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**Subject:** RESEARCH SUPPORTS ABORIGINAL CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT  
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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

2010CFD0020-001043

Sept. 14, 2010

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Vancouver Island University

RESEARCH SUPPORTS ABORIGINAL CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

NANAIMO - A new \$2.5-million B.C. regional innovation chair at Vancouver Island University will engage First Nations communities to create meaningful, culturally relevant and practical resources for early childhood educators of Aboriginal students, Children and Family Development Minister Mary Polak announced today.

"The B.C. regional innovation chair in Aboriginal early childhood development will be instrumental in training more professionals to work with children in ways that reflect and promote the traditions and values of their culture," said Polak. "That, in turn, will help give Aboriginal children the best chance to succeed and develop to their full potential."

The total chair endowment is \$2.5 million, with \$1.25 million provided by the Province through its \$56.25-million Leading Edge Endowment Fund (LEEF).

This is the first LEEF Aboriginal early childhood development chair to be appointed in B.C. It is a permanently endowed chair with Vancouver Island University.

The goal of the chair is to strengthen the cultural relevance of training for early childhood education and development practitioners. This will be achieved through a new collaborative approach that combines research with community-based practice to help create innovative and culturally relevant programs and services. The research and innovation agenda will be collaboratively set, actively involving Aboriginal practitioners and educators in research and curriculum development.

Linda McDonnell, the newly appointed chair, is a dedicated researcher in early childhood development. McDonnell has been involved in groundbreaking work in Aboriginal and Indonesian communities with students and early childhood educators to enhance the connections between practitioners, family, community and culture.

"I feel both honoured and humbled by the opportunity to do this work and potentially make a difference in an area that has formed an important focus for my work over the past two decades," said McDonnell. "I feel especially fortunate that this opportunity is in an area that has both

challenged and transformed my own beliefs, perspectives and approaches to teaching, learning and living in so many significant and positive ways."

The chair will be in VIU's faculty of health and human services, and will have links to faculties across the institution such as the faculty of social sciences, the department of First Nations studies in the faculty of arts and humanities and the faculty of education. External links with the University of Victoria, the University of British Columbia, the University of Northern British Columbia and Thompson Rivers University will be expanded to promote collaboration and information-sharing.

"We are very proud of Linda. Her work in the area of First Nations early childhood education and development is exceptional," said Dr. Ralph Nilson, president and vice-chancellor, Vancouver Island University. "I know she will undertake her new role with a strong commitment and respect for Aboriginal communities. This is an important appointment for our province and First Nations."

The B.C. government launched LEEF to encourage social and economic development in B.C. Based on a cost-sharing partnership with the private sector, LEEF is establishing 20 permanent leadership research chairs at public post-secondary institutions across the province in the areas of medical, social, environmental and technological research. LEEF is also establishing nine regional innovation chairs to create opportunities in communities through B.C.'s colleges, universities and institutes.

McDonnell is the 21st LEEF chair to be appointed.

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A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND  
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Chair Summary

The chair has four specific objectives:

- \* To enhance family and community knowledge of early childhood development by gathering and sharing information.
- \* To mobilize and integrate knowledge about early childhood development among professionals, families and community representatives to build links between the classroom and the community.
- \* To enhance accessibility and expand culturally sensitive education and professional development for Aboriginal students and practitioners in early childhood development.
- \* To strengthen connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early childhood development professionals to transfer knowledge.

Linda McDonell

- \* Linda McDonell has worked in early childhood education over the past three decades in a variety of capacities, including 20 years as a frontline early childhood educator (1971-1991), 22 years as a child-care researcher (1988-present time) and 16 years as a post-secondary instructor (1994-present time).
- \* McDonell has been a professor for early childhood education and care at VIU since 1995. Throughout her career at VIU, McDonell has focused on community-based research as a key means to develop meaningful, relevant and high-quality educational programs for Aboriginal students.
- \* In her more than 20 years of research experience, McDonell has been involved in groundbreaking work in Aboriginal and Indonesian communities with students and early childhood educators to enhance the connections between practitioners, family, community and culture.

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