



2023 / 2024 Annual Report

Prepared for the Matawa 36th Annual General Meeting
July 30–August 1, 2024
Hosted by Neskantaga First Nation



NESKANTAGA FIRST NATION





FIRST NATIONS MANAGEMENT

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Message from President of the Board of Directors **Rosemary Moonias**

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the remarkable work of Matawa First Nations Management and its subsidiaries. Together we have made significant strides in reclaiming our cultural heritage, building resilience, and fostering a brighter future for our members.

This year, we have continued to walk the path of reconciliation, addressing the historical injustices and ongoing challenges that have impacted our people for far too long. From language and cultural revitalization to education and youth empowerment, our programs have been guided by our unwavering commitment to self-determination and the wellbeing of our members.

As you read through our Annual Report, you will gain insights into the key events and achievements of the past year. These achievements would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our staff, Chiefs, and commu-

nity members. The dedication, wisdom, and generosity have been instrumental in driving our progress and honoring our ancestors' legacy.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we remain committed to our vision of thriving, vibrant First Nation communities, where our cultures, languages, and traditions are strong and resilient. We will continue to work together to address the ongoing challenges of colonization, discrimination, and inequality, and to build a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for your ongoing support and trust in our organization. Together, we can create a world where our nations can flourish and prosper for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Moonias

President, Matawa First Nations Management



2023/2024 Board of Directors

President

Rosemary Moonias
Constance Lake First Nation

Vice President

Peter Moonias
Neskantaga First Nation

Secretary/Treasurer

Lisa Echum
Ginoogaming First Nation

Board Members

Charlie Okees
Eabametoong First Nation

Stanley Oskineegish
Nibinamik First Nation

Frank Onabigon
Long Lake #58 First Nation

Roy Spence
Webequie First Nation

Robert Moonias
Marten Falls First Nation

Robinson Meshake
Aroland First Nation



Message from
Chief Executive Officer
**David Paul
Achneepineskum**

We gather each year at the Matawa Annual General Meeting to present to our Chiefs and our communities a report on the activities of this past year. I am very proud that our Matawa programs, services, and corporations continue to grow in a tradition of excellence, as we strive to serve our nine member First Nations and the grassroots Peoples of the Land.

There have been so many important milestones this year, including the grand opening of the Matawa Education and Care Centre in September, welcoming our inaugural Chief Medical Officer in December, and the amazing work by Four Rivers Environmental Services Group which announced a significant breakthrough in the detection of *blastomyces* DNA in Constance Lake in February. From our youth delegation's participation at the United Nations in April, to the establishment of a new Urban Housing Department, our committed staff continues to find and implement new ways to support our communities and our Peoples.

Our communities have many needs. To ensure we are effectively servicing our communities, Matawa is undertaking an independent review of all of our programs, services and corporations. Matawa has grown from a staff of approximately 80 ten years ago, to over 500 today. This unprecedented growth



has prompted our Chiefs to mandate that we carry out a full, comprehensive review of our services. We will assess what we are doing well and what needs improvement. We will ask our communities to participate by providing their input and wisdom so that we may understand what steps we need take to improve the work that we do, and to help us to plan to meet the future needs of our Peoples.

The Chiefs have appointed two Chiefs and two Matawa board members to a Matawa Review Team. The review team, through a thorough and transparent process, has selected an organization called Mokwateh to carry out the review and report back to the Chiefs at next year's Annual General Meeting. The review is a very important project for Matawa, and it is crucial that our community members be involved. Mokwateh will be visiting each Matawa First Nation to gather feedback and ideas, which will be used to develop and implement recommendations to help us better serve our community members. Mokwateh will also assess all Matawa programs, services, departments and corporations. We strongly encourage leadership and community members to participate in the Matawa Review.

It has been my privilege to work with our member First Nations and our staff to improve the lives and outcomes of our community members. As we move forward together, Matawa programs and services will continue to support the people living in the communities, as well as those living in urban centres and municipalities like Thunder Bay and Greenstone.

Miigwetch,

David Paul Achneepineskum
Chief Executive Officer, Matawa First Nation Management

Matawa Chiefs Council

The Matawa Chiefs Council is comprised of nine Matawa First Nations Chiefs. The Council provides overall strategic direction to Matawa First Nations Management and broad governance on collective issues.

For updates on Resolutions passed this year, refer to the 2023/2024 Matawa Chiefs Council Report which is available under separate cover.



Chief Sonny Gagnon
Aroland First Nation



Chief Rick Allen
Constance Lake First Nation



Chief Solomon Atlookan
Eabametoong First Nation



Chief Sheri Taylor
Ginoogaming First Nation



Chief Judy Desmoulin
Long Lake #58 First Nation



Chief Bruce Achneepineskum
Marten Falls First Nation



Chief Chris Moonias
Neskantaga First Nation



Ogamakan Michael Sugarhead
Nibinamik First Nation



Chief Cornelius Wabasse
Webequie First Nation



VISION

Matawa First Nations will be prosperous and enriched First Nations both individually and collectively. By creating enhanced social and economic opportunities for everyone, the Matawa First Nations will reach their maximum potential and have confidence in the future.

MISSION

Matawa First Nations are committed to supporting each other and focusing our collective efforts on core strategic priorities. By working together as a regional community, we will use our combined knowledge and resources in order to champion the social and economic vitality of our First Nations and invest in community and people building.

VALUES

Matawa First Nations Work Together

We have the opportunities to grow and reach our maximum potential as a regional group. The diversity within our regional communities is valued and a source of local and regional pride. We are proactively involved in the economic, cultural and political development of the Matawa territory.

Matawa First Nations are Dynamic and Sustainable Communities

We integrate modern social and economic development practices with our traditional culture and heritage. We build capacity and economic wealth for present and future generations and are well positioned to succeed in the national economy.



Matawa First Nations Uphold Quality of Life

We invest and protect our quality of life – socially, economically, culturally and environmentally – and ensure that the Matawa First Nations are prosperous and healthy communities in which to live, work and raise a family.



Awashishewiigihiwaywiin Administration



Awashishewiigihiwaywiin staff outside the Matawa Training & Wellness Centre.

Administration Staff

Robin Larrett, Program Manager • Michelle Levesque, Office Administrator • Sue Pelletier, Budget Officer • Vacant, Reception • Vacant, Part-time Reception

Department Committee

We do not have a defined committee and receive direction from community band reps and meet with them regularly to case consult as needed. We have for many years attempted to get representation on an advisory committee from the community level and have been unsuccessful in achieving quorum.

Mission

Children are a gift from the Creator, it is our sacred responsibility to protect, love, teach and honour them. Awashishewiigihiwaywiin will support children and families to restore family connection and unity. We will empower our children, families, parents and communities by wrapping them in a blanket of love, care, trust and support. We acknowledge and understand our family systems. We are culturally-based and rooted in a

historic understanding of Anishnawbe way of life. We remain true to the original Vision and Mission that was given to us in all our programs. As administration of the department, we oversee the operations and management of the office, departments, finance processing and personnel.

Vision

Healthy, strong, spiritual families together.

Key Priorities

- Annual funding applications and submissions.
- Completing Indigenous Services Canada reporting requirements.
- Completing other internal and

external reporting requirements.

- Personnel management.
- Training and professional development.
- Office management.
- Procurement.
- Partnership development.
- Department communication.
- Staff recruitment and retention.
- Data and file management.
- Budget submission and financial accountability.
- Development of departmental procedures and monitoring compliance.



Accomplishments

This year has been extremely busy with continued development of our new programs including the Family Transition Units, Next Steps, and Jordan's Principle.

- Completed policies and procedures for Family Transitional Housing Units.



- Policy development for Next Steps and Jordan's Principle is in progress.
- Database change to meet growing departmental needs. Partnership with Nishnawbe Aski Band Rep Conference and development of committee.
- Assist communities with questions and advise on Band Rep issues and funding both on and off-reserve.
- Assist with development of emergency procedures for the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre.
- Secure funding and begin construction on playground at the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre.
- Open programming to all Matawa families, not just those registered for our programs.
- Daily drop-in for families at our Resource Centre.
- Partnerships with other departments, including Matawa Health Co-op, Matawa Education and Care Centre, and assist where needed.
- Dental screening partnership to assist families at our Centre with mobile services.
- Partnerships with the District Social Services Administrative Board for Housing and Ontario Works.
- Staff training:
Jordan's Principle training • First aid • Mental health first aid • Fire watch training and facilitation • Customer service • Personality Dimensions • Cultural competency • Trauma-informed care • Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) • Naloxone



Awashishewi-igiihiwaywiin, Matawa's social services framework, supports families at-risk of child welfare involvement.



Mock-up of the playground installed at the Matawa Training & Wellness Centre.

Challenges

- With growing staff numbers we have already outgrown our new space.
- Staff recruitment.
- On boarding.
- Multiple annual funding submissions.
- Working effectively in a construction zone.
- Affordable housing.
- Addictions crisis.

Opportunities

- Continued partnership development to meet the growing needs of our families.
- Development of a Matawa staffed foster placement home to stop our children from living in hotels or being shipped out of the city or district.
- Looking at supports for those families who will be receiving monies in the child welfare settlement and planning to implement supports.
- Advising and supporting the development of a Matawa shelter for intimate partner violence.
- Continue to support the individual needs of Matawa families in a client-centered approach to meet their individual needs and goals.



Awashishewiigihiwaywiin

Family Transitional Housing Unit



Common area in the Family Transitional Housing Unit, housed in the Matawa Training & Wellness Centre.

Family Transitional Housing Staff

Transitional Housing Worker Lead: Samantha Lafreniere

Transitional Housing Workers: Angel Brewer, Meaghan Michaud, Leandra Howald, Brandon Salomon, Connie Koivu, Terri Churchill, Cinnamon Todosichuk, Laureen Sagutch, Elysha Blacker, Whitney Echum

Relief Transitional Housing Workers: Kelsey Baxter, Crystal Gerow, Sandra Kuurila, Justin Dueck, Ami Shaganash, Liana Desaulniers, Jerid Peltola

Overview

The Transitional Housing Unit works with Matawa families to assist with stabilization and establishing a healthy routine and lifestyle. Families residing within the unit will work toward the

ultimate goal, which is to find independent living accommodations.

Key Priorities

- Provide a safe and comfortable living environment for Matawa families.
- Assist and provide support for families to establish healthy lifestyles and decisions.
- Assist families to advocate for themselves and their children
- Assist families in finding safe, affordable independent living accommodations.

Accomplishments

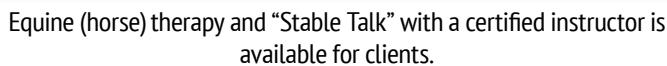
- Providing safe housing for four (4) families currently.
- Built a relationship with Thunder Bay District Social Services Administrative Board (DDSAB) to assist families looking for affordable housing.
- Assisted two (2) families to be reunified with their children.

Challenges

- Maintaining appropriate staff levels for 24/7 coverage.
- Maintaining cleanliness and organization in common areas.
- Monitoring residents and children in each unit to ensure they are interacting with each other positively and appropriately.
- Enforcing expectations in the Tenant Agreement.
- Providing safety and security for residents and staff.
- Ongoing training for staff.

Opportunities

- Staff are available 24/7 to talk with and provide families with support during crisis situations.
- Preventing children from entering the child welfare system.
- Providing families with a private area.
- Families can reside in the unit for up to two years.



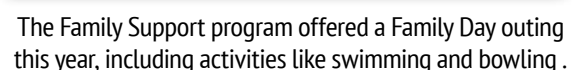
Family Support Lead: Kelly Tiboni-Ranta

Early Childhood Educators/Program Support: Nicole Gamble, Jen Godin, Jojo Pyykka

Awashishewiigihiwaywiin (Social Services Framework) provides assistance to families from the Matawa First Nations who are at risk of child welfare involvement, have open files, or have had children apprehended. It also supports families with Customary Care Agreements, Kinship Agreements, and advocacy. Awashishewiigihiwaywiin Family Support Workers (FSW) work with families on a voluntary, agreed-upon consent-to-service basis. The Family Support program offers support in navigating the child welfare system through prevention, planning and goal-setting, using community-based, culturally appropriate and responsive care models for children with a focus on prevention and family reunification.

- Providing support and advocating for families dealing with child welfare agencies.
- Navigating the different systems e.g. housing, Ontario Works, healthcare, education, obtaining identification, etc.
- Connecting families with other applicable resources and supports in the city.
- Addressing life skills.
- Administering nutritional programs
- Crisis counselling and support.
- Advocating for extra-curricular activities for children.
- Reunification visits in Resource Room.

- Child welfare files are getting closed.
- Sustainable/suitable housing for families has been found.
- Families have secured housing in our transitional units.





Awashishewiigihiwaywiin Family Support

- Service and safety plans for child welfare include Matawa Support.
- Families attending programming, limiting social isolation, and engaging with children.
- Referral to treatment programs for addictions issues.
- Mental health issues being addressed, referrals to counselling.
- Increased accessibility to dental care, with it available on-site once a month.
- Free music lessons, physical fitness and weight training programs provided on-site by certified staff.
- On-site and virtual programming for those not in community, certified
- Circle of Security Parenting and Anger Management program provided by certified staff, both on-site and virtually.
- Well attended food security programming, including nutritional bingo, community kitchen, health munchable.
- Health and well being programming for children provided by certified Early Childhood Educators on staff.
- Assisted families fleeing domestic violence.
- Provided education to parents and children on topics of healthy sexual orientation.
- Provided the opportunity for families to get family portraits

done.

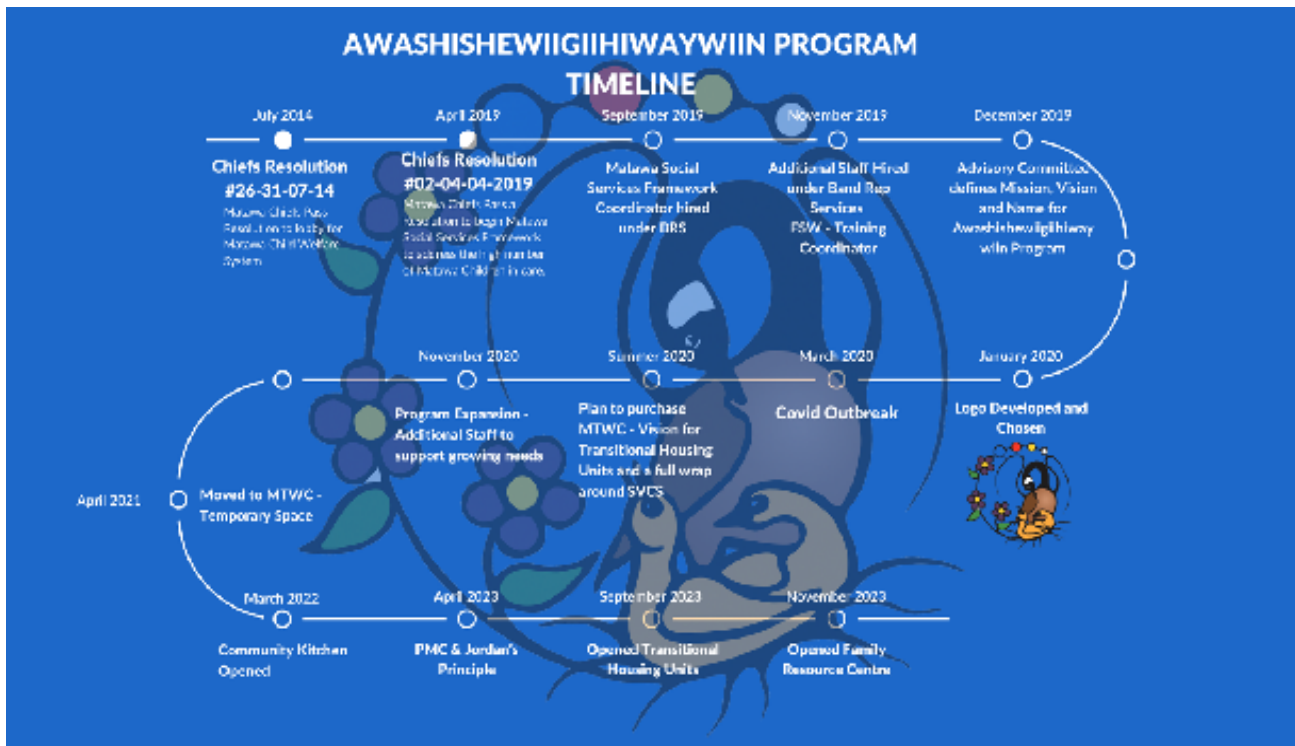
- Provided equine therapy “Stable Talk,” a new talking circle with certified instructor.
- Cultural programming including smudging and sharing circles with an Elder, and sewing groups where clients made regalia, and ribbon skirts and ribbon shirts.
- Opportunity to do paintings on canvases.
- Family Day outings including swimming, bowling, tubing.
- Family celebration and gathering, and seasonal festivities like Christmas party and Easter event, and a fall back-to-school event.

Challenges

- Having to see some of our children who were unable to stay with any family be placed/housed in hotel rooms with child welfare staff because of the shortage of safe homes.

Opportunities

- We will continue to develop programs and supports to meet the growing needs of the families we serve.
- Continued advocacy for the best interest of Matawa.





Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin Jordan's Principle



Jordan's Principle staff on "Bear Witness" day.

Jordan's Principle Staff

Program Lead: Jessica Sutherland
Case Manager: Jamesina Sugarhead
Navigators: Raili Kuurila, Suzanna Williamson, Maria Taylor, Morgan Slipperjack, Sylvia Metzner



unities, and promotes substantive equality by providing for culturally appropriate services that safeguard the best interests of the child.

Key Priorities

- Providing equitable access to culturally appropriate services and care that respects Indigenous traditions, languages and values.
- Timely delivery of services despite delays with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), support letters, etc.
- Community engagement and collaboration, including community visits, and partnering with Nishnawbe Aski Nation for events.

Accomplishments

- Soon to be established database called Dadavan that will streamline applications, reporting, finances, etc.
- Community engagement, community visits and events held by the department such as the tea party and P.D. day activities.

Challenges

- Inadequate funding, plus delays in approvals due to a major backlog with ISC and delays with clients due to communication barriers, health concerns, geographic/financial constraints.
- Lack of awareness and/or visibility in the community.
- Cultural competency and sensitivity. Mistrust/trauma.

Opportunities

- Increased awareness and education opportunities for both staff and clients, including networking events and online training.
- Community empowerment and capacity building: educate and encourage communities to take a more active role in determining their service needs through recurring visits.
- Collaboration and partnerships, including sharing knowledge and experiences with other Jordan's Principle coordinators and navigators outside of Matawa.
- Cultural knowledge and revitalization: incorporating Indigenous knowledge, languages and cultural practices into service delivery.
- Technology including telehealth, mobile clinics, online shopping, online forms, and others, can eliminate geographic barriers.

Status of Jordan's Principle applications as of May 14, 2024:

67 are complete 194 are pending/awaiting approval
96 are approved/in progress 52 are closed (no reply, external outcome)

Overview

The Matawa Chiefs recognize the need to provide support Matawa children through the Jordan's Principle program, and fully endorse the establishment of the Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin Jordan's Principle Program. Funding helps with a wide range of health, social and educational needs, including the unique needs of First Nations Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ children and youth, and those with disabilities. Unlike other programs and initiatives, Jordan's Principle is a legal obligation. Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle and legal rule that ensures First Nations children receive the services and support they need when they need them. Jordan's Principles funding is available for First Nation children, families, and com-



Awashishewiigihiwaywiin

Next Steps

Next Steps Staff

Ron Frost, Program Lead and Youth in Transition Worker • Isabella Shields, Youth in Transition Worker • Have applied for 2 additional staff

Overview

Post-majority support services assist youth aging out of care and young adults formerly in care across all provinces and in the Yukon, from the age of majority (18 years-old in Ontario) up to and including the age of 25. Post-majority support services aim to support the safety and well-being of First Nations youth and young adults in a way that is culturally-appropriate, in their self-identified best interest, and provided on the basis of substantive equality. The goal of post-majority support services is to provide wrap-around support that meets the distinct needs of First Nations youth and young adults, and promotes and supports holistic positive outcomes for thriving youth and young adults. Supports can include help with housing, food, employment and financial security, mental health and wellness, addiction support, and healthy relationships.

Key Priorities

- 10**  **Financial:** Every young person should have the financial resources required to meet their needs. Youth in care deserve to have a financial starting point that is above the poverty line, and allows them to pursue their career interests and dreams.
- 20**  **Educational & Professional Development:** Every young person should experience an environment where they can learn and grow in ways that are meaningful to them and at their own pace.
- 30**  **Housing:** Every young person should have a place they can call home, without strict rules and conditions to abide by.
- 40**  **Relationships:** Every young person should have people in their life that they can count on unconditionally and interdependently. Youth in care need to feel that they belong, have worth and are valuable members of their communities.
- 50**  **Culture & Spirituality:** Every young person should be connected to their culture and spirituality, in ways that are meaningful to them, safe, and at their own pace.
- 60**  **Health & Wellbeing:** Every young person should be provided with timely ongoing services and benefits that support their lifelong health and well-being. These supports need to be offered within a trauma-informed, non-judgemental harm reduction approach, without significant wait times.
- 70**  **Advocacy & Rights:** Every young person should have their rights respected and should experience environments where their voices are heard, and their silence is addressed holistically.
- 80**  **Emerging Adulthood Development:** Every young person should experience environments that cultivate personal growth and development as they transition into adulthood.



Awashishewiigihiwaywiin's Next Steps program offers wrap-around supports that meet the distinct needs of First Nations youth.

Accomplishments

These success stories highlight collaboration and how our program has used the funding to support the youth:

D (20) - "With support from the Next Steps program and collaboration with Matawa Education and Care Centre, we were able to safely house a client and encourage her as she navigates her newly found sobriety. This client is now on the path for 2024 admission to Algonquin College. When this client first came to Next Steps, she was experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and educational barriers. Next Steps was able to provide emergency housing through Métis Nation, complete and fund admission to the Matawa Care Centre dorm with around-the-clock support, refer her to counselling for addictions and mental health, and now support her as she applies and navigates her post-secondary application to Algonquin College. Next Steps was also able to support and fund a separate client's visit to their home community for visitation with their son. This included the opportunity to attend the community pow wow, strengthening connection to culture and community."

C (20) - "Before intake to the Next Steps program, this client was facing eviction and other challenges as they navigated a newly created kinship agreement for their 3 year-old sister. Next Steps was able to support this family with arrears payments and completing all necessary utilities connections. Our program was able to support this family with furniture, food security funds, access to mental and physical health care through Matawa, and a referral to Awashishewiigihiwaywiin's Jordan's Principle program. This family is connected with



wrap-around care for all members, and they're currently thriving family unit and exploring further development supports for their sister within Thunder Bay."

Next Steps has a total of 30 cases, including:

- 10** clients who are **pursuing secondary education**
- 3** clients who are **pursuing post-secondary education**
- 5** clients who are **working**
- 1** client in a **paid employment program**, and
- 11** clients who are **unemployed or other** (including accessing social assistance).

Challenges

The challenges faced by our post-majority care program are multifaceted, with one of the most pressing issues being the severe shortage of affordable and suitable housing options for Indigenous youth. This scarcity exacerbates the already significant barriers that Indigenous youth encounter when transitioning out of care into adulthood.

The lack of stable housing often leads to precarious living situations, including homelessness, or reliance on unstable accommodations. Additionally, many Indigenous youth face systemic barriers such as discrimination, inter-generational trauma, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. These factors create a cycle of disadvantage that can be difficult to overcome without adequate support systems in place.

Furthermore, the complex bureaucracy involved in accessing housing assistance programs can be overwhelming and discouraging for youth navigating the transition process. The need for culturally appropriate and trauma-informed support services is paramount in addressing these challenges and ensuring the well-being and success of Indigenous youth. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, Indigenous communities, and service providers are essential to developing holistic solutions that address the root causes of housing insecurity and systemic inequities. By addressing these challenges head-on and implementing comprehensive support systems, we can empower Indigenous youth to thrive and achieve their full potential as they transition into adulthood.

Opportunities

We are pleased to announce that our post-majority care program is currently in the early stages of developing a transformative initiative: a 10-unit Transitional Housing Unit. This project aims to provide essential support and stability for Indigenous youth as they transition into independent adulthood. Each unit will offer not only safe and affordable housing, but also on-site support services tailored to meet the unique needs of our youth.

Crucially, this Transitional Housing Unit will be situated adjacent to the Matawa Training and Wellness Center, providing residents with convenient access to a wide range of support resources. From family support and health services to training and employment opportunities, residents will have access to comprehensive support services that promote holistic well-being and personal growth.



Next Steps offers music lessons with a certified instructor.

By integrating on-site supports and fostering a supportive community environment, our goal is to empower Indigenous youth to overcome barriers and thrive in their journey toward independence. This initiative reflects our commitment to addressing the housing insecurity and systemic challenges faced by Indigenous youth, while also providing the necessary tools and resources for their long-term success. As we continue to develop this project, we look forward to working collaboratively with our community partners, government agencies, and Indigenous stakeholders to ensure its success. Together, we can create a brighter future for Indigenous youth by providing them with the stability, support, and opportunities they need to achieve their goals and fulfill their potential.



Communications

Matawa First Nations Management

Communications Staff

Carol Audet, Communications Manager • Charnel Anderson, Communications Generalist (started December 11, 2023)

Overview

The Communications department provides communications and advisory support to Matawa First Nations, Matawa Chiefs' Council, all Matawa First Nations Management departments, services, corporations, and KKETS, with services including: Media monitoring and support, development of informational and promotional materials, brand implementation and visual identity, website/cultural portal/intranet updates and training (shared role with IT), social media monitoring and updates, biweekly radio broadcast, recording, PA systems, and translation equipment.

Accomplishments

Continued assistance to communities in employment recruitment and providing up-to-date information online.

Communications (comms) support for Matawa First Nations

- All First Nations: Employment ads, Animal Services pilot project proposal and implementation, and Gathering of Rivers for Community Care 50/50 raffle draws.
- Ginoogaming First Nation - 2 media releases and a newsletter.



Two youth in each Matawa First Nation won a brand new mattress thanks to the Gathering of Rivers 50/50 draw.



Communications arranged for a group of Matawa Youth to speak at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

- Neskantaga First Nation - 1 media release and GoFundMe campaign support and administration.
- Webequie First Nation - 3 media releases.

Communications support for Matawa First Nation Management departments, including

- Matawa Education - employment ads, 3 media releases and comms support (such as liaising with media and government officials) at events including Post-Secondary and MECC graduation.
- Awashishewiigihiwaywiin - employment ads, website and social media updates.
- Matawa Health Co-operative - employment ads, updates to website and social media, 2 media advisories and 2 media releases, and comms support for the Youth Mental Health Summit.
- Technical Services - website and social media updates, 1 media advisory and 1 media release.
- CEO's Office - preparation of Annual General Meeting (AGM) materials and comms support for AGM, media conferences, and other events such as Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada Conference and Spotlight on Academic Film Festival, Request for Proposals, employment ads, youth delegation to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, application to obtain consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.



- Health & Social Meno Biimadeswin - assisted with Indian Residential School program proposal and acquired swag.
- Chiefs Council - proposal to Government of Ontario to address re-triggered intergenerational trauma due to attendance at Indian residential school, and Chiefs Council resolution updates.
- KKETS - employment ads, 0 media releases or advisories.
- Four Rivers - employment ads, 2 media releases, 1 media advisory, posting of RFP, collaboration on Orange Shirt Day.
- Matawa Training & Wellness Centre - participation in monthly progress meeting and worked with design company on temporary and permanent interior and exterior signage.



Matawa CEO David Paul Achneepineskum in an interview with reporters.

Media Relations and Monitoring

- Generated media coverage for a numerous Matawa-related events and issues in collaboration with other departments.
- 20 media releases (15 issued last year and 10 the year prior).
- 7 media advisories (5 issued last year and 2 the year prior).
- 10 Matawa First Nations media releases (3 issued the year prior).
- 28 weekly Ring of Fire Media clips (38 issued last year and 33 the prior year).
- Kept staff informed of relevant news items, published reports/studies, and applicable funding opportunities.

including providing peripherals to First Nations (Pride signage).

Social Media Update and Media Monitoring

- Increasing engagement, followers and likes on Matawa's social media platforms (including Twitter and Facebook) and continuing to double or triple the number of likes/followers through production of multi-media content responsive to community and world events.

Website Updates

- Regular website updates including monthly calendars, upcoming events, staff directory, and department updates upon request.

Matawa Radio Broadcast

Scheduled, produced, hosted, and recorded 24 bi-weekly radio shows to promote, educate, and provide updates on all Matawa programming via Wawatay Radio. Recently acquired new audio recording equipment to improve workflow.



Employment ads posted from August 1, 2023 to July 1, 2024:

158+ Matawa First Nation Management jobs

25+ Matawa First Nations jobs

Matawa Messenger Newsletter

Produced 4 quarterly newsletters (meeting work plan target) to highlight, celebrate, and inform Matawa communities about MFNM's work.

Informational Materials and Promotion

- Matawa Monday Memo issued weekly to inform staff and Chiefs of schedules and upcoming events.
- Monthly consolidated travel calendar (started in June 2024).
- Continued participation in Thunder Bay Anti-Racism & Respect and Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Inclusion Accord Committees.
- Promotion of Matawa's support of LGBTQ2S during Pride Month

Challenges

Maintaining Adequate Staffing Levels: While the department gained one more position this past year (for a total of two staff), it continues to be understaffed for the amount of users of the services.

Opportunities

- Continued graphic design training for First Nations and staff.
- With the approval of respective Matawa First Nations, collaborate with appropriate non-mainstream media outlets and/or policy think tanks on First Nations issues requiring exposure.



Matawa Education Administration



Some Matawa Education staff at the 2024 Education Conference.

Department Staff

Advisory Services and Administration

Sharon Nate, Executive Director of Education • Stephanie Hogan, Education Coordinator • Angela Wapoose, Education Executive Assistant • Jeffrey Yellowhead, Education Receptionist/ Budget Officer Assistant • Tracy Ostamus, Education Receptionist

Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee

Anna Marie Majiskon, Aroland First Nation • Martha Taylor, Ginoogaming First Nation • Patrick Patabon, Long Lake #58 First Nation • Tony Sakanee, Neskantaga First Nation • Ennis Jacob, Webequie First Nation

Building Maintenance and Janitors

Scott Russell, Operations & Maintenance Facility Manager • Gerald Suganaqueb, Facilities Manager Assistant • Beatrice Mamakwa, Custodian • Colin Sobey, Maintenance Lead Hand • Colt King, Maintenance Lead Hand • Conrad Moonias, Lead Custodian • Felix Quisses, Custodian • Michael McNaul, Fleet Coordinator • Mitchell Sutherland, Custodian • Ophelia Moonias, P/T Custodian • Rebecca Misseywace, P/T Custodian • Theresa Moonias, P/T Custodian

Overview

We provide educational support and advisory services to Matawa First Nation community schools and Education Authorities that result in school improvements and have a positive impact on the quality of students' learning. Matawa Education networks with applicable organizations, service providers, Ministry of Education, regional school Boards, and Post- Secondary institutions. Matawa Education is located in Thunder Bay at 200 Lillie St. N. and is comprised of the following departments:

- Matawa Education Department's **Advisory Services** provide technical support for Matawa First Nations leadership, both directly and through the Matawa First Nations Education Authority (MFNEA) incorporated in August 2017. The MFNEA Board of Directors are appointed by their respective First Nation.
- **Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC)** is a specialized

Matawa First Nations Education Authority Board of Directors:

- Annamarie Majiskon – Aroland
- Ennis Jacob – Webequie
- Mary Oskineegish – Nibinamik
- Melanie Moonias – Neskantaga
- Susanna Baxter – Marten Falls
- Elizabeth Atlookan – Eabametoong
- Christopher Hill – Ginoogaming
- George Whitehead – Elder



Matawa First Nation Education Authority's Board of Directors includes (L-R): Annamarie Majiskon, George Whitehead, Mary Oshkineegish and Ennis Jacob.



The Matawa Education Department offers a variety of curricular and extracurricular programming for students.

private high school, approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education to grant Ontario Secondary School credits and diplomas. The program is designed to facilitate opportunities that encompass an all-inclusive approach to each student, with a focus on their wellness, personal growth, and academics, through culturally-enriched education and programming.

- **Matawa Student Care Centre (MSCC)** provides housing for Matawa youth who have transitioned to Thunder Bay from their remote First Nation to attend high school. The Matawa Student Care Centre has more than doubled in capacity in the academic 2023-2024 school year, and provides a welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe space for Matawa youth attending school in Thunder Bay.
- **After Hours Student Support** program consists of the following programs and services: Safe Sobering Site, On-Call Service, Student Outreach, Youth Crisis Intervention, Night Supervision, Indigenous Cultural Reintegration, and supporting the Seven Youth Inquest. After Hours Department staff become front-line workers once school operations are closed during evenings and weekends.
- The **Pathways to Achieve Student Success** program continues to provide second-level services to community-based schools in the areas of information

technology, mental health and cultural supports, as well as Indigenous language development, and nutritional programs.

- Matawa Education's **IT Department** is dedicated to delivering comprehensive technology support and services to the Matawa School and the Matawa communities, including Marten Falls, Nibinamik, Aroland, Webequie, Eabametoong, and Neskantaga.
- **Matawa Waka Tere** Indigenous Revitalization program is all about revitalizing Indigenous languages in Matawa First Nations. Matawa Waka Tere is an adaptation of Dr. Rongo Weterere's delivery methodology, called Ako Whakatere, which helps learners quickly learn the Maori language. Matawa Waka Tere language classes help Matawa adult learners quickly learn Ojibway, Oji-Cree or Cree.
- » **Matawa Post-Secondary Program** is responsible for administering post-secondary services to five Matawa communities including Aroland, Ginoogaming, Long Lake #58, Neskantaga, and Webequie First Nations.
- » **Achieving The Dream Through Education** is devoted to supporting and improving the lives of Indigenous youth through education, holistic student-centred programs, spiritual values and embracing connections to community, language and land in Aroland, Eabametoong, Ginoogaming, Marten Falls, Neskantaga, Nibinamik and Webequie First Nations.



Matawa Educations offers experiential, land-based learning.



Matawa Education

Matawa Education & Care Centre



Students can participate in a variety of sports including hockey and basketball.

Transition Coordinator • Lindsay Johnson, Special Education Resource Teacher • Lisa Hill, Student Safety Support Coordinator • Lisa Wingert, Mental Health Development Assistant • Luke Pretto, Teacher • Melinda Rody, Education System Navigator • Manmeet Kapoor, Supply Teacher • Nick Nault, Special Education Resource Teacher • Paul Ochnicki, Math Teacher • Phyllis Goodwin, Teacher • Rebecca Wheeler, Wellness System Navigator • Robert Elliott, Choose Life Assistant • Sabrina Elsey, Student Safety Support Coordinator • Samantha Bachynski, Life Skills Teacher • Samantha Renaud, Head Teacher • Sarah Moonias, Elder • Sid Okees, Student Support Worker • Steve Achneepineskum, Cultural Lead • Steve Lipson, Cooperative Education Teacher • Steve St. Jean, Student Achievement Officer • Tim Sofea, Student Support Worker • Trevor Taylor, Trades Instructor

Matawa Education & Care Centre Staff Overview

Brad Battiston, Principal • Jacqueline Carrier, Vice Principal • Nick Shaver, Student Program Officer • Brittany Kennedy, Programs Administrator • Aaron Beardy, Outdoor Education Coordinator • Allan Wemigwans, Cultural Lead • Allyson Gilmour, Guidance Counsellor • Aly Wood, Mental Health Land Based Coordinator • Ashley Nate, Land Based Support Worker • Brandon MacLeod, English Teacher • Brett Desimone, PLAR Teacher • James Cole, Social Sciences Teacher • Chancy Atwood, Mental Health Worker • Cheryl Ugray, Special Education Coordinator • Chris Palmer, Trades Development Officer • Cynthia-Rose Edwards, Education Receptionist • Debbie McDougall, PLAR Teacher • Destiny Edwards, Classroom Assistant • Eddie Baxter, Mental Health Land Based Coordinator • Emily Jacob, Elder • Eva Sutherland, Classroom Assistant • Faith Jacob, Classroom Assistant • Heather Alanen, Special Education Resource Teacher • Jamie Bosma, Science Teacher • Jennessa Darosa, Mental Health Worker • Jeremy Oxford, Teacher Coach • Joanne Fox, Mental Health Worker • John Colledanchise, Classroom Assistant • Joseph Missewace, Outdoor Education Coordinator • Joseph Willis, Curriculum Development Officer • Kaleigh Caputo, Distance Education Coordinator • Karen Desroiser, Special Education Resource Teacher • Katie DeBiagio, Special Education Resource Teacher • Katy McGuigan, Interim Mental Health Coordinator • Kyle Rozic, MECC IT Technician • Keshia Teddy, Student

The Matawa Education & Care Centre (MECC) empowers youth to connect to their identity in a safe and supportive environment. The MECC is located in a building formerly operated as a long-term care facility in Thunder Bay. Since 2018, the building has undergone extensive renovations and retrofitting, with most of this work completed by September 2023. The MECC's holistic program integrates students' mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual self into the daily schedule and operational programming. MECC understands success is not defined by academics, but by personal growth and development.



MECC students can earn credits by participating in land-based learning experiences such as whitewater rafting.



A high percentage of youth enrolled at the MECC have been out of secondary school for an extended period, or removed from provincial schools for various reasons. As a result, when youth arrive at the MECC, they often lack the confidence needed to successfully pursue their long-term personal and academic goals, which is why staff at the MECC work diligently to create opportunities to bridge service gaps for Matawa youth to continue achieving personal and academic success.

The MECC building and programming are designed to facilitate opportunities that encompass an all-inclusive approach for each student, with a focus on their wellness and personal growth through culturally-enriched programming. Specific jobs have been created to combat the immense hardships and challenges Matawa youth face while relocating to a new city.

The Matawa Education and Care Centre's peak enrollment was **226** students, with **17** graduating students.

The MECC delivered a semestered schedule during the 2023-2024 school year, maintaining flexible learning supports such as in-person, remote delivery, and adaptive-learning models.

St. Joseph's Care Group and the MECC entered its seventh year of collaboration and partnership, which continues to provide 2 full-time Youth Workers, 4 Trauma Counselors/Specialists, and a part-time Family Therapist for the school year. The partnership also includes off-site primary care with academic and behavioural assessments with appropriate specialists. St. Joseph's Care Group provided extensive training and support for MECC staff in trauma-based education approaches, while working with students dealing with addictions.

The Principal worked with the Executive Director of Education (and applicable staff) in meetings, discussions, and proposals based on the Jury Recommendations resulting from the Seven Youth Inquest. This work includes advocating for the implementation of community-based recommendations and the continuation of Choose Life and Jordan's Principle funding.

Key Priorities

- Involve teachers, students, parents, and community partners in developing appropriate, effective, meaningful learning oppor-

tunities through which students can develop self-reliance, initiative, resourcefulness, creativity, and responsibility.

- Encourage students to become reflective, self-directed, lifelong learners.
- Provide environments that support self-motivated students encouraged in effectively planning and following their individual learning pathways.
- Provide programs and courses reflecting the needs of students and the Matawa First Nation communities.

Accomplishments

The MECC granted 345 credits during the 2023-2024 academic year, its highest credit count and largest graduating class to date. Graduating students celebrated their hard work and accomplishments with a school trip to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Through our partnership with the Critical Thinking Consortium, a worldwide leader in curriculum development, we have redesigned and developed 9 high school courses and 120 learning resources specific to MECC students, which emphasize Indigenous Ways of Knowing in alignment with Ontario Secondary School curriculum. Through this partnership, Indigenous culture lessons are being created to teach traditional knowledge and cultural teachings across different subject areas. Input for these lessons has come strictly from Matawa community members. The MECC and Critical Thinking Consortium's curriculum project collaboration was accepted into the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement's annual conferences held in Chile in January 2023, in Ireland in January 2024, and Learning Forward's Annual Conference held in Washington, D.C. in



Students learn leadership skills and cultural knowledge through land-based learning activities.



Matawa Education

Matawa Education & Care Centre

December 2023. These conferences bring together educational leaders from around the world.

This past year, the MECC expanded its Co-operative Education and Distance Education program to offer placements not just in Thunder Bay but also in the Matawa communities. The Distance Education Co-ordinator worked closely with other program areas to provide wrap-around virtual and learning support to 125 students, with 38 students being adaptive learners and 87 students being remote learners.

Our Special Education Program had five Special Education Resource Teachers and four Classroom Assistants provide services and support to students in-person and remotely. We continued to provide Life Skills and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) courses as per student academic needs.



This year the MECC launched its welding facility to introduce students to the skilled trades.



MECC has partnered with Confederation College and trade unions to offer students the opportunity to explore more career pathways.

Mental health and wellness support was provided to remote learners by telephone and online. In-person wellness checks were conducted by St. Joseph's Care Group staff in Thunder Bay, and through Nishnawbe Aski Police Services (NAPS) and/or the Nursing Station for students living in community, when needed.

The Land-based team provided students with several experiential learning opportunities focused on developing leadership and cultural knowledge to improve self-esteem. These opportunities were applied to credits. Some highlights include moose hunting, dog sledding, ice fishing, goose hunting, and whitewater rafting. Students were able to

earn various certifications, such as firearms safety, motorboat safety, whitewater paddling, and First Aid.

In collaboration with the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS), the MECC secured funding to continue staffing a School Resource Officer (SRO), whose primary role is to support the school community, including students, parents, school staff, and administrators.

MECC and other Matawa Education staff provided support to the education staff following the loss of the John C. Yesno Education Centre in Eabametoong First Nation due to fire. Support from MECC staff was given through preparing and serving meals, providing home support to community members, facilitating games and activities for the youth, providing training to school staff, and purchasing supplies, equipment, and materials on behalf of the Eabametoong First Nation Education Authority. Approximately half of the Grade 9 students attending John C. Yesno Education Centre chose to attend the MECC following the fire. MECC staff also provided on-site school administration support to the staff of Johnny Therriault School in Aroland First Nation over a period of several weeks at the end of the school year.

Challenges

- This year we experienced a very tragic loss: a MECC student passed away in December. This event affected the entire school, both students and staff. They were supported with specialized



- grief counsellors and programs to help cope with the loss.
- Several community Seven Youth Inquest recommendations still need to be implemented. MECC staff continue working with Matawa leadership to advocate for these recommendations to receive the necessary funding to be implemented. More work is necessary to ensure the government provides predictable and reliable funding.
- Another challenge the school experiences is in filling some positions. We will continue posting positions and recruiting to provide our students with options.

Opportunities

A highlight to start the year was the completion of the gymnasium. To celebrate its completion, we hosted a Grand Opening Celebration on September 29, 2023. Dignitaries included Minister Patty Hajdu, Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Mayor Ken Boshcoff, and several Matawa Chiefs.

The gymnasium is home to the MECC Northern Eagles sports teams, and offers a variety of student programming, including Superior Secondary Schools Athletics Association (SSSAA) sports, along with a new weight room, golf simulator, and a warming kitchen for food.

MECC students participated in football, golf, cross country running, curling, girls' hockey, and track & field. While the MECC students did not enter the city-wide high school competitions for volleyball, badminton, cycling, cross-country skiing, basketball, and tennis, they did practice these sports with an eye toward competing next year.



The MECC gymnasium was completed last fall and has since hosted a number of sports practices as well as MECC's graduation and other community events.

Additionally, while not a city-wide school sport, several MECC students competed in an invitational chess tournament held at Superior Collegiate & Vocational Institute.



MECC Northern Eagles sports team logo.

November 1, 2023, the Matawa Health Co-op hosted World AIDS Day in the new gymnasium. Three special occasion dances were held for Matawa youth, including a Halloween dance for elementary-aged students and families, with a DJ and bouncy castle. This new facility now provides opportunities for Matawa First Nation Management and Matawa First Nations to have a large venue to hold gatherings and celebrate special events.

To celebrate the end of the school year, the graduating Class of 2024 held its first graduation ceremony with family, friends, communities, and staff on June 19, 2024, in the new facility, and it was a momentous success.

The launch of the welding facility was a also success, and opportunities with Confederation College and their welding program, partnerships with trade union LiUNA, other organizations, and trade providers are resulting in more career pathways for students when they graduate high school. With the hiring of a Trades Teacher in May 2024, the MECC will be better positioned to offer more skilled trades courses.

The MECC will continue working with NAPS and TBPS to promote career opportunities in policing. We also hope to create a high school credit course based on the Police Foundations program at Confederation College.



Matawa Education

Matawa Student Care Centre



The Matawa Student Care Centre (MSCC) houses youth from remote First Nations attending high school in Thunder Bay.

Student Care Centre Staff

Malinda Staal, Matawa Student Care Centre Manager • Agnes Kwandibens, Security • Alexandra Robertson, Youth Care Leader Supervisor • Ankush Mahajan, P/T Youth Care Leader • Anthony Petten, P/T Youth Care Leader • Antoine Moonias, P/T Cultural Activities Worker • Brandon Morrisseau, Youth Care Leader • Cedar Kwandibens, Youth Care Leader • Chaseon Fiddler, Youth Care Leader • Cindy Jacob, Youth Care Leader • Crissy Hamlin, Youth Care Leader • Conrad King, Youth Care Leader • Dakota-Colt Meshake, Cultural Activities Worker • Danica Logan, Mental Health and Crisis Worker • Dylan Neshinapaise, Youth Care Leader • Dustin O'Nabigon, Youth Care Leader • Emily Tornquist, P/T Youth Care Leader • Emmalee Goudie, P/T Youth Care Leader • Evona Kondakow, Mental Health and Crisis Worker • Javad Tashakori, P/T Youth Care Leader • Jayden Sugarhead, Cultural and Activities Worker • Jennifer Kamande, Cultural and Activities Worker • Johnathon Echum, Youth Care Leader • Joshua McCart, Mental Health and Crisis Worker • Keith Debassige, Security • Honey West, Youth Care Leader • Kelly Soulias, Youth Care Lead Supervisor • Kyra Metatawabin, P/T Youth Care Leader • Levi Yellowhead, Student Safety Liaison Worker • Matilda Suganaqueb, Youth Care Leader • Mary Kakegamic, Security • Micah Beardy, Security • Michelle McConnell, P/T Youth Care Leader • Mitchel Sutherland, Custodian • Natasha Wabano, Youth Care Leader • Nicole Beardy, Mental Health and Crisis Worker • Noah Okiror, Tutor

• Paul Nawagesic, Youth Care Leader • Peter Nawagesic, Youth Care Leader • Rakshya Dhakal, P/T Youth Care Leader • Raven Echum, Youth Care Leader • Rhonda Moonias, P/T Youth Care Leader • Richard Jourdain, Cultural and Activities Lead • Ryann Okeese, Youth Care Leader • Saba Hosseini, Youth Care Leader • Sunshine Moonias, Youth Care Leader • Tammy Moonias, Youth Care Leader • Theresa Moonias, Custodian • Tracy Dore, Youth Care Leader • Tyarra Goodman, Mental Health and Crisis Worker • Zigiwan Moses, Youth Care Leader

Overview

Opened in September 2022, the Matawa Student Care Centre (MSCC) houses youth who have transitioned to Thunder Bay from their remote First Nations to attend high school. The MSCC, located on the second floor of the Matawa Education & Care Centre in Thunder Bay, is able to accommodate 106 students. There are three accessible zero-barrier rooms available. The MSCC manages the safety and security of the students while providing accommodation, food services, recreational, spiritual and cultural activities, and liaising with healthcare service providers. The MSCC also works closely with the MECC and provincial school boards to ensure applicable academic and tutoring supports are available to students.



Students at the MSCC can participate in after-hours programming.

Key Priorities

The MSCC offers extensive after-hours recreation and cultural pro-



programming for students to get to know each other and create a sense of belonging to their own unique community. Programming also offers pathways to learning new skills, the opportunity to participate in safe activities, and positive ways to connect with their school and the city of Thunder Bay. This sense of home life is enhanced with intentional staffing of Matawa community members as much as possible.

The 24-hour care is done with a 1:10 staffing ratio, equating to one staff member to support 10 students. Consistency in scheduling and oversight builds a strong sense of trust, respect, and acceptance between students and staff. Building strong and trusting relationship allows students and staff to navigate through difficult and challenging situations during the school year.

Matawa Student Care Centre by the numbers:

- The MSCC can accommodate **106** students.
- 98** students lived at the MSCC during the 2023/2024 school year.
- 3** previously homeless youth lived at the MSCC this year.
- 17** students returned to the MSCC in 2023-2024.
- The staff to student ratio at the MSCC is **10:1**
- 6** students staying at the MSCC graduated high school this year.

Every student at the MSCC has a designated Mental Health and Crisis Worker who completes regular check-ins, offers small group programming, and is able to provide one-to-one sessions with students. The Mental and Crisis Worker can also put referrals into other wellness agencies or next-level services to provide additional support, based on a student's individual needs.

Accomplishments

- The MSCC, in partnership with the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, accommodated three homeless youth during the 2023/2024 school year.
- The MSCC accommodated a total of 98 students during the school year, including 17 returning students, providing opportunities for continuous growth and the development of best practices for caring and support of students.
- Staff participated in several training sessions such as Mental Health First Aid, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, Non-violent Crisis Intervention, Standard First Aid, Trauma-informed Practices, and medication administration records training.

ing. The MSCC now has in-house trainers for Mental Health First Aid, Standard First Aid, and Non-violent Crisis Intervention.

- The MSCC after-hours programming hosted their first annual student-led volleyball tournament. Students had the opportunity to participate in a few tournaments this year, including Tournament of Hope and Goodwill Hockey Tournament.
- Six students staying at the MSCC graduated high school this year.
- The MSCC provided a safe living space for Grade 9 students from Eabametoong First Nation after the community school, John C. Yesno Education Centre, burned down. Staff immediately set up programming and in-house services for students to aid in a smooth transition in to the city and school. This was a great loss and a traumatic time for the students and the whole community.



In addition to programming, the MSCC also offers mental health and crisis support.

Challenges

- Indigenous Services Canada is not currently providing stable and predictable funding to meet programming and students' needs, which continues to be a significant operational barrier. We continue to advocate with the hope of securing stable funding for the 2024/2025 academic year.
- We doubled our capacity this year, but did not operate at full capacity at any point during the school year. If this trend continues, it will negatively impact the viability of the MSCC.
- Attracting qualified staff to fill the various positions at the MSCC has been a challenge. At times, this resulted in having to utilize other staff temporary to ensure student safety.

Opportunities

- The MSCC has received funding for additional student support positions for the 2024/2025 academic year. These positions include a Night/Weekend Youth Care Lead Supervisor, Developmental Social Worker, Student Support Worker, and Nursing supports.
- Students from the MSCC have utilized the gymnasium at the MECC nightly since it opened its doors. This encourages students to be active and healthy.



Matawa Education

After Hours Student Support

After Hours Student Support Staff

Stephanie Ritch, Youth Inquest Manager • Timothy Fox, Night Supervisor • Angela Rae, Outreach Worker • Ardelle Sagutche-way, Indigenous Cultural Reintegration Youth Worker • Chad Samuelson, Youth Crisis Intervention • Cherilyn Fox, Youth Crisis Intervention • Cheyanne Meekis, On Call Worker • Cheyanne Moonias, After Hours Student Support Worker • Danielle Legacy, PT Safe Sobering Site • Derek Gagnon, Outreach Worker • Elaina Anderson, Youth Residential Worker • Elkanah Wesley, Outreach Worker • Harold Meeseetawageesic, On Call Worker • Jacob Moore, Addictions Crisis Worker • Jada Sofea, On Call Worker • Jared Yellowhead, After Hours Student Support • Jay Caron, Addictions Crisis Worker • Joseph Baxter, After Hours Student Support Worker • Kayla Littlepoplar, After Hours Student Support Worker • Klarissa Sakanee, On Call Worker • Lacey Anderson, PT After Hours Student Support Worker • Leslie Spence, Outreach Worker • Lashee Waswa, PT After Hours Student Support Worker • Michael Sutherland, After Hours Support Worker • Mya Dixon, After Hours Support Worker • Owen Atlookan, On Call Worker • Samantha Echum-Legarde, Indigenous Cultural Reintegration • Tanya Towner, PT Safe Sobering Site



After Hours Student Support staff at the career fair in Webequie First Nation in May.

Overview

After Hours Student Support staff are the front-line workers when school operations are closed during evenings weekends. All after hours programs and services support Matawa high school students aged 13-22 attending high school in Thunder Bay. Staff work as a team to support students, and answer calls for help from parents, boarding home parents, and community members. Staff often call emergency services including the Thunder Bay Police Service, Superior North Emergency Medical Services, and Thunder Bay Crisis Response to ensure the safety of Matawa students. The After Hours Student Support department consists of the following programs and services:

Matawa Safe Sobering Site supports Matawa students in need of safe and supervised short-term stabilization from alcohol or drugs. The site is housed in the Matawa Education building, operational 24/7/365, and monitored by Addictions Crisis Workers and Youth Residential Workers.

Matawa On Call Service provides free and safe transportation to Matawa students. For students experiencing intoxication, On Call Workers transport students to the Matawa Safe Sobering Site, or if



Youth at the After Hours Student Support Centre participate in programming.



Common areas in the After Hours Student Support centre at the Matawa Education and Care Centre.

necessary, call emergency services. On Call Workers also respond to calls from students, guardians, and community members pertaining to Matawa students.

Student Outreach Workers work evenings and weekends to help students with issues they're facing, ensure that students are in their boarding homes by curfew, and patrol high-risk areas in Thunder Bay to help at-risk Matawa students.

Youth Crisis Intervention Workers are mental health professionals who provide counselling and support services to youth under emotional distress or experiencing a crisis. These staff provide crisis intervention and support to stabilize students in crisis who are being serviced in any of the After Hours department's programs and services.

The **Night Supervisor** is responsible for the After Hours department's operations, attending to student and staff needs and concerns. The Night Supervisor manages staff workflow, team schedules, training new hires, evaluating after-hours performance, student data, and coordinating appropriate staff to respond to student crisis.

Indigenous Cultural Revitalization Youth Workers provide programming for Matawa students relating to cultural revitalization and Indigenous mental health promotion and practices. Staff work with youth during lunch time, evenings and weekends. These staff often support the Matawa Student Care Centre Cultural Workers.

The **Seven Youth Inquest** was held following the deaths of students Jethro Anderson, Reggie Bushie, Robyn Harper, Kyle Morrisseau, Paul Panacheese, and Jordan Wabasse. The inquest into the deaths of the

seven youth began October 5, 2015, and concluded June 28, 2016, when the jury rendered its ruling. At the conclusion of the inquest, 149 Jury recommendations were developed, aimed at keeping youth safe, 24 of which are directed at Matawa Education.

The **Youth Inquest Manager** acts as liaison between MECC and government, as well as First Nation inquest partners, to complete items associated with the Political Table, Education Table, and Task Team Tables. The Youth Inquest Manager also manages the After Hours Department.

Key Priorities

- Provide crisis intervention and lifesaving support to Matawa high school students involved in serious incidents.
- Amalgamate new programs and services into existing programs and services.

Accomplishments

- Throughout the 2023/2024 academic year After Hours Student Support staff provided crisis intervention and support to Matawa high school students involved in serious incidents, which directly attributed to saving students lives.
- New services launched in the 2023/2024 academic year include Youth Crisis Intervention and Indigenous Cultural Reintegration.
- Outreach Workers began making "curfew calls" to the boarding home parents of students living in Matawa First Nations Boarding Homes in September 2023 and data is already demonstrating a positive impact.



Matawa Education

After Hours Student Support

- Youth Crisis Intervention Workers have made a tremendous impact on staff and student support as there are more specialized staff for students experiencing emotional distress or a crisis.
- The addition of a Night Supervisor has added a layer of protection for staff and students in need of immediate guidance and support.
- Indigenous Cultural Revitalization Youth Workers have been the primary staff opening and operating the Matawa Student Lounge during lunch which offers additional cultural programming for students.
- The Seven Youth Inquest continues to support the following programs and important work within the Education Department: Jordan Wabasse Memorial Award, Matawa Student Care Centre, building renovations and new gymnasium, partnership with Critical Thinking to Indigenize curriculum for secondary school credits, Safe Sobering Site, Special Education services at the MECC, cultural and land-based programming, Ojibway and Oji-Cree secondary school credits, student and staff training opportunities, and our partnership with St. Joseph Care Group.

Challenges

- In the 2023/2024 academic year, 12 students with no known current address—due to family breakdown, boarding home breakdown, refusal to return to their community, etc.—received emergency shelter from Matawa Safe Sobering Site. Matawa Safe Sobering Site is not designed to be a homeless shelter as we don't have the necessary homelessness related programs/services, and we cannot physically separate genders or those experiencing homelessness vs. acute intoxication. On some nights, most of our six beds were taken up by students experiencing homelessness. Staff were often stretched very thin and lacked capacity to do both safe sobering and caring for homeless students.
- Students learning remotely in their home community and coming out for medical, counselling, or vacations to Thunder Bay continue to be a challenge for After Hours Student Support. Often staff are not informed in advance of their temporary address in Thunder Bay, or who their escort is, therefore, staff do not know where to bring the student or who to contact during student emergencies.
- Finding parental, guardian, or boarding home support for students who end up in Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre Emergency Room is an on-going challenge. Staff are often unable to contact parents/guardian to inform them their child is



After Hours Student Support staff in Webequie.

in hospital. After Hours Student Support staff are dealing with multiple crisis each night and often do not have the staff capacity to support students in hospital all night long. Overall, increased parental support is required during medical emergencies.

Opportunities

- The After Hours Student Support department and its respective programs and services will now be open throughout the year to support students, parents and communities during routine school closures.
- Funding announcements in 2023/2024 academic year include funding for nurses and security guards.

In May 2024, **Matawa Education** partnered with **Matawa Health Co-operative** to launch **nursing supports** for the **After Hours Student Support** and **Matawa Student Care Centre** beginning September 2024.

- New initiatives such as Youth Crisis Intervention, Indigenous Cultural Reintegration Youth Workers, and Night Supervisor will continue to grow moving forward. Overall, staff are our biggest asset and continuous staff development is a key opportunity moving forward.
- Chiefs Council Resolutions for both a Matawa Youth Shelter and Matawa Youth Treatment Centre will be put forth during the 2024 Matawa Annual General Meeting in hopes of building our collective capacity to help our most vulnerable Matawa students in need of emergency shelter and access to treatment.



Matawa Education

Pathways to Achieve Student Success

Pathways to Achieve Student Success Staff

Katherine Hughdie, PASS Program Manager • Joanna Wabano, Assistant Budget Officer • Douglas Gagnon, Cultural Education Coordinator • Marlee Poulin, Community Education Navigator • Maryann Nawagesic, Mental Health Lead • Olivia Merko, Student Nutrition Program Coordinator • Rita Mannella, Student Academic Lead • Shelby Ch'ng, Education Partnerships Program Liaison • Trey Duncan, Recruitment Officer

Overview

Matawa Education's Pathways to Achieve Student Success (PASS) program provides support services—primarily in the areas of literacy, numeracy, student retention, and community education initiatives—to Matawa First Nation schools, including:

- Johnny Therriault Memorial School, Aroland First Nation
- John C. Yesno Education Centre, Eabametoong First Nation
- Neskantaga Education Centre, Neskantaga First Nation
- Nibinamik Education Centre, Nibinamik First Nation
- Henry Coaster Memorial School, Marten Falls First Nation
- Simon Jacob Memorial Education Centre, Webequie First Nation
- Ginoogaming First Nation

Regular feedback on PASS activities is received from on-site visits by PASS staff, school Principals through the Principals Working Group, and through the Matawa First Nations Education Authority Board of Directors, which is comprised of Education Directors or designated representatives from the Matawa First Nations.



The PASS team provides support services to 7 Matawa First Nations.



The PASS team in Aroland First Nation earlier this year.

Key Priorities

- The PASS team supports School Success Plans, numeracy and literacy programs, and other educational initiatives to promote student success. PASS also hosts the annual Matawa Education Conference in March, covering a wide range of professional development topics addressing current needs for Matawa teachers, principals, education leadership, administrators, nutrition program staff, parents, and community members.
- PASS provides advisory services by engaging community members through outreach activities and sharing information related to education.
- Professional collaboration continues between PASS and other organizations like the Rapid Response Northern Schools Team, a trauma-informed team comprising board-employed, certified educators and administrators. This initiative is run through the Keewatin Patricia District School Board, Dorset Piers Mental Health, Bowmanville Rotary Club and various Post-Secondary Institutes, providing increased capacity for support in diverse ways.



Matawa Education

Pathways to Achieve Student Success



The PASS team held a number of youth transition workshops this year.

Accomplishments

- The 14th Annual Matawa Education Conference was held March 5 to 6, 2024, at the Valhalla Hotel and Conference Centre. The PASS team welcomed back Matawa First Nations educators and support staff, with 400 registrants and 75 presenters, participating in a diverse range of professional development topics.
- Staff provided cultural and ceremony services for various events throughout Matawa Education (conference, meetings, etc.), which were highly appreciated and fostered a positive atmosphere for learning and collaboration.
- A new logo for Henry Coaster Memorial School in Marten Falls First Nation was developed, contributing to the school's unique identity. Additionally, a school pow wow was organized for Johnny Therriault School in Aroland First Nation, highlighting Indigenous culture and traditions for students.



The Henry Coaster Memorial School logo, based on artwork by Marten Falls First Nation Chief Bruce Achneepineskum.

- Funding was obtained from the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services to support Henry Coaster Memorial School with a new breakfast program, significantly impacting students'

lives in Marten Falls First Nation.

- Matawa schools continue to receive extra support in Youth Life Promotion, focusing on holistic, strength-based, and empowerment-focused programs that honor youth individuality and support wellbeing.
- The Grade 8 Transition Workshops, aiding students transitioning to high school, were conducted by the PASS team in most community schools, focusing on wellbeing, self-care, and cultural discussions.
- PASS supported the planning and implementation of the Welcome to Kindergarten Program, helping prepare young learners and families for full-day kindergarten. A new parent handbook was created to assist families better.
- A Recruitment Lead was hired to assist Matawa schools and communities with staff recruitment and retention needs, anticipating more opportunities for hosting teacher candidates and attending job fairs.
- The Bowmanville Bursary, in partnership with the Rotary Club of Bowmanville, Ontario, was awarded to Matawa members excelling in various educational programs. This year, PASS members presented at the Rotary Conference in Oshawa and attended the 100 Year Bowmanville Rotary Club Anniversary Gala, where an additional \$1,000 was awarded for scholarships.
- Matawa Education congratulates the 2023/2024 Matawa school and community winners for their achievements in various categories, encouraging continued participation in award submissions.

Johnny Therriault Memorial School award winners:

JK & SK: Melissa Megan's Kindergarten Class

Grade 1-2: Allen Wabigwan's Grade 1/2 Class

Grade 3-5: 1st place - Catherine Mendowegan, Grade 4;

2nd place - Scarlett Achneepineskum, Grade 5

Grade 6-8: 1st place - Jeremiah Mendowegan, Grade 6;

2nd place - Kaidence Baxter, Grade 6

Native Language Award: Carter Gagnon, Grade 7

Creative Writing Award: Jaxon Mashake, Grade 6

PASS encourages all Matawa schools, communities, and students to submit in the elementary/secondary award categories. Please visit <https://www.matawa.on.ca/services/education/> for next year's call out for submissions.



The PASS team hosts the annual Matawa Education Conference, one of the largest in the region.

Challenges

- Matawa schools face varying levels of teacher turnover and recruitment difficulties. The PASS team is working with schools to identify barriers and develop a teacher retention framework.
- The loss of John C Yesno Education Centre in Eabametoong First Nation has disrupted education programming and continuity. PASS continues to assist school staff and leadership in providing community support.
- There was low participation in the Education Counsellor Working Group, which aimed to have three meetings a year. A new strategy will be employed next year to highlight the group's value to Education Counsellors.

Opportunities

- Efforts are underway to disseminate information on curriculum changes from the Ministry of Education, summarizing content into accessible documents for schools.
- The new Recruitment Lead is developing a robust recruitment model to support schools facing staffing challenges.

- There is an opportunity to leverage the existing newsletter as an engagement tool for communities, especially in preparation for the next strategic plan.
- A memorandum of understanding between Lakehead Public Schools and Matawa Education is in progress, enhancing resource sharing, networking, and professional development collaboration.
- PASS Staff continue to provide crisis support to communities like Eabametoong First Nation and Neskantaga First Nation.
- School staff had opportunities to participate in the Indspire Conference, gaining insights into Indigenous Education.
- The creation of Minoyaawin Moshkomod (Wellness Bags) continues, promoting self-regulation and wellbeing among students.
- School Success Plans are being developed for some Matawa Schools, with one school completing their plan, encouraging others to follow suit.
- We were successful in receiving a library grant for the schools from Webequie, Nibinamik, Neskantaga and Aroland First Nations. There is an opportunity to leverage this grant funding with our current funds to provide new libraries for schools, encourage literacy in the communities, and improve overall student retention.



Matawa Education Information Technology (IT)

Matawa Education IT Staff

Rafal Zgolak, System Administrator
Andrew Sedesky, IT Technician
Nathaniel Salgueiro, Database Helpdesk

Overview

The Matawa Education Information Technology (IT) Department is dedicated to delivering comprehensive technology support and services to the Matawa Education & Care Centre (MECC) and the Matawa communities, including Marten Falls, Nibinamik, Aroland, Webequie, Fort Hope, and Neskantaga First Nations. Our mission is to enhance the educational experience and operational efficiency through reliable and innovative IT solutions.

Key Priorities

- Provide timely and effective technical support to teachers and staff at the MECC and within Matawa communities, including maintaining and troubleshooting hardware, software, and network systems to ensure smooth and continuous operations.
- Oversee the installation, configuration, and management of IT infrastructure, including servers, networks, and communication systems, while simultaneously ensuring robust cybersecurity measures are in place to protect sensitive data and systems from potential threats.
- Collaborate with educators to integrate technology into the curriculum, enhancing learning experiences and outcomes; in addition, provide training and resources to teachers and students to effectively utilize educational technology tools and platforms.
- Extend IT support services to the Matawa communities, facilitating access to digital resources; as well as, develop and implement community-oriented IT initiatives that address local needs and foster technological growth.
- Lead and manage IT projects that align with the educational goals and technological advancements of the Matawa School and communities; and staying updated with emerging technologies and recommend innovative solutions to enhance educational and administrative processes.



Matawa Education's IT department supports the MECC and five First Nations.

Accomplishments

- When the John C Yesno Education Centre in Eabametoong First Nation tragically burned to the ground, the IT Department acted swiftly to provide essential IT support. This included setting up temporary systems to ensure educational continuity and access to digital resources for students and staff. In addition, the IT Department is involved in setting up the necessary IT infrastructure, including networks and computers, trying our best to ensure a seamless transition for the school community.
- Matawa Education IT procured a projector for the MECC gymnasium and is currently coordinating installation. This equipment will enhance the facility's capability to host events, presentations, and other community activities, contributing to a more enriched educational environment.
- Through proactive and strategic initiatives, the department continues to foster an environment where technology enhances learning, communication, and community development.

Challenges

- One of the primary challenges is limited internet speed and availability in many of the Matawa communities. Slow and unstable internet connections hinder the ability to access online educational resources, conduct virtual meetings, and perform other essential digital tasks.
- The absence of static Internet Protocol (IP) addresses in the com-



munities complicates network management and security. This limitation affects the ability to establish stable remote access and manage devices efficiently.

- Troubleshooting IT issues in remote schools and communities is often challenging due to the uncertainty of the problems encountered. Without knowing the exact issue beforehand, it becomes difficult to prepare adequately for on-site visits.
- When traveling to remote areas, the IT team does not always have access to the necessary tools and resources to address specific issues. This limitation can delay the resolution of problems and affect the continuity of educational activities.
- Delivering IT equipment and supplies to the communities can take a considerable amount of time due to geographical isolation and logistical challenges. These delays impact the timely implementation of technological solutions and maintenance efforts.
- Despite these challenges, the Matawa Education IT department remains dedicated to providing high-quality IT support and services. The team continuously seeks innovative solutions and collaborates with community leaders to address these issues effectively. By leveraging their expertise and resources, the department strives to overcome obstacles and enhance the educational experience for all members of the Matawa School and its communities.

Opportunities

- The future holds promise with the continual emergence of new technologies becoming more accessible and affordable. Advances in cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and educational software can revolutionize teaching and learning experiences, making education more interactive and effective.
- Improvements in satellite and wireless internet technologies offer the potential to significantly enhance connectivity in remote areas. Exploring these solutions could address current internet speed and availability issues, providing more reliable and faster internet access for all communities.
- The IT department actively seeks new technologies by attend-



Limited internet speed and availability poses challenges for Matawa communities.

ing industry expos, workshops, and conferences. These events provide valuable opportunities to discover the latest tools and equipment tailored for educational environments, ensuring that the department remains at the forefront of technological advancements.

- The department encourages community members to share their concerns, questions, and suggestions regarding technology in their schools. Understanding the specific needs and desires of students, teachers, and community members helps tailor IT solutions to meet those requirements effectively.
- By actively engaging with the community, the IT department can develop customized support and solutions that address unique challenges and enhance the educational experience.
- To better serve the MECC and its communities, the IT department invites all community members to provide their feedback and insights. Please share your concerns, questions, and what you would like to see in your school technology-wise. Your input is invaluable in helping us understand your needs and how we can support you more effectively.
- The Matawa Education IT department is committed to continuous improvement and innovation. By leveraging new technologies, engaging with the community, and building strategic partnerships, the department aims to create a technologically advanced and supportive educational environment. Together, we can overcome challenges and seize opportunities to ensure a bright future for the Matawa School and its communities.



Matawa Education

Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Project



Matawa Waka Tere Year One class with tutor Cheyanne Patabon in Long Lake #58 First Nation.

Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Project Staff

In Thunder Bay: Tai Watene, Budget Officer • Aroha Watene, Indigenous Language Revitalization Specialist • Mike Graham, Indigenous Language Revitalization Specialist • Sydyn Baxter, Project Officer • Faith Bruyere, Procurement Support Officer • Gerrelle Emery, Student Registry/Support Lead • Caitlyn Balcombe, Student Registry/Support Officer • Lois Whitehead, Indigenous Language Specialist / Marketing Lead • Nancy Ritch, Indigenous Language Specialist • Tracy Spence, Indigenous Language Specialist • Lawrence Therriault, Indigenous Language Specialist • Gloria Champagne, Indigenous Language Specialist Assistant

In Matawa First Nations: Aroland First Nation (Ojibwe): Cathy Therriault, Tutor Assistant • Glenda Meshake, Instructor/Tutor – Constance Lake First Nation (Cree): Florrie Sutherland, Instructor/Tutor • Nancy Wesley, Tutor Assistant – Eabametoong First Nation (Ojibwe): Noreen Misewace, Instructor/Tutor • Sophia Yellowhead, Tutor Assistant • Gordon Yellowhead, Instructor/Tutor • Eileen Wabano, Tutor Assistant – Ginoogaming First Nation (Ojibway): Brittney Mendowegan, Instructor/Tutor • Janelle Bear, Tutor Assistant – Long Lake #58 First Nation (Ojibway): Cheyanne Patabon, Instructor/Tutor • Hannah Meshake, Tutor

Assistant • Andrea O'Nabigon, Instructor/Tutor • Carla Kowtiash, Tutor Assistant – Marten Falls First Nation (Ojibwe): Elizabeth Achneepineskum, Instructor/Tutor • Michelle Smith, Tutor Assistant – Neskantaga First Nation (Oji-Cree): Elizabeth Sugarhead, Instructor/Tutor • Judy Sakanee, Tutor Assistant – Webequie First Nation (Oji-Cree): Kerina Wabasse, Instructor/Tutor • Sandra Spence, Tutor Assistant • Tamara Suganaqueb, Instructor/Tutor • Melissa Wabasse, Tutor Assistant – Nibinamik First Nation (Oji-Cree): Loretta Wabasse, Tutor Assistant • Connie Anderson, Tutor Assistant – Thunder Bay (Cree): Rebecca Yesno, Instructor/Tutor • Bentley Cheechoo, Tutor Assistant – Thunder Bay (Oji-Cree): Sariane Fiddler, Instructor/Tutor • Krystle Suganaqueb, Tutor Assistant • Wilma Goodwin, Instructor/Tutor • Shelley Mee-seetawageesic, Tutor Assistant – Thunder Bay (Ojibwe): Shannon Slipperjack, Instructor/Tutor • Queenie Earle, Tutor Assistant • Wanda Baxter, Instructor/Tutor • Cathy McGuire, Tutor Assistant

Overview

The Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Project (MWTILRP) began in 2018 with three years of funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage's Indigenous and Cultures Program 2022. The language project's objective is to develop and deliver three Indigenous language programs in Cree, Oji-Cree, Ojibwe/Ojibway Certificates and Diplomas, and to select and train staff to fulfill Resolution #21-28-07-2022 Roll out of the Matawa Waka Tere Language Revitalization Program, passed by the Matawa Chiefs' Council.

Department Committee members:

- » Sharon Nate, Matawa Education Authority Executive Director
- » Stephanie Hogan, Education Coordinator
- » Jeff Yellowhead, Interim Education Executive Assistant
- » Katie Hughdie, PASS Manager
- » Emily Shandruk, Special Projects and WINHEC, Matawa Education committee chair
- » Tai Watene, Budget Officer
- » Tracy Ostamus, Reception



Key Priorities

- Finalize Year Two Conjoint Diploma curriculum resource developments and training materials in three languages (Cree, Oji-Cree, Ojibwe/Ojibway).
- Select and train Indigenous Language Revitalization Specialists, Year Two community instructors/tutors and assistants in the Matawa Waka Tere delivery methodology and program administration.
- Market, recruit and roll-out Year One Conjoint Certificate and Conjoint Diploma pilot programs Semester 1 and Semester 2, distribute resources in three languages (Cree, Oji-Cree, Ojibway/Ojibwe), conduct program evaluations and maintain accurate student academic records.

munities and Thunder Bay delivered a Year One certificate and/or Year Two diploma in one of the three languages.

- Distributed Matawa Waka Tere Staff Acknowledgment Awards to five recipients for their commitment to the quality delivery of the Indigenous Language Revitalization Project and Curriculum 2022/2023.
- Student enrollments opened and received by non-Matawa community participants. Evaluation feedback attests the program's success, has helped a student learn more language than previous college and university program providers, and has inspired students to becoming a tutor and or assistant tutor.

Challenges

- We continue to evaluate and adapt the facilitation of the Matawa Waka Tere full methodology training to ensure new and re-trained hires produce quality practical skills with a sound understanding on how to deliver program content and perform administrative tasks.
- Student withdrawal and retention is an ongoing expectation that students on the program achieve 100% in all assessments and maintain an average of 85% attendance to graduate. Students

Accomplishments

- Received approval of the Conjoint Year Two National Indigenous Kikinomagewin Anishinaabemowin curriculum details and chiimaan 1 to 3 (semester 1 and 2) content resources for the three languages (Ojibwe/Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree) by the Matawa First Nations Education Authority Board of Directors in August 2023 and chiimaan 4 to 6 (semester 3 and 4) content resources in May 2024.
- Completed all semester 1 and 2 Diploma program resources, which were used as training aides for new and promoted Year Two hires.
- Six Indigenous language specialist positions remain ongoing and function as program content developers, translators, training facilitators, and delivery support personnel mentoring and monitoring all 9 community tutor/instructors and Assistants in Year One and Year Two.
- Each participating Matawa First Nation site received all appropriate materials, site resources, tutor/instructor resources, student resources and class administration supplies required to deliver a successful program.
- 2022-2023 Certificate Year One Delivery concluded in July 2023; In 2023-2024, nine participating Matawa First Nations com-



Matawa Waka Tere tutor Wanda Baxter received an acknowledgment award for honesty and integrity.



Matawa Education

Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Project

who withdraw may re-enroll and complete outstanding assessment tasks. As 'other' was the primary reason students withdraw, a dedicated recruitment person is accessible to source and provide academic well-being support. The withdrawal outcomes imply the program takes a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to graduate success by sharing the thoughts and feelings of staff, students and stakeholders through consistent program evaluation reports and speaking the language.

- Building staff's digital literacy skills to meet modern teaching and administrative demands will improve communications and the timely submission of unit results and attendance tasks.
- Matawa Education is currently undergoing a site accreditation process through the World Indigenous Nations Holistic Education Consortium (WINHEC) for the purpose of accrediting the Matawa Waka Tere Certificate Year One and the Diploma Year Two programs by adhering to the site and self-study process.
- In-house marketing and recruitment strategies are initiated and maintained by all staff who wear various hats at various times throughout the academic calendar year.
- The Matawa Waka Tere Leads are aware that curriculum development currently takes precedent over additional community visits,

which are substituted by regular online staff support meetings, and to avoid late resources.

- Procuring and shipping program resources to remote and drive-in communities requires the attention of a procurement officer to ensure the timely ordering and distribution of resources, and to minimize costs due to inflation.
- Differing dialects continue to be a challenge for most staff until they refer to the curriculum content as a guide for consistent structural context and delivery.
- The New Zealand (NZ) Language Specialists work permit renewals are currently renewed per annum, and delayed approval processes cause a hold on personal well-being and professional project activities. The NZ specialists will be transitioning to New Zealand in 2025 at the conclusion of the current funding.
- Some communities are limited to providing optional classroom space for the delivery of the Matawa Waka Tere language programs.
- Establishing an Education Institute will assist in the development of robust program curriculum development structures and managerial infrastructures. This would allow a focus on curriculum advancements, training and development, including specific language-learning needs allowing projects for building



A workshop for Matawa Waka Tere tutors held during the 2024 Matawa Education Conference.



infrastructure, human resource and other department support structures to obtain student academic well-being funding and/or recognized educational institutional funding as does mainstream to deliver and develop self-determined accredited programs applicable to the Matawa community members needs.

Opportunities

- The Matawa Waka Tere Oshki Maachita Graduation Committee looks forward to celebrating the first Oshki Maachita graduates at the Matawa Education Care Centre in July, for approximately 80 Year One Certificate students graduating from 2019-2020, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 classes.
- The Year Two Diploma will be in its third and fourth semester from fall 2024 to spring 2025, and will be ready for accreditation through the WINHEC site and self-study process. All diploma content for chiimaan (semester) 4 to 6 will be complete December 2024.
- Community language speakers and student graduates should take the employment opportunity to train, study and staircase into delivery and administrative positions within the Matawa Waka Tere Project. Matawa Waka Tere project welcomes the opportunity to develop community language strategies with Matawa community leaders.
- The Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization project is exploring further funding pathways for 2025 through 2027.
- Additional personnel have been identified in student support, procurement and marketing positions. Capacity to create educational community-building strategies and source funding to accommodate administration and tutorial staff delivering the three languages in Year One and Year Two in Thunder Bay and Matawa communities.
- An educational building strategy will promote a holistic learning environment conducive to the program's essential principals.
- Selected tutors within Year One and Year Two have been



Training for Matawa Waka Tere tutors held at the Valhalla Hotel in 2023.

identified to explore, improve and pilot digital software platforms for the delivery of chiimaan in the classroom, to deliver tutorials and to perform or train in administrative duties.

- The World Indigenous Nations University Honorary Doctorates will finally be conferred upon the four Matawa First Nations Management employee applicants this fall at the WINHEC Annual General Meeting in Hawaii as a legitimate conferring.
- Matawa Waka Tere staff look forward to marketing and recruiting in their respective First Nation communities with more confidence and understanding of the integrity of the program and the commitment required by participants.



Year Two class with Ojibwe tutor Wanda Baxter.



Matawa Education Post Secondary Program



Graduates and award winners at the 2024 Matawa Post-Secondary Graduate Recognition and Awards Banquet on June 6 in Thunder Bay.

The Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee was established to ensure that each First Nation has decision making for their own post-secondary funding. The Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee representatives are chosen by their own respective First Nations. The Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee meets twice annually and is in continuous contact via email and telephone throughout the year. The Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee:

- Liaises for their students and post-secondary staff.
- Makes decisions with their First Nation Education Authority for student applications, requests, and budgets.
- Liaises with their own First Nation for Post-Secondary Program.

Matawa Post-Secondary Staff

Matawa Post-Secondary Department

Georgette O'Nabigon, Post-Secondary Coordinator • Carly Perras, Post-Secondary Student Support Worker • Courtney Strutt, Post-Secondary Transition Coach

Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee

Anna Marie Majiskon, Aroland First Nation • Martha Taylor, Ginoogaming First Nation • Patrick Patabon, Long Lake #58 First Nation • Tony Sakanee, Neskantaga First Nation • Ennis Jacob, Webequie First Nation

Overview

The Matawa Post-Secondary (MPS) Program, established in March 1997, consists of the following five communities: Aroland, Ginoogaming, Long Lake #58, Neskantaga and Webequie First Nations. The main role of Matawa Post-Secondary staff is to:

- Administer post-secondary funding for five participating First Nation
- Liaises for First Nation Communities, students, Post-Secondary Institutes, and any other outside resource organizations.
- Support and monitor students' academic progress and social well-being.

Key Priorities

The Matawa Post-Secondary Program: provides support services, maintains a database, liaises with the Matawa Post-Secondary Advisory Committee, students, and post-secondary institutions. MPS staff continue to represent students on various committees throughout the year.

The Matawa Post-Secondary 2023/2024 school year by the numbers:

95 students enrolled in the MPS program
15 students withdrew from the MPS program
24 students in the MPS program graduated this year!

Graduates were celebrated at the graduate recognition and awards banquet, held on June 6, 2024, at the Superior Inn (formerly Victoria Inn) in Thunder Bay.

A new position called Post-Secondary Transition Coach was filled on August 8, 2023, with funding from Ministry of Colleges and Universities' Indigenous Targeted Initiatives Fund (ITIF). The first funding allocation was approved until March 2024, and we were successful in obtaining additional funding up to September 2025. This particular



project is focused on helping Grade 12 students, and other students entering post-secondary for the first time, make a smooth, safe, and successful transition into post-secondary life. Resources and opportunities for learning and one-on-one support has been provided, as well as connecting students with and informing them about services in urban settings. Another focus is to provide resources, encouragement, and support to female Matawa students in their pursuit of post-secondary education.

Accomplishments

The MPS program successfully obtained additional project funding through the ITIF for the “Life & Learning after Graduation: Transitional Support Program,” which builds on lessons learned during the 2023/2024 ITIF-funded pilot called the Matawa Education Safety Transitional Supports project. The Transition Coach will address ongoing challenges for students as they transition to post-secondary, as identified this past year (including offering one-on-one support to help students make plans for housing, income, computers, etc.). The Transition Coach will also continue to build resources and offer learning opportunities, such as workshops and the three-day in-person Life After Graduation Transition Experience. This project will also address the need to maintain connection with new high school graduates who don't continue to post-secondary right away, and empowering Indigenous women in their post-secondary journeys.

At the end of March 2024, the MPS program piloted the “Life After Graduation Transition Experience,” a three-day immersive opportunity for upcoming or recent high school graduates to connect, learn, and prepare for this life transition with one another. Fifteen youth between the ages of 17 and 20 from six Matawa communities participated in the program, which took place in Thunder Bay. During the workshop, youth were able to:

- Practice taking public transportation.
- Tour post-secondary campuses including Lakehead University and Confederation College, with a focus on student life.
- Discuss and reflect on building support networks and taking



Fifteen students from six Matawa communities participated in the MPS' Life After Graduation Transition Experience in March. (Credit: Morningstar Derosier)

care of their mental health.

- Interact with organizations that offer supports and services to Indigenous youth.
- Cook easy and affordable meals.
- Hear the experiences of past and current Matawa post-secondary students.
- Learn about budgeting, money management, and funding for post-secondary education.

Maadaadizi Post-Secondary Student Orientation: Held on September 9, 2023, at Marina Park in Thunder Bay, the annual Maadaadizi student orientation event is a special day meant to welcome First Nation students and their families to Thunder Bay. The event featured First Nation role models, keynote speakers and musical performances, plus information booths, children's activities, prizes and refreshments. It's a free event supported by participating organizations and local post-secondary institutions who donate either financially or in-kind. The Maadaadizi Committee, formed in Thunder Bay in 2013, consist of representatives from local post-secondary institutes and administering agencies. Maadaadizi means “he/she starts a journey” in the Ojibwe language.

Matawa Rotary Bursary Program: The Bowmanville Rotary Club generously funds a number of awards and bursaries, which are awarded to students at the annual Matawa Post-Secondary Graduate and Recognition Banquet and Awards Ceremony (held on this year on



Matawa Education Post Secondary Program

June 6, 2024, at the Superior Inn in Thunder Bay). Since 2008, Matawa Education has partnered with the Bowmanville Rotary Club to administer the annual bursary program, which features award categories including elementary, secondary, post-secondary, apprenticeships, training, and adult education. The bursaries are awarded based on literacy, class participation and personal achievements, as determined by Matawa school representatives and the Bowmanville Rotary Club. The intent is to honour community members and encourage them on their educational journey.



Like many Matawa programs, the Post Secondary Program struggles with insufficient funding.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges faced by the MPS program is insufficient funding for student applicants and the inability to increase monthly allowance rates for some of our First Nations. Funding amounts have not increased since 1987, meaning that with the rate of inflation, the living allowance provided to students falls far below what is needed to make ends meet.

Opportunities

- Post-secondary staff represent the MPS program on various local committees.
- During the week, the Post-Secondary Student Support Worker spends time at local Post-Secondary Institutes meeting with students personally and taking part in student activities, which helps with getting to know the students and staff.
- In addition to other committees, the Post-Secondary Coordinator sits on Confederation College's Negahneewin Council.
- The Matawa Post-Secondary Transition Coach has had the opportunity to visit Matawa First Nations and their respective schools, as well as local feeder high schools, to network and build rela-

tionships with Grade 12 students approaching graduation.

- The Post-Secondary Coordinator and PASS Student Nutrition Program Coordinator were invited to the Bowmanville Rotary Club Annual General Meeting in October 2023. They did two presentations about our Matawa Education and our partnership with Bowmanville, as well as the bursary program. A former Bowmanville award winner sat on the panel to represent Indigenous students and spoke on behalf of students and her educational journey. All presentations were well received.



Matawa Education staff attended the Bowmanville Rotary Club's 100th Anniversary Gala this year.



Matawa Education

Achieving the Dream Through Education

Board of Directors

Ennis Jacob, Interim President, Webequie First Nation
Anna Marie Magiskan, Board Member, Aroland First Nation
Melanie Moonias, Board Member, Neskantaga First Nation
Mary Oskineegish, Interim Treasurer, Nibinamik First Nation
Elder George Whitehead, Webequie First Nation

Achieving the Dream Through Education Overview

Achieving the Dream Through Education is devoted to supporting and improving the lives of Indigenous youth through education, holistic student-centred programs, spiritual values, and embracing connections to community, language and land in the Matawa Communities of Aroland, Eabametoong, Ginoogaming, Marten Falls, Neskantaga, Nibinamik and Webequie First Nations.

Key Priorities

Areas of focus for the charity are the scholarships, bursaries and awards that allow Matawa youth and students of all ages to further their dreams and goals. Created by interested and driven donors, many of which who have first-hand connections to Matawa youth, the opportunities that these funds create open up new and exciting pathways.

Accomplishments

Around \$13,000 in scholarships, bursaries and awards was distributed to 12 deserving students at the 2023 Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) graduation. Specifically graduating from the MECC, we want to congratulate: Trish Kakegamic, Sunshine Moonias, Leean Moonias, Tamara Moonias, Nathan Oskineegish, Clayton Quisses, Precious Thompson, Shaylin Wapoose and Lashaunda Waswa.

Challenges

The Achieving the Dream Through Education charity faces funding hurdles, particularly in securing sufficient funding to support all student applicants. One of the most pressing challenges is the inability to provide financial assistance to every deserving student due



2023 MECC graduates and Achieving the Dream Through Education award winners.

to limited resources. This shortfall not only restricts the number of students who can benefit from the program, but also hampers the charity's ability to increase the number of scholarships, bursaries and awards that are available. Overcoming these funding challenges is essential to fulfilling the charity's mission of empowering First Nations students through education.

Opportunities

Despite the funding challenges, there is a significant opportunity for the Achieving the Dream Through Education charity to strengthen its community and donor engagement efforts. By dedicating more time and resources to highlighting student accomplishments, current donor engagement and community support, the charity can foster a deeper connection with its supporters and the broader community. This transparency can lead to increased awareness and understanding of the students' needs, inspiring more substantial and consistent contributions from donors.

Moreover, this situation presents a chance to develop new fundraising initiatives and partnerships. By collaborating with businesses, foundations, and other organizations committed to education and First Nations communities, the charity can secure additional funding streams.

Ultimately, addressing the funding challenges openly and proactively can galvanize the charity's supporters, attract new donors, and create sustainable financial solutions that will enable more students to achieve their educational dreams.



Financial Advisory Matawa First Nations Management



Matawa's Financial Advisory department supports Matawa First Nations with accounting and finance related services.

Department Committee

The Financial Advisory Services department collaborates with the Band Managers Committee (BMC). This committee includes the Director of Operations/Manager and the Finance Manager from each member community, as well as the Director of the Financial Advisory Services Department. The committee's goal is to enable communities to share knowledge and information on funding opportunities, capacity building, managerial successes, and other resources to support the effective administration of community headquarters. Additionally, the committee advises the Financial Advisory Services Department on potential services to offer.

Financial Advisory Staff

Lloyd Wabigwan, CPA, CMA, Director Financial Advisory Services

Overview

The Financial Advisory Services Department partners with the CEO and the BMC to enhance the administrative capacity and opportunities of member First Nations, focusing on accounting, finance, and governance. The department provides community-based outreach services, support, and resources directly to First Nations administrations and individuals, emphasizing sound fiscal management.

Key Priorities

Our goal is to support Matawa First Nation administrators and Councils by providing information, resources, and training in accounting, finance, and governance. This includes support in audit planning and preparation, accounting and bookkeeping, awareness of financing avenues and financial aid opportunities, development of administrative policies, proposal development, and other aspects of effective administration and operations management for First Nations. Additionally, we assist individual community members with preparing and filing simple income tax returns, understanding and submitting claims for various settlement agreements, and other

government applications such as Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan. This initiative aims to support community members both within and outside the community. We are available to provide financial guidance and help with government applications and other financial challenges they may face.

Accomplishments

- Continuously researching funding options for communities and informing the BMC of potential funding streams.
- Provided support to communities with auditing challenges, policy development, job descriptions and interviews, banking, and proposal development as requested, annual budgeting, transition plans, organizational structure.
- Participated as a member of a community finance audit committee.
- Informed the BMC about various training and capacity development workshops, conferences, and webinars related to First Nation administration.
- Attended the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association (AFOA) 2024 National Conference and the Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Joint Gathering.
- Attended the Strengthening Governance – Chief and Council Roles and Responsibilities workshop and was pleased to see representation from seven of the Matawa communities.



- Assisted internally with the Matawa management team with various initiatives and interviews.
- Provided an Income Tax preparation service to those members with little to moderate incomes i.e., preparing and submitting tax returns for membership.
- Assisted individual members with non-tax-related inquiries, helping them understand issues related to government applications, forms, and contacts.
- Assisted individuals with the completing and submitting of Drinking Water Claims and other various settlement claims.
- Collaborated with a local financial planning group to prepare a proposal, which was submitted to ISC, for providing free estate management services to community members. The primary focus of this initiative will be creating Wills and Powers of Attorney for individuals residing in the communities. Obtained a supporting Chiefs Council Resolution.
- Consistently leveraging learning opportunities in accounting, finance, and governance, which are the areas covered by the department.
- Facilitated a personal budgeting workshop for the students at KKETS.
- Facilitated a financial literacy workshop for the Matawa summer students.

has proven arduous. Despite submitting proposals over the years, the uncertainty of government funding has hindered the implementation of our Matawa strategy. Although exploring alternative revenue sources is challenging, it is not impossible. We recognize the need to establish our own revenue streams, which requires advocating for revenue-sharing partnerships with governments, thereby eliminating the need for constant application and reporting.

Another challenge is assisting member communities in various aspects to ensure they are not at risk of insolvency and have consistent and predictable funding and financing.

Additionally, inadequate broadband Internet access in communities presents a challenge for online communication and activities.

Opportunities

To continuously promote educational opportunities for community finance staffers and potential future finance staffers, to market it so that future generations take a keen interest in this sector of First Nation management.

To establish a community-made capacity development process and/or system which will allow for current community-based staff to increase capacity and understanding of accounting, finance, and governance, and to ensure there will be others who are willing to apply for staffing positions responsible for these roles if and/or when they become vacant.

To improve member First Nations accounting, finance, and governance systems so that accurate and timely information to evaluate a member First Nations financial status is readily available to management for decision making purposes; and to third parties such as financiers to make confident decisions about a First Nations borrowing capacity. This will assist with long-term borrowing needs a First Nation may have, i.e., large infrastructure projects.

Improve BMC communication, establish an avenue for the BMC members to share their successes and failures and to mentor each other. Having the BMC collaborate on what type of common services the Tribal Council can provide in the future in terms of accounting, finance, and governance.



The Financial Advisory department offers financial literacy and personal budgeting workshops.

Challenges

Securing long-term government funding to support the human resources and activities of the Financial Advisory Services department



Finance

Matawa First Nations Management

Finance Staff

Neil Miller CPA, CA, Manager • Mike Harding CPA, Finance Controller • Tina Gordon, Finance Officer • Brook Mainville, Finance Officer • Robina Baxter, Finance Officer • Carl Levesque, Finance Officer • Laureen Kahgee, Finance Officer (on leave) • Thomas Kelos, Finance Officer • Ethan Crawford, Finance Officer • James Gascon, Finance Officer • Tanya Watts, Payroll and Benefits Officer • Ashley Tomagatick, Administrative Assistant (Finance) • Claudia Rheault, Casual Receptionist • Amanda Goulet, Casual Receptionist • Tanis Faulconer, Casual Receptionist • Tanaya Tomagatick, Casual Receptionist • Ayla Spyрка, Casual Receptionist • Arianna Atlookan, Casual Receptionist

Overview

The Finance department provides financial and administrative support services to the Matawa Chiefs, Board of Directors, CEO and Program Managers. The department is responsible for regular financial and compliance reporting (monthly, quarterly, and annually), and proper maintenance of all financial activities for MFNM and its related entities. The department is also responsible for the reception services at Matawa's main office at 233 Court St. S.

Finance works out of the 2nd floor office at 233 Court St. S. in Thunder Bay. We are responsible for payroll, paying the bills, and reporting to Matawa's funders. Our clients are all the other staff of MFNM and its associated entities. We work closely with Executive Directors, Program and Department Managers to provide support and guidance in not only financial matters, but also any operating issues that may arise. Finance also provides advisory services for the various Board and Committees of the Matawa Group as requested.

Key Priorities

The key priority of the Finance Department is maintaining the financial viability of Matawa First Nations Management and its related entities. Matawa's variety of programs need to be operated efficiently and effectively and within constrained financial and human resources. Matawa's Program Managers have done a tremendous job in controlling their financial resources and working within the budget constraints of the funding agreements. The Finance Department assists the Program Managers in the proper accounting for all the revenue and expenses to satisfy the financial reporting requirements of the program funders.

Matawa's Finance department supports:

- Matawa First Nations Management
- Matawa Non-Profit Housing Corporation – Non-profit providing subsidized housing to persons of low or modest income.
- Matawa First Nations Property Inc. – For-profit enterprise consisting of building and property at 233 Court St. S. in Thunder Bay.
- Four Rivers Inc. – For-profit enterprise providing environmental and other services.
- Matawa Training and Wellness Centre – Providing office and training spaces for health, social services, and training and education.
- Gathering of Rivers for Community Care (GORFCC) – Registered charity.
- Achieving the Dream Through Education – Registered charity.
- Rapid Lynx Telecommunications GP Inc. – Broadband project.
- Matawa Development GP Inc. – Non-profit economic development.

Accomplishments

Matawa has its books and records audited annually by a local auditing firm. The audited financial statements are required by Matawa's funders to ensure funds were expended in the manner prescribed in the contribution funding agreements. Matawa has received an unqualified audit opinion in its consolidated financial statements since its inception. This is a very high standard and difficult to maintain. This aspect of our work plays a critical role in the on-going success of Matawa.

Matawa's Finance department also provides accounting, bookkeeping and payroll services for Matawa Health Co-operative Inc. and Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Education and Training Services (KKETS).

During the 2023 fiscal year, the Finance department implemented new accounting and payroll systems to better serve the staff and



Matawa has received an “unqualified audit opinion” or a clean report every year since it's inception.

membership of Matawa. The transition to Sage Intacct and Criterion required hundreds of hours of staff time. The department encountered many issues typical for such a change, but it is hoped and expected that the results will be more timely and effective. There are still some growing pains, but we are confident the hardest work is now behind us.

Challenges

Cash flow continues to be a challenge for Matawa. The demand for services requires constant management of the organization's financial resources. Matawa has been very successful in attaining contribution agreements with our funders, but for many reasons outside the control of Matawa, it often takes quite some time to receive funds committed to us. These delays often require much time and effort to manage our vendors and suppliers, but our staff does a great job keeping them happy!

Adequate human resources are also critical for the Finance department's operation. Our staff need to be skilled, experienced, and resourceful. This skill set is always in demand, so these positions are often difficult to fill. We have been fortunate to find and attract qual-

ified candidates, but more creative methods may be needed in the future to attract and train staff as Matawa continues to grow.

Opportunities

Matawa has been very successful in obtaining contribution agreements that provide funding for specific programming, and a modest amount of funding for ancillary support services (ex. Finance, HR, IT, etc.). This available funding, which used to be 10% of a program's budget, has been shrinking in recent years. Matawa has been successful in expanding and diversifying its various revenue streams, but more effort and focus needs to be directed towards utilizing non-government sourced funding to reduce our reliance on funding from outside authorities. Self-sufficiency remains a goal for Matawa, as it is for our member First Nations.

As Matawa First Nations Management continues growing its programming and services, the Finance department needs to continue to keep pace with the demand for its services. Human resources will be critical to the future success of Matawa's Finance department. Recent additions to our staff complement help ensure the continuation of the high professional standards of the department. There continue to be opportunities for Matawa's members for a satisfying career in Finance.

The Finance department recently received an operational review conducted by an independent third party. The review, which was generally very favorable in its assessment of the department, resulted in several recommendations that will be implemented over the course of the next several months.

Matawa's Finance department looks forward to continuing to be a strong and vital component of the current and future success of Matawa, its operating entities, and its member First Nations.





Four Rivers Environmental Services Group

Department Committee

Kenogami Environmental Technical Table (KET Table): The KET Table (KETT) was established in December 2019 by road access Matawa First Nations to address common environmental issues impacting their shared territories within the Kenogami watershed. The membership includes up to two technical representatives and two alternates each from Aroland, Long Lake #58, Ginoogaming and Constance Lake First Nations, who have significant existing capacity in environmental stewardship and lands and resource initiatives. KETT welcomed new members this year from Constance Lake and Ginoogaming First Nations. Over the year, KETT held several in-person and virtual meetings to share knowledge and information as well as to discuss strategies and planning for joint+ environmental initiatives. Highlights of KETT's accomplishments this year include a three-day meeting in Longlac focused on enhancing community roles and values in forest management, and the award of a carbon assessment project that will see training workshops in summer 2024.

Kenogami Environment Technical Table contributing participants:

Aroland First Nation: Mark Bell and Jerry Shabogamik

Constance Lake First Nation: Wayne Neegan, Bertha Sutherland, Roger Wesley, Carly John-George and Nelson Nakoochee

Ginoogaming First Nation: Calvin Taylor, Curtis Towegishig, Crystal Iserhoff

Long Lake #58 First Nation: Amanda Misnakoshkang

Regional Assessment Working Group (RAWG): A Regional Assessment (RA) is being co-led by communities in the Matawa and Mushkegowuk territories, along with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC). The RA was announced in February 2020, and in February 2023, Canada, Matawa and Mushkegowuk Council committed to a co-led process. An RA Working Group (RAWG) was formed in April 2023, bringing together community representatives and federal government staff with IAAC. Since January 2024, the RAWG has been meeting monthly. Most members of the previously active Matawa Environment Technical Table (METT) are now on the Regional Assessment Working Group. METT is paused during this time to support scheduling needs of the RAWG.

Regional Assessment Working Group members and participants:

Aroland First Nation: Mark Bell

Constance Lake First Nation: Wayne Neegan and Bertha Sutherland

Eabametoong First Nation: Harry Papah, Louie Sugarhead, Elizabeth Atlookan

Ginoogaming First Nation: Calvin Taylor

Long Lake #58 First Nation: Ervin Waboose and Amanda Misnakoshkang

Marten Falls First Nation: Alanna Downey-Baxter, Robert Moonias and Kathy Brady

Neskantaga First Nation: Wayne Moonias

Nibinamik First Nation: Roger Oskineegish, Lias Yellowhead and Walter Oshkineegish

Webequie First Nation: Gordon Wabasse and Michael Whitehead

Other participating communities and groups: Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Missanabie Cree, Moose Cree, Weenusk, Chapleau Cree, and Canada.

Facilitator: Alan Young

Four Rivers Staff

Sarah Cockerton, Managing Director • Alanna Robbins, Engagement Specialist • Alex Horne, Communications, Logistics & Admin Officer • Anthony Schirru, Geomatics Technician • Dan Paradis, Sustainability Manager • Dinesh Gunawardena, Environmental Information & Systems Specialist • Erin Kelly, Environmental Technician • Graeme Saukko-Sved, Geomatics/Environmental Technician • Holly Pyhtila, Manager, Communications & Engagement • James Gascon, Financial Analyst • Janet Knight, Project Manager, Engagement • Jasmine Baxter, Environmental Technician • Jennifer Duncan, Community Values Coordinator • Kevin Wabasse, Linguistics Officer • Kimberly Jorgenson, Manager, Environment & Technology • Laura Prior, Communications Specialist • Lynn Palmer, Environmental Technical Specialist (Casual) • Peter Moses, Mineral Development & Information Support Officer • Sonny Black, Project Manager, Technology • Lucy Percy, Logistics Specialist (Casual)



Overview

Four Rivers was established in 2011 as an environmental services group within Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) to provide environmental support and technical services to the Matawa member First Nation communities facing unprecedented development within their shared traditional territories. In early 2017, Four Rivers Inc. was created as a stream of Four Rivers to expand our service offerings beyond the Matawa member First Nations, in a cost-effective and competitive manner. Four Rivers supports capacity building in communities throughout northern Ontario by coordinating and supporting initiatives aimed to assist community-based land and resource management. Four Rivers uses a holistic, community-based approach to projects and strives to:

- Be open and honest in all aspects of our work;
- Be responsive to individual community needs and capacities;
- Build capacity through training and create legacy projects for communities; and,
- Provide innovative and sustainable community-based solutions.

Key Priorities

Environmental services: Four Rivers aims to help position communities in a place of active leadership relative to the stewardship of their lands and waters. Armed with the knowledge, working relationships, tested techniques, advanced partnerships, and expanded environmental networks, Four Rivers is well-situated to work with communities to advance their environmental projects and program visions. Four Rivers has provided over 120 environmental presentations, training sessions and workshops at various events including community open houses, environmental conferences, university forums and Elder gatherings. Environmental support services have been focused in the areas of: environmental assessments and policy; water, soil, and sediment samples; vegetation surveys and assessments; acoustic and video surveying technology for monitoring frog, bird, bat, wolf and caribou populations; Geographic Information System/Global Positioning System (GIS/GPS) for values collection and monitoring, benthic (i.e. the bottom of a body of water) bio-monitoring; contaminated



Four Rivers staff outside their warehouse on Johnson Avenue in Thunder Bay.

site assessments and drone imagery. Four Rivers actively partners with organizations and institutions to bring enhanced environmental services to communities. This past fiscal year has seen multiple notable accomplishments, including the continued environmental investigation into *Blastomyces* in Constance Lake (leading to a significant breakthrough in the detection of *Blastomyces* DNA), and the successful completion of river-based field programs (including the contribution of western science teachings at the Matawa Education & Care Centre's annual canoe trip on the Kitchi Siipi).

Geomatics and mapping: Four Rivers offers comprehensive, award-winning mapping and geomatics services, the goal of which is to provide the support that communities need to gather, store, analyze and display important land, resource, and values data to ultimately make informed decisions about their lands and waters.



Four Rivers work with species at risk including caribou and bats.

The customized services include map creation, data collection/storage and project support, as well as training opportunities. Four Rivers has established secure data storage solutions for information including: GIS data, drone imagery, environmental research data, and traditional knowledge and values data. It is crucial for communities to have access to an organized bank of environmental information in order to: guide and participate in environmental stewardship and monitor-



Four Rivers Environmental Services Group

ing; climate change adaptation planning; community-based land use planning; source water protection initiatives; impact/environmental assessment processes; and resource development processes. This past fiscal year has seen the expansion of mapping and drone technology through the addition of a cutting-edge bathymetric-mapping drone (a drone boat) capable of mapping the underwater environment.



Four Rivers has expanded its drone technology, adding a bathymetric-mapping drone, or “drone boat” to their collection.

Project and internal support and communications, logistics, and translation services: Four Rivers works with communities to build internal capacity in the resource development sector to ‘bridge the gap’ from the community outwards. Major barriers often exist for communities in their efforts to lead lands and resource development projects in their homelands. These challenges are often based in the absence of established communication processes to successfully link community members to the information required for informed decision-making. Often communities also seek support in developing project proposals, project coordination and reporting. The ultimate goal of all Four Rivers’ services is successful communities who are well-informed, knowledgeable, and able to fully participate in projects and initiatives that are happening within their homelands. Four Rivers’ project support and communication services are wide-ranging and apply a holistic approach to community barriers. Every community’s or project’s unique constraints are considered when developing appropriate implementation strategies, and we regularly apply creative or innovative solutions in addition to tried and tested strategies to convey information. Our team has a proven track record of organizing and facilitating many successful large and small scale meetings, events, workshops and conferences, including 40+ delegate Regional

Assessment Working Group meetings in our Four Rivers warehouse space this past year. Four Rivers has also assisted MFNM departments (i.e. Chiefs Council), to provide administrative, logistical, technical and translation services. This past fiscal year has seen multiple notable accomplishments, including the construction of a cell phone tower for Aroland First Nation, and the ongoing support for the establishment and operational needs of the RAWG.

Accomplishments

Four Rivers successfully carried out numerous projects and initiatives throughout the year both as part of Matawa First Nations Management’s publicly-funded environmental programs, as well as through Four Rivers Inc. Some initiatives include support of other projects being carried out by MFNM. An overall summary of projects and initiatives:



- **CWS Acoustic Monitoring - Funded by Environment & Climate Change Canada (ECCC)** - This project expands on developed of baseline monitoring programs (on birds, bats and wolves) by working with individual communities to identify monitoring priority areas, and to design remote monitoring programs to support their vision.
- **Mineral Development & Information Support Officer - Funded by Ontario Ministry of Mines (MINES)** - Support to communities on mineral industry & plans and permits through the Mineral Development & Information Support Officer.
- **Crown Indigenous Relations & Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) mapping - Funded by CIRNAC** - Project is capturing drone imagery in all nine Matawa member First Nations, targeting community priority areas for mapping and aerial imagery capture. In 2023, surveys were completed in Aroland, Long Lake #58 and Ginoogaming. Community infrastructure maps are also being generated for all communities.
- **CBCM Climate monitoring - Funded by CIRNAC** - Project is focusing on gathering climate data collection through the launch of

involve outreach surrounding draft species at risk (SAR) recovery documents (to be released by Environment Canada), as well as outreach on wolverine SAR.

- **Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk (AFSAR) aquatic - Funded by Fisheries and Oceans Canada** - Project involves research on waters and sturgeon populations on two waterways, as well as community capacity building and discussions on sturgeon populations and monitoring.
- **ECCC AFSAR - Funded by ECCC** - Project involves research on multiple species at risk (SAR) through nested field research programs on waterways and homelands in the winter (including birds, bats, insects, black ash and caribou). Includes community capacity building and discussions on SAR populations and monitoring.
- **ECCC Carbon - Funded by ECCC** - Project to support carbon and peat lands conversations in the Matawa homelands, with training workshops to occur in 2024/25 surrounding vegetation assessments and drone mapping.
- **Plotter procurement - Funded by MINES** - Project to see large-format printers (plotters) installed in all nine member First Nations.
- **Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation & Parks (MECP) Caribou - Funded by MECP** - Project to start in 2024/25 and include expanding current caribou research (via trail cameras) in three member First Nations. Goal to expand capacity in caribou SAR conversations throughout the homelands, Indigenous Knowledge documentation and community guardians in field research.
- **Broadband support Phase 1 - Funded by Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM)** - Four Rivers involvement surrounding environmental responses to Phase 1 work.
- **Broadband support Phase 2 - Funded by MFNM** - Four Rivers involvement focused on mapping support for planning purposes.
- **Chiefs Council support - Funded by MFNM** - Provide administrative, logistical, technical and translation support when required for Matawa Chiefs Council meetings.



The cell tower in Aroland First Nation.





Four Rivers Environmental Services Group

- **Digital communications - Funded by MINES** - Provide administrative and logistics support on Digital Communication procurement project for Matawa First Nation communities.
- **Four Rivers Inc. - Various funders** - Support of over 17 projects to 7+ clients

Challenges and Opportunities

This past year Four Rivers saw growth and new challenges, with support and work expanding in new projects and initiatives. Highlights of our challenges and opportunities over the past year:

Mineral Development & Information Support Officer (MDISO): Our long standing MDISO position and program continues. The past year saw another 12 MDISO Journals (a mining related information piece straight from the pen of Peter Moses) shared through email. Peter Moses continues to support members with plans and permits and/or processes, and regularly supports the sessions that bring together the Community Communication Liaison Offices (CCLO's) from across the Matawa member First Nation communities. He generously shares his extensive knowledge, provides updates and helps build capacity for Matawa members who work in the mining and minerals field.



Four Rivers hosted a three-day workshop for Community Guardians in January.

Field research and GIS

Four Rivers field work programming has made great advances over the past year, including a significant advancement in data communications. Multiple 'Dashboards' have



been created through ArcGIS Online, which allows for the effective communication of field program work and baseline data collection efforts, in areas including birds, bats, fish, water and plants. These visual communication platforms can showcase real-time data collection efforts, showing locations where research is happening at that very moment. After the field work is complete, the resulting data can be incorporated into the dashboard to display relevant results, such as; what birds/bats/animals were found in an area, scientific lab results (such as levels of mercury found in fish tissue or metals within waters), photos and much more. As baseline data collection efforts are expanded throughout the homelands through the efforts of Community Guardians, standardized sampling methods will be seamlessly incorporated into this communication platform. This data will then be included in the secure GeoHub, and be accessible immediately.

Guardians and Technology Youth Development (MasterCard Foundation):

A long term vision of Four Rivers has been to support community environmental monitoring. We have worked to advocate for Indigenous Guardians resourcing and the associated programs and activities both for communities and at the regional level. In the last year we have been able to secure a partnership with the Mastercard Foundation that will allow us to support guardians, and some related technology initiatives, in an expanded way. Specifically, within the upcoming year, the project aims to support Indigenous Guardians apprenticeships, training youth to work as River Guardians, further train them to support the broadband network within their homelands, and to engage youth and young people in this work



being done by the Guardians. Overall, this project will work to achieve positive change and opportunities for Matawa member youth.

Blastomyces research: A significant scientific breakthrough has been made as Constance Lake First Nation (CLFN) continues to grapple with serious impacts from a blastomycosis outbreak in the absence of thorough environmental research and financial resources to navigate its complexity. Community driven efforts have led to the laboratory-confirmed detection of Blastomyces species in CLFN's homelands. This is only the second time Blastomyces has been successfully isolated from the environment in Ontario, the first time back in the 1980s.

The breakthrough is further monumental in that it is the first sample in Ontario confirmed using a novel DNA PCR test. A devastating blastomycosis outbreak hit CLFN in the fall of 2021, with at least 50+ people infected and tragically, 5 deaths. Following the outbreak's emergency response, CLFN partnered with Four Rivers, Matawa's Environmental Services Group and Laurentian University to build a dedicated team to search for answers. A focused literature review was conducted in 2023 by Laurentian University's Up North on Climate team to support the community-led efforts to search for the fungus. Ultimately, the review uncovered an effective sampling and analysis protocol from the University of Minnesota which allowed for the first ever detection of Blastomyces DNA in an Ontario environmental sample. This breakthrough suggests that future sampling efforts will contribute to a better understanding of its life history and habitat, with the potential to bring desperately needed answers to the region. Four Rivers provided support to publish Blastomyces and Blastomycosis information materials including fact sheet and videos for community members, which were also translated, and presented their research at the United Nations Climate Change conference in Montreal. Going forward, work will include supporting the publication of the Blastomyces literature review and continuing important research in this field to support Matawa member communities in a better understanding of the fungus.

Regional Assessment and Impact Assessment: Regional Assessment (RA) is a broad-scale study of an area, and the RA process includes



Four Rivers supports the Regional Assessment Working Group in their work conducting Regional Assessments and Impact Assessments.

collecting baseline data, identifying patterns and trends, and looks at the combined impacts of all the different projects, developments, and other factors in the region. Unlike an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Impact Assessment (IA), which look at specific projects and decide if (and how) they can go ahead, RA provides information to other decision-making and planning processes. RAs work to understand and protect the environment and communities' wellbeing, while providing opportunity for sustainable development. There are many potential projects in the Ring of Fire area, which could impact the environment, as well as the communities' ways of life. A Regional Assessment for the Ring of Fire area was announced in 2020, and will look at many factors to understand the combined impact on the region, in order to produce a final report on the findings. Four Rivers has been successful this past year in supporting capacity building initiatives related to these assessment processes, both through supporting individual community proposals and initiatives, as well as large capacity building initiatives at the regional level. Specifically, Four Rivers has been providing support to the Regional Assessment Working Group, which includes logistical support of meetings/travel, co-ordination and project management supports, and also supports





Four Rivers Environmental Services Group

for developing specific products (i.e. communications materials) that RAWG members have identified as required. We want to acknowledge the massive amount of work done by communities to advance Regional Assessment, so that they have a process that meets their individual community needs and allows them to answer questions that will help them make informed decisions about their futures.

Matawa Environment Gathering and Collaborative Video:

The Matawa Water Futures (MWF) project was developed through the Global Water Futures project to advance Indigenous-informed water science to support decision-making and water stewardship in the Matawa First Nation homelands and traditional territories in Northern Ontario. The objective for the end of the MWF project is to hold a large water-themed gathering, inviting all MFN communities to attend to celebrate the value and sacredness of water, as well as share observations and scientific knowledge about the water, and



A drone shot of the Matawa Water & Environment Gathering at Fort William Historical Park in June 2023.

share progress in water and environmental stewardship programs. This event, the Matawa Water & Environment Gathering, was hosted June 13 – 15, 2023 in Thunder Bay at the Fort William Historical Park. Following the gathering, a collaborative video project was developed in the Fall of 2023 with Four Rivers, Esri Canada, Global Water Futures and Wilfrid Laurier University. The video is a model of innovation and

partnership in a region facing unprecedented environmental changes. The video weaves Indigenous and Western science into innovative solutions for natural resource management and empowers Indigenous wisdom with GIS technology telling a story of sustainability and knowledge. Four Rivers highlighted some of the ways GIS is used to empower Matawa member First Nations including: facilitating community-led research and decision-making; Supporting research and field work for environmental guardians; fostering collaboration among Indigenous groups; and, advancing environmental stewardship initiatives. The video project collaboration empowers Indigenous communities ensuring that they are leading the research and have the solutions to strengthen their cultural heritage preservation as they enhance their resource governance and decision-making.



Four Rivers provides a variety of environmental services, including soil and water testing and surveying animal populations.



Health and Social Meno Biimamadeswin

Matawa First Nations Management

Department Staff

Francine Pellerin, Director • Miranda Waboose, Administrative Assistant • Nicole Jacob, Regional Crisis Intervention & Victim Services Coordinator • Elizabeth (Liz) Wapoose, NIHB Client Navigator • Cheryl Suganaqueb, NIHB Client Navigator • Hilary Fox, Social Emergency Coordinator • Breanne Anderson, Approaches to Community Wellbeing Facilitator • Aaron Tyance, Mental Wellness Team Lead Facilitator

Overview

The Health and Social Meno Biimadeswin (HSMB) department oversees the management, administration, coordination and implementation of several health and social wellness programs and initiatives. HSMB provides advisory, advocacy, and technical support to Matawa

First Nations and limited direct supports for social crisis, social emergencies, and for clients accessing Non-Insured Health Benefit (NIHB) services. HSMB department works in partnership with several health and social services groups, organizations, agencies and institutions affiliated with Matawa First Nation. HSMB supports primarily community-based programs, offers limited education, promotion, and prevention awareness as requested by the First Nations. HSMB oversees nine annualized funding programs and three one-time initiatives and/or projects.

Key Priorities

To strengthen, enhance and promote health and wellbeing within Matawa First Nations. HSMB's key priority area is community-based program supports, responding to communities in social crisis, addressing client healthcare needs and challenges, and supporting First Nations in capacity building among health and social staff.

Accomplishments

- **Continuation of all HSMB Programs:** HSMB maintains and administers ongoing programs and one-time/short term initiatives.
- **First Nation Front-line Workers Debriefing Session:** Ten to twelve participants gathered in Thunder Bay for a three-day debriefing session.

- **Support community training, workshops and gatherings:** Supporting four First Nations in coordination of community organized training sessions in traditional teachings, grief and loss, mental health First Aid, and harm reduction. Successful in accessing funds for four First Nations to support community crises and youth initiatives from multiple governments and ministries.
- **Advance Wilderness First Aid Training:** Coordination of training in five Matawa First Nations. Trained 48-50 community workers and volunteers. Supplied three communities with first responder equipment including defibrillator, spinal board and harm reductions supplies.
- **First Nations Crisis Support:** Mental Health and crisis response and support was provided to all nine First Nations experiencing overdoses, substance and alcohol related incidents, sudden deaths, and suicides. Several communities had multiple incidences. To date a total of 4,899 individuals have been served.
- **Coordination of Matawa-Area NIHB Forum:** To address challenges and issues and improve services and relationships.

Challenges

- Lack of human resources available to respond to communities in crisis.
- Lack of coordination and communication within all systems.
- Lack of funding continues to be a challenge. HSMB continues to operate with what is committed. Government funding does not meet the high cost of living.
- Travel to the remote communities is limited due to lack of accommodations/housing and cost of air travel.
- Continued social and healing challenges including addictions issues, lack of housing, dealing with historical trauma (residential school, day school, other trauma), lack of childcare.
- Language barriers in training. Elders are key knowledge keepers, they are unable to understand the language in the training delivered.
- Lack of staff training.
- Lack of emergency resources available to assist clients when services not approved (i.e. NIHB meals, accommodation, etc.).

Opportunities

- Integration and cost sharing with other programs and service providers.
- Increase participation and partnership with other organizations in health transformation and planning for health system change (i.e. community planning, engagements and assessments with partners).
- Increase community capacity through more on-site training.



Human Resources Matawa First Nations Management

Human Resources Staff

Angelle Rebelo, CHRP, CHRL, Human Resources
Manager

Diego Villanueva, Human Resources Officer

Overview

Matawa Human Resources provides the structure and ability to meet the needs of our First Nations and Matawa First Nations Management's strategic goals through managing our most valuable resources—our employees. Human Resources manages the life cycle of an employee from the recruitment stage to the termination/resignation stage. At the time of writing this report, Matawa First Nations Management had 558 employees in its workforce.

Human Resources assists with the annual review and revision of First Nation policies and procedures, provides advice and responds to Human Resources queries from the First Nations.

Key Priorities

- Managing and directing a workforce of 558 employees.
- Review, revise and develop Human Resources and Health and Safety policies and programs.
- Human Resources administration such as keeping track of documents including personnel files and employee records related to attendance, performance, training, benefits, vacation and leaves of absence.
- Recruitment, selection and on-boarding the right people for the right jobs.
- Employee training and development.
- Sustaining a healthy and safe work environment, physically and psychologically.
- Managing employer-employee relations.
- Overseeing compensation and benefits; managing Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and Canada Life short-term and long-term disability claims.
- Staying up-to-date and ensuring compliance with all relevant government legislation (federal, provincial, First Nation) labour laws and employment standards.



Matawa Human Resources manages a workforce of 558 employees.

- Advising managers and employees on human resources matters and concerns.

Accomplishments

- Hired additional staff for the Human Resources department – a Human Resources Officer.
- Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and First Aid cabinets purchased and installed at the Matawa First Nations Management office, the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre buildings, the Matawa Health Co-operative, Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin, KKETS, and Four Rivers sites. A third party (Cintas) will conduct monthly inspections at each building and site and items will be replenished as required.
- Developed a 3.5 hour in-person workshop for employees to review and discuss revisions to the Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention policy and program elements. Workshops for employees were held this year on February 5, 12, and 14, March 7, and April 24.
- Compliance with First Aid Regulation 1101 that Matawa has the adequate number of employees trained in First Aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillators (AED) across each department. Human Resources commenced centralizing this training on May 29-30, 2024, and will continue



to facilitate additional courses with the expertise of our in-house certified trainers.

- Naloxone training session provided to the Matawa Central Joint Health and Safety Committee by a certified in-house trainer. Other departments have requested and received this training.
- Investigation and resolution of various complaints, grievances and employment legal issues.
- Priority to develop an Emergency Response Plan for the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre (i.e. Shelter in Place – Hold and Secure – Lockdown). Communicated plan to employees, residents, and Thunder Bay Police Service. Mock drills and training to be scheduled. Matawa Education and Care Centre has an Emergency Response Plan.

Challenges

- Exponential growth of Matawa First Nations Management in all departments and entities necessitates increasing our human resources (i.e. staffing) across Matawa to provide the program supports and services required.
- Insufficient staffing in the Human Resources department. In order to keep up with Matawa's growth, there is a need to hire additional Human Resources staff to conduct various Human Resources and Health and Safety functions and new programs.
- Matawa, now with over 500 employees, requires a Human Resources Information System (HRIS), a software solution that centralizes all employee data, helping reduce manual errors and ensuring information is consistent across the organization.
- Ensuring staff levels in all departments are at optimal levels. Recruitment, selection and retention of human resources (staff) in specialized employment opportunities within Matawa may be difficult to attain at times.



Opportunities

- Investigate, purchase and launch a Human Resources Information System (HRIS): a software solution that helps manage and automate core HR processes and support benefits administration, time and attendance, payroll, and other workflows, as well as the storage of employee data, such as personal, demographic, and compensation information.
- Centralization of Human Resources files. Files from all departments and entities of Matawa to be filed in fire-proof and locked cabinets in the HR Department. Archive and destroy files as per File Retention Policy.
- Develop an Asbestos Management Plan for all Matawa buildings and sites.
- Develop and implement an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) for Matawa First Nations Management sites. Communicate plan to employees and Thunder Bay Police Services. Mock drills and training will be scheduled. Matawa Education and Care Centre has an Emergency Response Plan in place.
- Continue with the Workplace Harassment and Violence workshops for employees until all employees are knowledgeable about the policy and trained on the program elements.
- Review of Human Resources and Finance Policies and develop work instructions.
- Develop Health and Safety policies, programs and work instructions; communicate and train employees.
- Plan and organize an Matawa information and career fair. Work with Program Managers and First Nations to set up dates, venue, description of each department and vacant positions in each department.
- Preparation and commencement of the recruitment and selection of the incoming Chief Executive Officer.



Information Technology (IT) Services

Matawa First Nations Management

Department Staff

Rob Wesley, Manager • Stefano Fata, IT Helpdesk Analyst Tier 1
• Chris Harrington, IT Helpdesk Analyst Tier 2 • Tom Paradis, IT Helpdesk Analyst Tier 2

Overview

Ensure corporate information technology is accessible and equipped with current hardware and software.

- Perform professional, technical and analytical tasks to identify business requirements and to procure information technology-based enhancements that meet our corporate business needs and objectives.
- Identify, select, design, and implement policies, conventions, and standards for server and network technologies and infrastructure.
- Plan, organize, direct, control and evaluate the operations of information systems.
- Meet with Program Managers to discuss system requirements, specifications, costs and timelines.
- Hire and manage information technology personnel and contractors where required to design, develop, implement, operate, and administer computer and telecommunications software, networks and information systems.
- Manage the IT Services budgets and expenditures.
- Troubleshoot hardware, software and network operating systems.
- Be familiar with all hardware, software and network operating systems.
- Provide orientation to new users of existing technology.
- Train staff about potential uses of existing technology
- Provide individual training and support on request.
- Provide recommendations about accessing information and support.
- Maintain current and accurate inventory of technology hardware, software and resources.



Manage, monitor and maintain technology to ensure proper and secure access.

- Troubleshoot all technology issues.
- Maintain logs of required repairs and maintenance (Helpdesk Software Application).
- Make recommendations about the purchase of technology resources.
- Research current and potential resources and services.
- Provide network access to all staff and students.
- Maintain servers.
- Install workstations.
- Connect and setup hardware and install all required software.
- Provide network accounts and passwords as required.
- Configure and maintain network access requirements.
- Implement and monitor security of all aspects pertaining to the network infrastructure.
 - Advise staff of security breaches and/or a change in passwords or security status.
 - Identify and prepare hardware for disposal by ensuring removal of all corporate data.

Assist with overall management of corporate information technology and computer systems.

- Assist with planning, organization, direction, control and evaluation of the operations of information systems.
- Implement policies and procedures for IT management and computer systems operations and development.
- Meet with program managers to discuss system requirements, specifications, costs and timelines.
- Supervise information technology personnel and contractors who design, develop, implement, operate and administer computer and telecommunications software, networks and information systems.
- Operate within identified computer systems budgets, policies and procedures.

Quality Management System (QMS)

Adhere to, implement, review and improve Matawa First Nations Management's Quality Management Systems as it relates to all duties and the department.



Prepare progress reports, briefs, work-plans, budgets and other reports as requested or required for the Chief Executive Officer and/or Board of Directors.

Key Priorities

The IT Services department's key priority area is to provide secure, reliable and continuous access to Matawa's data and information systems to support the sustained delivery of Matawa First Nations programs and services to its partners and communities. IT Services strives to ensure connectivity to such resources by providing a well-designed and reliable network infrastructure.

An additional requirement of the IT Services department will be to oversee the Network Operations Center of the pending Fiber Optic network with the Rapid Lynx Telecommunications group. The IT Services staff will be the initial trainees for all components involved once the project goes online.

Accomplishments

- Successfully completed Cybersecurity training with the University of Toronto and self studying for CompTIA's Security+ certification.
- All IT Helpdesk Analyst staff will soon be attaining industry standard certifications.
- Additional full-time IT Helpdesk Analyst staff has proved very beneficial to both the IT Services department and to all staff we serve.
- Assisted with initial requirements in setting up Microsoft Teams for Ginoogaming First Nation.
- Adaptation of new management tools regarding our email system change
- Working with several new departments to ensure their IT requirements exceeded expectations.
- Partaking in the construction phases of the Matawa Training & Wellness Centre with respect to the IT requirements, security cameras, door lock mechanisms.
- Manage and maintain 20+ individual servers within Matawa and KKETS.
- Community Email Systems with over 400 email accounts, recently moved to a paid subscription model.
- Network reconfigurations necessary to keep up to date with



Matawa's IT Helpdesk Analyst staff are attaining industry standard certifications.

newer technologies.

- Adapting to new recommended ways in server use and server management.

The Matawa IT Services department oversees the maintenance of the following in-house hosted websites:

- <https://www.matawa.on.ca/>
- <https://www.ginoogamingfn.ca/>
- <https://www.gatheringofrivers.com/>
- <https://www.rapidlynx.ca>

Challenges

- Learning technologies that have not been in use at Matawa First Nations Management before.
- Adapting to the continuing changes of Microsoft365 Administration tools.
- All IT Services staff to attain Industry Standard Certifications in various areas of expertise.

Opportunities

- Could easily host additional First Nation community websites.
- Intranet site (Document Sharing site) can now be implemented in a limited capacity using Microsoft365 and their SharePoint solution.



Membership Matawa First Nations Management

Department Staff

Barb Rabbit, Membership/Indian Registration Administrator
(IRA)

Ashley Tomagatick, Assistant Membership Clerk (starting June
2024)

Overview

Matawa's membership department offers membership support such as obtaining status cards (laminated Certificates of Indian Status) and reporting life changes during registration as a Status Indian, such as births, marriages, divorces, and deaths. In addition, other reports contain amendments, additions, and updates to information on an individual's registry page.

Matawa's membership department administers the following Matawa First Nations:

- Aroland
- Eabametoong
- Marten Falls
- Neskantaga
- Nibinamik
- Webequie

Key Priorities

To provide an accurate and up-to-date Indian Registry, Membership Service is mandated. The Membership Indian Registration Administrator (IRA) manages the requirements for Indian Registration reporting related to the Indian Act, federal and provincial statutes, and the Indian Registration System's policies and procedures.

"The Indian Act is the Canadian federal legislation first passed in 1876 that sets out certain federal government obligations. It provides for the registration of a person as Indian, identifies who is entitled to be registered and who is not, sets the requirements of Band Lists (membership), and makes provisions of protests of decisions concerning registration and membership and for appeals," according to the INAC Indian Registration Administrator Manual.



Matawa's membership department assists members in obtaining their status cards, both laminated paper cards (top) and secure status cards (bottom).

Accomplishments

Certificate of Indian Status (CIS) Paper-Laminate Card

Membership Services: IRA provides laminated paper status cards to the cardholder that is still in circulation. The purposes for issuance are as follows:

- Lost, stolen or damaged card.
- New first card – New registrants such as infants, toddlers, etc.
- Renewals – Expired dated cards for both adults and children.
- Replacement – Events for marriage, name or birth transfer changes, etc.

Event Reporting

Any changes occurring in the life of an individual registered as a Status Indian are entered into the Indian Registry System (IRS). These changes, such as reporting a birth, marriage, divorce, and death, are called events. Other reports include miscellaneous amendments to add and delete information on the individual's registry page.



Rapid Lynx staff at the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada 2024 conference.

Matabwa First Nations Management (MFNM) and Matabwa First Nations (MFN) leaders elected to take control of their communities' broadband future in 2013 after learning that the Nishnawbe Aski Nation project would not have sufficient funds to connect the remote MFN communities as planned. MFNM formed a Broadband Working Group (BWG) of representatives appointed by the communities to support the effort. MFNM facilitated the creation of Rapid Lynx Telecommunications, a for-profit corporation formed to oversee the construction and to own, govern, and operate Rapid Lynx after MFNM has completed deployment and operational start-up, as required by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) and Ontario's Ministry of Energy, Northern Development, Mines (MENDM) and Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF).

Key Priorities

Build Rapid Lynx Fibre Optic Backbone to all nine Matabwa First Nation communities and light the network for service.

Board of Directors

- Sam Kashkeesh, Aroland First Nation
- Kevin Proctor, Constance Lake First Nation
- Donald Meeseetawageesic, Eabametoong First Nation
- Henry Waboose, Ginoogaming First Nation
- Vacant, Long Lake #58 First Nation
- Robert Moonias, Treasurer, Marten Falls First Nation
- Edward Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation
- Matthew Sofea, Secretary, Nibinamik First Nation
- James Suganaqueb, President, Webequie First Nation

Overall construction of the **Rapid Lynx backbone network** (i.e. it's central core) is **69% complete** as of **April 30, 2024**.

Rapid Lynx Staff

Wayne Slipperjack, General Manager

Gina Dore, Administrative Assistant

With support from: Rob Wesley, IT Director, Matabwa First Nations Management, and Tom Paradis, Tier 2 Helpdesk Analyst, Matabwa First Nations Management

Accomplishments

- Aerial contractor, Moncrief Construction, secured January 2024.
- Construction is underway on the 11 kilometre pole line in Neskantaga First Nation, with 22.6 kilometre pole line construction soon to begin in Eabametoong First Nation.
- Buried contract award close to being finalized.
- Section 5 – Webequie First Nation to Nibinamik First Nation is largely complete.
- Seven of 9 shelters are in place, with security fencing installed. The remaining 2 shelters are built and staged at KPE Electrical Contractors' warehouse.



Construction is underway on an 11 kilometre pole line in Neskantaga First Nation.

Rapid Lynx will place Matawa First Nation communities as only one hop off of Canada's global Internet backbone, allowing Rapid Lynx to obtain ultra high-speed wholesale service at Toronto, where competition is robust and service costs are at the lowest levels in Canada. This will support the business plan of Rapid Lynx while keeping community's service costs affordable.

Four qualified and experienced operating partners expressed interest in bidding on start-up support for Rapid Lynx through a Request for Proposals process. Clearcable Communications was selected by MFNM, and the selection was reviewed and approved by the Rapid Lynx Board of Directors. Clearcable recently presented at a Rapid Lynx Board Meeting and will have a representative at the Annual General Meeting.

Rapid Lynx's network will be the only long-haul fibre optic network in Ontario's Far North, and it will be 100% owned, controlled and operated by Matawa First Nations.

- Power to Shelters: 4 of 5 remote community shelters are powered. Webequie First Nation's is scheduled for July 8, Aroland First Nation is near complete, and Ginoogaming First Nation is in Hydro One's queue, scheduled for June 18, 2024.
- Electronic equipment for all nine shelters received and staged in Thunder Bay.
- Phase 2 Consultations are complete. Phase 2 section 2A work to commence summer 2024, pending MNRF's final consent, which is expected soon.
- Cable and pole materials staged in Nakina are ready for contractor pick up and provisioning, with some already trucked to Sections 2 and 3 for aerial construction starts.
- Outstanding permits for crossings are pending, but in process with no indication of issues to date.
- Receiving good cooperation from the Ministry of Transportation's Thunder Bay office regarding Phase routes along Highway 584 and Highway 11.
- Solution obtained on behalf of Rogers to complete local build from Long Lac #58 First Nation to Ginoogaming First Nation.

Matawa First Nation Management has mitigated major risks to the project to date, including in Phase 1:

- Phase 1 construction dispute management and development of feasible alternatives. Contractor default insured by a performance surety bond of over \$48 million.
- Retained experienced construction attorney in 2022 to assist with document discovery by the contractor's legal counsel and surety.
- Formation of an Arbitration Committee to settle the contractor dispute, review and approval of committee members by MFNM and construction attorney.
- Document discovery completed in January 2023.
- Notice of contractor default issued by construction attorney in January 2023, and notice given to the contractor's surety.
- Termination of contractor for cause by MFNM in January 2023 without prejudice to MFNM's right to access the contractor's surety bond.
- Recovery of fibre reels valued at over \$4 million. Reels were



Cable in Winisk Lake, near Webequie First Nation.

wrongfully taken by the contractor when it abandoned the project in 2022. The contractor was ordered to return the reels to MFNM by the Arbitration Committee Chairman.

- Recovery of the reels from the contractor could not be completed before closure of the winter road in 2023 due to contractor delays. MFNM ordered additional reels in time for delivery on the winter road to be able to complete construction along community access roads in summer 2023.
- After arbitration is complete and the contractor is found to be in default, MFNM will recover additional costs and damages to the project caused by the contractor from the performance bonds. MFNM will make one claim to the surety at completion of construction when all damages and penalties have been identified.
- Redesign of the Phase 1 network between Neskantaga First Nation and Webequie First Nation to shorten the route and avoid areas of heavy surficial bedrock. The redesign is expected to reduce the cost of backbone construction by \$6.75 to \$8.2 million and allow MFNM to complete Phase 1 construction with the

award funds remaining.

- Coordination with the grant management teams of MENDM and ISED of the progress of arbitration and ensuring their continued support. The Ministries have extended the deadline for Phase 1 construction to March 31, 2025, to allow completion after the delays caused by the contractor and recovery of MFNM's fibre reels.

Phase 2:

- Engineering of the Phase 2 network is nearly complete. The remaining section, 2C (Ginoogaming First Nation to Constance Lake First Nation) is in detail design review status. Changes requested by the communities have been incorporated into the design.
- Consultations for Phase 2 are complete.
- Phase 2 construction from Aroland First Nation to Ginoogaming and Long Lake #58 First Nations is prioritized in 2024 because Ginoogaming First Nation is the upstream Internet interconnection point for all nine Matawa First Nations.
- The Phase 2 network is scheduled for completion in December 2025.

Challenges

- Shorter winter road seasons.
- Sanford Lake Lease area along Anaconda Rd.
- Risk of one or more communities changing their mind on route access, invoking delays.
- Possible conflict on clearing contractors regionally.
- Ogwiidachiwaning Forest Management at this date has not





Rapid Lynx General Manager Wayne Slipperjack spoke at the Indigenous Connectivity Summit in Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia in June 2024.

named a new general manager.

- Compressed construction timeline with both aerial and buried work performed in parallel.
- Dry seasons/risk of forest fires causing delays.
- Unforeseen complications surfacing with regards to Right of Ways/Easements (e.g. lease lands).

Education, health care, public safety and economic development will be transformed by access to high capacity, reliable and affordable advanced fibre-optic Internet connectivity.

Opportunities

- All nine Matawa First Nations will have abundant and affordable Internet service over advanced fibre-optic cable, valued at over \$132 million at completion. Fibre-optic cable has the longest functional life of any other technology – 40 to 75 years – and is scalable to meet higher future demands with only equipment upgrades. Fiber-optic cable is “Next Generation Technology” because of its long life, reliability and virtually unlimited capacity.
- Opportunities for direct employment will increase during construction of phase 2.
- Communities will benefit indirectly by providing support services and resources such as accommodations, fuel, meals, cleaning,

waste management and other camp services to the construction and inspections teams throughout the life of the project.

- Future opportunities for direct employment on this project including brush cutting and clearing, and technical and operational support services when the network is active.
- Matawa First Nations will own, govern and operate the only long-haul fibre optic network in Ontario's Far North, and will interconnect their network to the global Internet backbone at one of the largest connection points in Canada at Toronto.
- Ownership and interconnection to the global Internet backbone will ensure that the Matawa First Nations will control their own digital future.



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management

Overview

Matawa Technical Services assist member communities in the development and maintenance of community infrastructure. This includes assisting communities with all aspects, such as the environmental components and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) capital project approvals process. Technical Services responds to First Nation requests, and services provided will vary according to individual community needs, levels of individual capacity, technical proficiency, and management ex-

pertise. The services we provide include:

Capital Projects and Housing: Project management, capital projects and housing applications, project reporting, First Nation Infrastructure Investment Plans (FNIIP), Operation & Maintenance reporting (O&M), Asset Condition Reporting System (ACRS), project advisory, building inspections, and work with consultants on conceptual drawings.

NIBI Services: Water and Wastewater Operator support and remote monitoring.

Environmental and Public Health: Water and wastewater sampling and reporting, soil testing, housing inspections, Safe Food Handling, communicable disease investigations and dog bite investigations.

Emergency Management: Emergency management coordination, FireSmart planning, emergency declarations, emergency response planning, fire investigations, Hazardous Identification Risk Assessments, 911 Services planning, community wildfire protection plans, Incident Management systems, fire mapping.



Technical Services working group at the 2023 First Nations Housing Conference in Thunder Bay.

Technical Services Staff

Saverio Rizzo, Manager (acting Manager from December 1, 2022 to October 29, 2023, and full-time Manager since October 30, 2023.) • Leah Echum, Technical Services Administration Support

Capital Projects and Housing: Dharmender Dhankhar, Community Engineer/Projects • Lindsey Jupp, Environmental Technologist • Carla Jean-Chisel, Capital Projects Coordinator • Walter Monias, Housing Inspector/Infrastructure Specialist

NIBI Services: Michael Bazdarick, Water and Wastewater, Overall Responsible Operator (ORO) • Meghdeep Chauhan, Water and Wastewater Operator Support • Mitchell Elsey, Water and Wastewater Operator Support • Leonard Wavy, Water and Wastewater Operator Support

Environmental/Public Health: Oksana Ostrovska, Environmental/Public Health Inspector • Karen McGoldrick, Environmental/Public Health Inspector

Emergency Management: Monica Budiselic, Emergency Management Coordinator • Moe Douglas, Fire Marshall



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management

7. Recycling Program 2022 – MCA sent for funding – \$186,655 – Delayed.
8. Garbage truck 2022 – MCA sent for funding – \$311,244.
9. School sprinkler upgrades – TBD – Estimated \$500,000.
10. Wastewater Lagoon Expansion Study – Submitted and approved – \$119,600.
11. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations – Submitted and waiting for funding to be available – \$437,000.
12. Elders Complex – Design completed – Construction to start in summer – \$20,585,124.
13. Band Representative building – proposal submitted for approval – \$1,563,500.
14. RHI – 6 major renovations completed.
15. ISC 2022/23 – 10 renovations started – \$696,000.
16. HAF application – submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses – approved by CMHC for \$2,414,000 (actual submission was \$3.6 mil).

Constance Lake First Nation

1. School Repairs Assessment 2021 – MCA sent for funding – \$1,100,000.
2. Solid Waste Transfer Site – cost TBD – MCA to be submitted.
3. Wastewater System and Lagoon Project – \$14,892,455 – Con-



New unit in Constance Lake First Nation funded through Indigenous Services Canada's immediate need program.



Temporary school facility under construction in Eabametoong First Nation.

- struction started May 2024.
4. MCA for Capital Plan Study – Submitted – \$251,550.
5. Water and Wastewater Professional Services Accommodations – Submitted and waiting for funding to be available – \$437,000.
6. RHI – 6 new single houses - Complete.
7. ISC – 2 new units (houses) – Complete.
8. Insurance rebuild – 1 unit- Complete.
9. ISC 2022/23 – 10 renovations to start – \$696,000.
10. CMHC – 8 renovations to start.
11. HAF application – Submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses.
12. Possible community arena – Steel structure – Funding TBA.

Eabametoong First Nation

1. Soil Remediation 2015 – Decommission Year - \$9,942,077 – Not yet completed.
2. Landfill 2017 – Need site selection confirmation from First Nation.
3. New Generator install and upgrades 2022 – 1.5MW & Upgrades – \$8,714,129 – 99% complete.
4. Independent Power Authority operational support – 2023/24 – \$490,999.
5. Heavy equipment repairs and maintenance – Case-by-case basis.



6. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations – Submitted and approved –\$437,000 – Almost completed.
7. East End Development – Waiting for full Project Approval Request (PAR) approval. – Partial approval –\$2,191,410 allocated for design phase.
8. School feasibility project – Architectural design phase.
9. RHI – 5 new duplexes – Complete.
10. Insurance rebuild – 1 unit – Construction has started.
11. ISC 2022/23 – 5 new units – \$2,457,500 – Complete.
12. RHI – 10 singles houses – Construction has started.
13. School portable renovation – MCA submitted.
14. HAF application – submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses.
15. Bush fire truck – Approved and purchased – Sent on winter road 2024, part of ISC pilot.
16. Fire Marshall assisting community with specifications on Triple Combination Pumper – \$604,747.00 – winter road 2025.
17. Temporary school facilities – Approved – \$12.7 million – Construction started in April 2024.

Ginoogaming First Nation

1. Recycling program 2023/24 – \$108,869 – To submit for 2024/25.
2. Garbage truck 2022 – \$237,336 – Complete and submit for O&M 2024/25.
3. Municipal Type Service Agreement (fire, water/sewer, waste) – Ongoing.
4. Greenstone Waste Steering Committee – Phase 2 – Site selection/mapping.
5. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations –Submitted and waiting for funding to be available – \$437,000.
6. CMHC Sec. 95 – 3 units – To be started.
7. ISC 2022/23 – 8



House renovations in Ginoogaming as part of ISC's immediate needs funding.



Fourplex under construction in Long Lake #58 First Nation.

- renovations – \$556,800 – Complete.
8. HAF application – submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses.
9. Public Works building – MCA to be submitted.
10. Transfer station – MCA to be submitted.
11. Micro subdivision pilot project – assisting with costs and possible design.
12. 3 lot development – MCA submitted to ISC.
13. Micro subdivision pilot project – assisting with costs and possible design.
14. Initial stages of discussion with ISC relating to a new subdivision – May 2024.

Long Lake #58 First Nation

1. Recycling program – 2023/24 – \$142,364 – Delayed.
 2. Municipal Type Service Agreement (fire, water/sewer, waste) – Ongoing.
 3. Greenstone Waste Steering Committee – Phase 2 – Site selection/ mapping.
 4. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations – Submitted and waiting for funding to be available – \$437,000.
 5. Capital Planning Study – Approved – \$241,888, consultant selected. To start in June.
 6. Retrofit for elementary school – Feasibility Study – Proposed.
 7. RHI - 2 new four-plexes – 90% complete.
 8. CMHC Sec. 95 - 7 major renovations (with extensions) – 75% complete.
 9. ISC Immediate Needs renos – 7 units – Work to begin.
 10. ISC 2022/23 – 7 renovations – \$487,200 – To be started.
- HAF application – submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses –



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management

\$2,556,000 approved (amount requested was \$6,177,000).



Winterizing fire hydrant in Marten Falls First Nation.

Marten Falls First Nation

1. School Upgrades – fire system cost TBD and submit application.
2. Modulares and fourplex teacherages 2021 – \$2,564,346 – Completed spring 2022 – awaiting ESA inspection from contractor.
3. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations – Submitted and approved – \$437,000 – 50% complete.
4. Low Lift Station rebuild – Relocation of wet well project – Started May 2024
5. ISC – 2 units or duplex – Almost complete.
6. 1 new isolation unit (3 suites) – 70% complete.
7. ISC 2022/23 – 3 new units (to start) – \$1,311,000.
8. ISC 2022/23 – 10 renovations (to start) – \$825,000.
9. Low Lift Station rebuilding – Winterization phase – Should be complete by end of summer 2024.

10. Multi-purpose building – To be approved.
11. RHI – 2 six-plexes – Work has started.
12. Subdivision planning with ISC is getting underway.
13. Lot development for 2 six-plexes – MCA has been submitted to ISC.
14. Micro subdivision pilot project – Assisting with costs and possible design.
15. Hydro upgrade – Discussions underway with ISC.

Neskantaga First Nation

1. Solid Waste Management Plan 2019 - \$384,000 – to be re-submitted.
2. Hydro One remote diesel generating station upgrades 2023 – \$13,780,567 – Ongoing.
3. Nursing station remediation and upgrades 2022 – \$167,328.
4. Winter road crossing #4 temporary bridge and inspections – \$95,999 - Complete.
5. Winter road Otokoswin bridge design – Cost TBD – First Nation working on this.
6. New NAPS detachment – \$13,314,790 – Very close to completion.
7. Capital Planning Study – Submitted to ISC for approval from SBA.
8. Water/waste water assessment – Submitted and approved – \$331,971 – In progress.



The kitchen in a duplex in Neskantaga First Nation.



9. Soil remediation – Approved – \$5,249,984 – Work to start this summer.
 10. RHI – 5 new duplexes – 98% complete.
 11. ISC 2022/23 – 4 new units – \$1,748,000 – Almost complete.
 12. RHI – 5 duplexes – Work has started 2024.
 13. Teacherage project – eight-plex teacherage – starting in 2024.
 14. Lift station upgrades – MCA – \$106,100 – Approved and almost complete.
- Hydrant upgrades – MCA – \$187,000.00 – Approved and complete.

8. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations – Submitted and approved – \$437,000.
9. Lagoon rehabilitation project – Contractor to site May 23 to start project.
10. RHI – five-plex, four-plex, tri-plex, duplex – Complete.
11. CMHC Sec. 95 – Tri-plex – Complete.
12. ISC 2022/23 – 5 new units – \$2,185,525 – Started.
13. ISC 2022/23 – 5 new lots (to start) – \$344,000.
14. Micro subdivision pilot project – Assisting with costs and possible design.
15. HAF application – Submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses.

Webequie First Nation



New unit in Nibinamik First Nation.

Nibinamik First Nation

1. ATR Environmental Assessment Phase 3 2022 – \$536,851 – Complete and will move to remediation 2024/25.
2. Independent Power Authority operational support – \$569,921 – Annual – 2023/24.
3. Winter road crossing upgrades 2022 – \$232,744 – Geo-tech drilling now complete for 2 bridges to be installed in 2024/25 and another 1 to be installed in 2025/26 – Ongoing and applied for an additional \$2.5 million.
4. Solid Waste Management Plan 2019 – \$249,875 – New bridge to site.
5. Diesel generating station upgrades – \$6,359,366.
 - a. New C27 purchase 2023 – \$259,000 – has arrived in community.
6. Airport tank system – Cost TBD.
7. School fuel system upgrades – Cost TBD.

1. Airport remediation – MTO/Hydro One remotes – Cost TBD.
2. Solid Waste Management Plan 2018 – \$580,250 – To be re-submitted to ISC.
3. Winter road crossing – Install 2 bridges 2023/24 – Bridges already purchased – \$1,428,349.00 – ISC and Ministry of Northern Development (MND) – Summer inspection. Geo-tech drilling to be completed for another bridge to be installed in 2024/25 – Application submitted to MND for \$2.5 million.
4. Hydro One Remote Diesel Generating Station Upgrades 2021 –



New bridge on winter road crossing #16 to Webequie First Nation.



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management



New bush fire truck for Webequie First Nation.

\$5,017,075.

5. School repairs and upgrades – MCA submitted – \$566,280.00 – Not funded yet.
6. Modular classroom portables Install – Cost TBD.
7. School Feasibility Study – Project team member as of May 2023.
8. New teacherages – 4-plex – Cost TBD and submit MCA for funding.
9. Water and wastewater professional services accommodations – Submitted and approved – \$437,000 – almost complete.
10. Project management on housing projects (ISC, CMHC).
11. Band Representative building – \$1,563,500 – Proposal to be submitted.
12. Arena – \$15,600,000 – Design and tender documents completed project.
13. Elder Complex Feasibility Study – Feasibility study is now completed – April 30, 2024.
14. Garage building and Feasibility Study.
15. Disaster Mitigation Fund – two-bay Emergency Garage – Proposed project.
16. ISC 2022/23 – 5 new units – \$2,185,000 – almost complete.
17. ISC 2022/23 – 10 renovations (to start) – \$825,000.
18. HAF application – Submitted to CMHC for future lots/houses – Approved \$1,065,000 (amount submitted \$3,905,000).
19. Bush fire truck – Approved and purchased – Completed February 2024.

20. Water Treatment Plant – Will work with ISC for possible upgrades – Waiting on costs.

Environmental and Public Health

Environmental Health Officer's have instilled of number of temporary boil water advisories due to various reasons in a few different communities. These have been since lifted after the proper water testing provided.

Bacteriological water testing

- June 2023 – Webequie, Constance Lake, Aroland
- July 2023 – Eabametoong, Neskantaga, Webequie, Constance Lake
- August 2023 – Eabametoong, Marten Falls, Webequie, Constance Lake
- September 2023 – Nibinamik, Webequie, Constance Lake
- October 2023 – Eabametoong, Neskantaga, Constance Lake, Aroland, Ginoogaming
- November 2023 – Marten Falls, Webequie, Constance Lake, Ginoogaming
- December 2023 – Neskantaga, Nibinamik, Constance Lake, Long Lake #58, Aroland
- February 2024 – Eabametoong, Marten Falls, Constance Lake
- March 2024 – Neskantaga, Nibinamik, Webequie, Constance Lake, Aroland
- April 2024 – Eabametoong, Constance Lake, Aroland
- May 2024 – Marten Falls, Webequie, Constance Lake, Ginoogaming

Quarterly water testing

- June 2023 - Aroland
- July 2023 – Eabametoong, Neskantaga
- August 2023 – Eabametoong, Marten





Falls, Constance Lake

- September 2023 – Nibinamik, Webequie
- October 2023 – Eabametoong, Neskantaga, LL#58, Aroland, Constance Lake, Ginoogaming
- November 2023 – Marten Falls, Webequie, Ginoogaming, Long Lake 58
- December 2023 – Neskantaga, Nibinamik, Aroland, Constance Lake
- February 2024 – Eabametoong, Marten Falls
- March 2024 – Neskantaga, Webequie, Aroland
- April 2024 – Eabametoong, Constance Lake
- May 2024 – Marten Falls, Webequie, Ginoogaming

Annual water testing completed

- June 2023 – Aroland
- July 2023 – Eabametoong – WTP fire incident – inorganics, general chemistry, total metals, organics, VOC, BTEX, HC, radiological
- July 2023 – Neskantaga
- August 2023 – Marten Falls, Constance Lake
- September 2023 – Nibinamik, Webequie
- November 2023 – Long Lake 58, Ginoogaming
- May 2024 – Constance Lake

Water colour testing completed – Total Organic Colour (TOC), Dissolved Organic Colour (DOC):

- July 2023 – Neskantaga
- August 2023 – Eabametoong, Marten Falls
- September 2023 – Nibinamik
- October 2023 – Eabametoong
- November 2023 – Marten Falls
- December 2023 – Neskantaga, Nibinamik
- February 2024 – Eabametoong, Marten Falls
- March 2023 – Neskantaga, Nibinamik
- April 2024 – Eabametoong
- May 2024 – Marten Falls

Wastewater monitoring completed – Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations (WSER): Sampling was conducted in the lagoon.

- June 2023 – Webequie
- July 2023 – Webequie
- August 2023 – Webequie, Marten Falls
- September 2023 – Webequie
- October 2023 – Webequie, Neskantaga, Marten Falls, Aroland
- November 2023 – Webequie, Eabametoong
- December 2023 – Webequie
- January 2024 – Webequie

- February 2024 – Webequie
- March 2024 – Webequie
- April 2024 – Webequie
- May 2024 – Webequie, Marten Falls



Recently-upgraded lagoon in Nibinamik First Nation.

All communities that are subject to report to Effluent Regulatory Reporting Information System (ERRIS) were supplied with the WSER kits. The annual 2023 monitoring reports were submitted in ERRIS for Aroland, Eabametoong, Marten Falls, Neskantaga and Webequie First Nations (Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4).



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management

Lead testing program

- October 2023 – Eabametoong, Neskantaga
- May 2024 – Marten Falls, Webequie

Manganese testing program

- May 2024 – Webequie

Etc.

- Water Treatment Plant fuel contaminated site, soil testing for HC/hydrocarbons – November 2023
- Colilert and water and wastewater testing supplies were ordered and shipped/delivered to: Eabametoong (CHR and WTP), Marten Falls, Webequie (WTP and WWTP), Nibinamik, Neskantaga, Aroland, Constance Lake
- *IDEXX Quanti-Tray Sealer Plus* was ordered and delivered to Aroland as per the Aroland WTP request.

Technical Services environmental and public health services by the numbers:

24 food recall warnings and alerts were faxed out to Matawa First Nations.

37 animal bite/exposure incidents were investigated and closed.

Around **23** public health inspections related to mould, electrical, and other issues were conducted in Matawa communities.

Food Safety

- Food Handler Certification course was offered in Constance Lake in August 2023 and to Matawa Health Co-operative staff in May 2024.
- Updating the Food Handler Certification Course presentation to create a more interactive and appealing course. It is the hope that this course can be incorporated annually into the education boards for all Matawa schools to educate the youth on food

safety and prepare them for any future work in the food industry.

- Total of 24 food recall warnings/alerts faxed out to the communities.

Communicable Disease Program

- Total of 37 animal bite/exposure incident follow-up investigations, all followed up and closed.
- Communicable disease follow up:
 - Webequie – Pathogen follow up, C. J., February 14, 2024
 - Constance Lake – Unknown rash, June 16, 2023. Varicella outbreak. Forwarded to ISC for follow up.
 - Constance Lake – Blastomycosis follow up, MT July 26, 2023.

Housing and building inspections (environmental health)

Aroland First Nation:

- October 2023 – Aroland General Store inspection
- October 2023 – Johnny Therriault Memorial School inspection

Constance Lake First Nation:

- June 2023 – School kitchen inspection
- October 2023 – J G Grocery store inspection
- May 2024 – Coroners inquest regarding 2021 Blastomycosis outbreak (in progress)

Eabametoong First Nation:

- June 2023 – Public Complaint Inspection, community resident
- June 2023 – Public Complaint Inspection, Detox Building
- August 2023 – Public Complaint Inspection, community resident
- October 2023 – Mold Complaint Inspection, EFNEA apartments, teacher's duplex, unit(s) #14/15
- April 2024 – Public Complaint Inspection, Early Childhood Development Building
- April 2024 – Mold Complaint Inspection, Detox Building
- April 2024 – Mold Complaint Inspection, RSD trailers





Ginoogaming First Nation:

- November 2023 – Head-start inspection
- May 2024 – Mould complaint – 119 Spruce St.

Long Lake #58 First Nation:

- November 2023 – Mould/electrical complaint inspection – 179 Beaver St.
- December 2023 – Head-start inspection

Marten Falls First Nation:

- November 2023 – Adawegamik GP, community store, routine inspection
- May 2024 – Mold Complaint Inspection, community resident (report complete)

Neskantaga First Nation:

- July 2023 – Elementary School Playground Inspection
- July 2023 – Community playground Inspection
- May 2024 – Band office mould complaint

Webequie First Nation:

- November 2023 – Bunk House Kitchen Inspection
- November 2023 – Northern Store, Meat Room Inspection
- May 2024 – Business Centre, Hotel Inspection (report in progress)

Biomedical waste disposal

- Biomedical waste/sharps were collected from Marten Falls, Aroland, and Constance Lake and picked up by Stericycle on the scheduled date(s) as per the agreement.

NIBI Water Services - Matawa Hub

- Responded to 185 after-hour calls to assist with operational and maintenance concerns at the various water and wastewater facilities.
- Provided 207 days of on-site operational support to Water Treatment Plants (WTP). Local operators unavailable for coverage.
- Continued with OJT training, technical direction, support and as-



Water Treatment Plant in Constance Lake First Nation.



- assistance to the relief operators at the Marten Falls WTP.
- Provided 35 days of full-time on-site support for recommissioning of the Eabametoong First Nation WTP after the fire.
- Provided 18 days of full-time on-site support for the operation of the Webequie WTP.
- Provided 84 days of full-time on-site support for the operation of the Marten Falls WTP.
- Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) continues to operate and maintain the Neskantaga WTP.
- Daily check of facilities through remote monitoring is ongoing and continues to be an asset in maintaining the various plants and operations.
- Attended various construction progress meetings for the Eabametoong, Nibinamik, and Neskantaga WTP.
- Developed and implemented operational procedures, daily log and spread sheets for daily operation of the Marten Falls WTP.
- Assisted with lab work.
- Carried out monthly calibration and servicing of analyzers when required.
- Provided routine maintenance and calibration of various equipment.
- Reviewed best operating practices with plant operators to optimize plant operations and maintenance.
- Liaise with Northern Water Works Incorporated to complete annual inspections of water and wastewater facilities as requested



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management

by ISC.

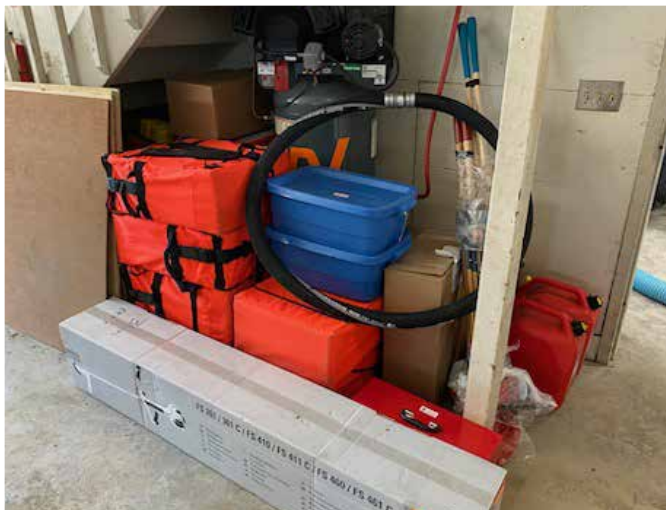
- Trained on-site contractors on proper use of hydrants and ONT.REG 170 requirements for taking water.
- Attended the Aboriginal Water Wastewater Association of Ontario (AWWAO) conference in Orillia to complete required courses and training to maintain level of certification for licenses.
- With the support of the Marten Falls Chief and Council, our Overall Responsible Operator would like to make a recommendation to initiate the process for the lifting of the BWA in Marten Falls.
- 24/7 technical guidance and direction given over the phone continues to be a major factor in the reduction of emergency responses into the remote communities. The lack of qualified licensed operators is of high concern and affects the safe operation and maintenance of the majority of the water treatment plants. Accommodation while on-site also continues to affect the level of support that could be provided.

Emergency Management

FireSmart Program – All Matawa communities

A) - Forest Fire Suppression Equipment

Kit includes: pump, pump tool kit, hard suction intake hose, 25L fuel tank, 1-1/2" forestry hose, hose packs, 10 sprinkler heads.



FireSmart supplies sent to Nibinamik First Nation.



Eabametoong First Nation bush fire truck.

B) - FireSmart Mitigation Equipment (4-person crew)

Kit includes: axes, Nomex safety wear, shovels, clearing axes, rakes, chainsaw, brush saw, weed trimmer, chainsaw sharpening kit, brush saw blade, woodcutter safety kits (chaps, ear protection, shield, etc.), gloves and safety glasses, five-person first aid kit.

All the above delivered to remote communities: Delivered to Eabametoong, Webequie and Marten Falls April 25, 2024, and Nibinamik and Neskantaga April 26, 2024. Same supplies will be delivered to road accessible communities, Aroland, Ginoogaming, Long Lake #58 and Constance Lake in May and June.

As part of a pilot project: Webequie and Eabametoong each have a rapid attack wildfire bush truck. Delivered February 17, 2024, via winter road (driven by community members) to Eabametoong, and delivered February 19, 2024, via the winter road (driven by community members) to Webequie.

SP-100 Wildland Firefighting Courses:

- Course #1 held May 29 to June 2, 2023, in Geraldton with 18 students. Only one course ran 2023. All available resources were deployed including new recruits.
- Course #2 held May 23 to 27, 2024 in Geraldton with 30 students (new recruits) registered. A class for re-certifications was held May 28 to 30, 2024.
- Course #3 held in Webequie on June 3 to 7, 2024 for new recruits



and June 8 to 10, 2024 for re-certifications.

- Course #4 held in Eabametoong on June 12 to 16, 2024 for new recruits and June 17 to 20 for re-certifications.
- Collaborating with Red Cross to develop templates to create checklists for specific disasters (the most common being floods and fires), and a generic template for other hazards that may affect a community.
- Master Emergency Response Plans: Engaging with communities in updating/developing All Hazards Emergency Response Plans. Neskantaga and Eabametoong have created an Emergency Management Program Committee that is actively updating their existing plans. Matawa EMC is providing assistance.
- 911: Just getting started on this project. Need all streets/roads named and all homes require civic numbers. This will tie in with GIS mapping for 911 services. Technical Services, Four Rivers, and EMC are collaborating. Next Generation 911 (NG911) is in the works and we want to make sure our First Nations Communities are included.



SP100 Wildland Firefighter training in Geraldton with Geraldton Community Forest.

Fire Marshall

In 2023/24, Matawa First Nation communities did not have a serious fire injury or fatal fire.

- The Fire Marshall closely worked with NAPS and the province on investigations.
- The Matawa Training and Wellness Centre training project (Fire Watch) will extend into next fiscal year.
- The continued effort of working with our First Nation fire departments for additional fire protection equipment, fire training, fire prevention, and furthering the development of critical building Fire Safety Plans in all our communities.
- Virtual attendance to Matawa fly-in communities' MTO airport table top exercise.
- Aroland First Nation - Building fire inspections for special requests (school), and fire inspections with an area fire plan, existing mobile fire apparatus inspection and training with school O&M staff.
- Constance Lake First Nation - House, multiple building fire investigations follow ups, house fire inspections for special requests, Eagles Earth fire inspections with an area fire plan, assist with the successful acquisition of a Fort Gary Mobile Fire Apparatus with firefighting equipment and training (\$505,129.00).
- Eabametoong First Nation - House, multiple building fire investigations follow ups, Mobile Fire Apparatus repair, maintenance. Unsuccessful with the repair to the pump. Assist Matawa Emergency Management Coordinator with wildfire rapid attack vehicle specifications.
- Ginoogaming First Nation - Building fire inspections for special request (Aboriginal Head Start) and training.
- Long Lake #58 First Nation - Building fire inspections for special request (Early Learning Centre) and training.
- Marten Falls First Nation - House fire investigations follow ups.
- Neskantaga First Nation - House fire investigations follow ups.
- Nibinamik First Nation - House fire investigations follow ups, assist with the specifications for a rapid attack mobile fire apparatus. Delay in manufacturing due to supply issues.
- Webequie First Nation - House (fourplex) fire investigations follow ups, assist with the specifications of Mobile Fire Apparatus



Technical Services

Matawa First Nations Management

with firefighting equipment and training. Assist Matawa Emergency Management Coordinator with wildfire rapid attack vehicle specifications.

Fire Safety is paramount for all nine Matawa communities.

Infrastructure Fire Safety Plans: Engaging with communities in developing and updating the critical infrastructure occupancies Fire Safety Plans.



Training for Fire Department(s): Basic Exterior-Only Firefighting Training is critical for communities with fire suppression equipment. Emphasis on firefighter safety, knowledge of the community fire suppression equipment in firefighting and techniques and equipment maintenance. Some members have engaged in this training. It is very difficult in communities recruiting volunteers for the fire department.

Training for Assembly Occupancy: Developing a cultural seminar package for training fire safety and evacuation protocols and procedures in assembly occupancy.

Future of Fire Prevention and Protection: Next generation for fire prevention and protection in the communities will cover land based and air-based communities on their individual perspective of their

response with the available resources in the community. A collaborative approach will be taken to bring different working skills in the community to meet the individual fire safety initiatives successfully. Completing the training of individuals in infrastructure inspections to meet the fire safety requirement of the community.

Challenges

The Operator HUBs funding is currently secured through March 2026. With all the new water treatment plants that will require certified operator oversight, we will have to advocate for an extension of this program and be able to staff additional operators to assist and mentor community operators. There also should be a succession plan to bring in younger operators with proper training to take over when the current operators retire. Communities with new water treatment plants have witnessed issues with sewage collection and treatment systems due to a number of factors including design, capacity, construction, and insufficient O&M. These issues have significantly impacted the construction of new infrastructure.

On a number of occasions community representation on project teams has been lacking as staff is overextended and that could hinder projects from advancing. We need to continue to push ISC for more core funding to support capital projects positions in the communities. The ISC admin fees are insufficient, to support a position and those fees typically go towards their finance department. If there is more coordination, payment reviews and reporting, we would be able to do a lot more across the board.

Opportunities

We will continue to work with ISC in regards to the Matawa HUB in terms of additional staffing and extending the funds in future years. There are some project management opportunities available within approved capital projects that some staff have taken on. There will continue to be project management opportunities like this moving forward. We realize one of the major needs is lot and subdivision development in most Matawa communities. We have been working with ISC slowly to move forward. Additionally, the Emergency Management position is funded on a year-to-year basis, and we are working with ISC to try to make this position permanent as it is much needed.



C-18 alternator for power plant delivered by helicopter to Eabametoong First Nation during the community's State of Emergency.



Quality Assurance

Matawa First Nations Management

Department Committee

Internal Working Group: Sarah Cockerton and Anthony Schirru, Four Rivers Environmental Group • Rob Wesley, Information Technology • Angelle Rebelo, Human Resources • Neil Miller, Finance and Administration

Quality Assurance Staff

Shelly Beaudreau, Quality Assurance Coordinator (on leave) • Patrick Cheechoo, Quality Assurance Project Officer (on contract until March 2025)

Key Priorities

The Quality Assurance Project Officer will focus on:

1. Ensuring MFNM has a successful Registration Audit for ISO 9001:2015 through documentation review and enhancements, internal audits, management review and audit preparation.
2. Converting MFNM's Quality Management System to a digital platform, to be developed and implemented by the Four Rivers in conjunction with Information Technology, Finance, Human Resources and Quality Assurance.

Overview

Quality Assurance implements, monitors, evaluates and enhances Matawa First Nations Management's (MFNM) Quality Management System primarily to help ensure quality of service and programs for member First Nations and their community members. MFNM's Quality Management System is guided by ISO 9001:2015, an international standard for quality management, and its 7 guiding principles:

1. Customer Service: Ensuring that Matawa focuses program and service delivery that effectively addresses the wants and needs of Matawa First Nations and their community members.
2. Leadership: Ensure that objectives and leadership provided by Chiefs, the Boards of Directors and the CEO's Office drive all organizational development and quality service and program delivery.
3. Engagement of People: Supporting the leadership and efforts of Matawa Boards, Committees, Advisors along with the abilities and ensuring that the efforts MFNM Managers and Staff have sufficient supports, adequate resources and a clean and safe work environment to implement organizational objectives.
4. Process Approach: Monitoring new and existing planning and administrative processes for effectiveness and opportunities for improvement.
5. Improvement: Formal efforts to recognize and act on opportunities.
6. Evidence-based Decision Making: Monitoring implementation of data analysis and usage along with records management in support of documented and effective planning, administration and decision making.
7. Relationship Management: Ensuring effective communications and response to the wants and needs of Member First Nations and community members while ensuring effective relations with government, vendors and other stakeholders.

Accomplishments

1. Early modelling of digital platform piloted by Four Rivers is being recognized by ESRI's ArcGIS Online as leading edge and will place Matawa and Four Rivers in the forefront of a digitized model for quality assurance.

Challenges

1. An unexpected gap in departmental personnel resulting in absent communication internally and with the auditing firm has culminated with the expiration of Matawa's ISO 9001:2015 Certification. Matawa has been without ISO 9001:2015 Certification for over one year.
2. Additionally, internal communication with departments and affiliate entities was absent, which has resulted in some confusion and delays in implementation of the quality management system for some.

Opportunities

1. Development, adoption and implementation of a new digital quality management system will very likely be at the forefront of digital quality management for First Nations, non-profit organizations, government and global corporations.
2. Matawa departments and affiliate entities will benefit from review, analysis and enhancements to their respective documentation, processes and quality assurance as Matawa prepares for an ISO 9001 registration audit, tentatively scheduled for February 2025.
3. Establishing a new Quality Assurance team supported by succession planning, enhanced processes and effective documentation to ensure potential gaps in departmental personnel does not result in negative impacts to Matawa's quality management and its ISO 9001:2015 Certification.



Matawa

FIRST NATIONS MANAGEMENT

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