

## The Power of Unity, The Dignity of Difference

# Celebrating Matawa Learners

## FIRST NATIONS

Four Rivers  
paddles **500**  
kilometres



*Living with us:*  
Red-headed woodpecker



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Indigenous Services Canada Minister Patty Hajdu, Matawa youth and Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin manager Robin Larrett cut the ribbon at the playground (right) Minister Hajdu and Matawa CEO David Paul Achneepineskum (left).



## Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin unveils brand new playground

By: Charnel Anderson, Communications Generalist

Following months of anticipation, Matawa's Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin unveiled a brand new playground on August 21, 2024. The new playground—which features four slides, monkey bars, and multiple climbers—cost roughly \$500,000 and was funded by Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) First Nations Child and Family Services post-majority support services program.

"Children and families here deserve quality playgrounds, just like anyone else in the country. Thanks to Matawa First Nations, children will be able to play, socialize and grow here. Families will be able to gather.



This is another step in providing the services families need so that children can get a fair chance to succeed," said ISC Minister Patty Hajdu, who attended the playground's ribbon cutting ceremony."

Since 2019, Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin, Matawa's social services framework, has been supporting Matawa families at risk of involvement in the child welfare system, as well as youth who are aging out of the child welfare system through its Next Steps program.

Last August, Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin, in partnership with the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, opened six transitional housing units within the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre, aimed at supporting and stabilizing families in a culturally-appropriate and responsive way. ●

How to pronounce Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin: Ah-WAH-shi-SHEE-wee-gee-HE-way-win

## Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin's 4th Annual *Back to School Bonanza*



Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin's annual Back to School Bonanza features fun-filled, family-friendly activities like bouncy castles, face painting, horse rides, dunk tanks, and more. The aim is to get "Matawa kids excited about going back to school," explains Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin manager Robin Larrett. "It's my favourite event of the year where we get to see the children laughing and playing, and it reminds us why we do what we do," said Larrett. The event is free, and registered children receive backpacks filled with back-to-school essentials. Be sure to follow "Matawa Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin" on Facebook to hear about next year's Back to School Bonanza and other events and programming.



Four Rivers met up with Matawa Education students along the Kitchi Siipi (Albany) River and delivered science lessons, including tree and fish identification.

## Four Rivers' river journeys

By: Laura Prior, Communications Specialist

Four Rivers' Field Team was very busy on the rivers this summer, with Environmental Technicians Erin Kelly and Graeme Saukko-Sved padding nearly 500 kilometres along the rivers within the Matawa homelands while collecting baseline environmental data to support Matawa member communities. This year, Four Rivers navigated two rivers: the first being the Little Current River in May, and the second being the Kitchi Siipi (Albany) in June and July.

The Little Current River trip took 16 days. Erin and Graeme initially flew into Percy Lake, and from there made their way down river and hauled out upstream on the Squaw River. With guidance from Aroland First Nation, the team documented vegetation, bees, fish, water quality, and deployed song meters to document birds and bats in the area. The team identified Species at Risk on the way, including Lake Sturgeon habitat.

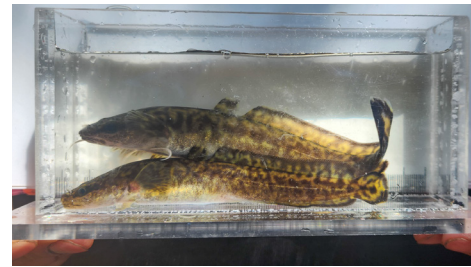
In June, the team embarked on the Kitchi Siipi for a second year. This

trip took 25 days, starting at Miminiska Lake and ending in Marten Falls First Nation. The first half of the trip was to collect song meters that were deployed two years ago, and to sample the same locations as previously done for vegetation, bees, and water quality.

After a short stopover in Eabametoong First Nation, the team met up with a group of students from the Matawa Education and Care Centre at Triangular Lake to continue down



Four Rivers staff traveled close to 500 kilometres on the water this summer.



river. During this portion of the trip, the team delivered science lessons to the students, including how to collect water quality information and why it's important, how to sample fish for scientific purposes, tree identification, compass navigation, how soils are formed, and why the land looks the way that it does. They also learned about the water bugs that they didn't know existed, and many more things! •

Is there a river that you would like Four Rivers to help document? Or would like to join us for part of a journey?

Reach out Four Rivers at [communications@fourrivers.group](mailto:communications@fourrivers.group)

## Drone demo at the AGM

The Four Rivers Drone team was in Neskantaga First Nation for Matawa's 26th Annual General Meeting, where community members and delegates got to see the big Wingtra drone in action as the team completed eight large-area drone flights, covering roughly 200 hectares! Stay tuned for drone flights in other Matawa communities soon.



Did you know? The Wingtra GEN II drone can be used to create maps of a landscape, and flies at 16 metres per second for close to an hour!



## Nibinamik youth retreat

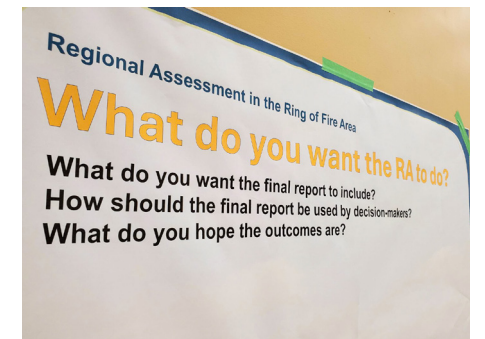
From July 11 to 15, Four Rivers was invited to participate in Nibinamik First Nation's 25th annual Youth Retreat at the Breathing Grounds. Staff led programming with youth on different ways to be an environmental monitor, including looking for animal tracks, identifying different critters found in the water, taking pictures and creating maps through drones, and even trying out a few experiments.

Four Rivers staff were also able to capture drone imagery of the Breathing Grounds which will be used to update existing maps of the area to help monitor any changes to the land and water in years to come. We had an amazing time with the community and had lots of fun with all the kids that spent time with us. We hope to see everyone again next year.



## Ring of Fire Regional Assessment Information Session

On August 6, Matawa members were invited to the Moose Hall in Thunder Bay to learn about the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire area. The information session was hosted by Regional Assessment Working Group (RAWG), with support from Four Rivers and Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. Matawa members learned about regional assessments through a presentation, a series of hand-out materials (including translated versions) and a question-and-answer period. RAWG members spoke to the draft Terms of Reference for the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire area and began to collect valuable feedback, which will be incorporated into the final document.



According to the Government of Canada, the Ring of Fire Regional Assessment "aims to gather information and data on the region to understand the potential effects from past, existing and future development in the area."



Lise Vaugeois, Member of Provincial Parliament representing Thunder Bay-Superior North, stopped by to chat with horticulturalist Myles Armstrong at the Grand Opening of the Matawa Health Co-op's Wellness Garden in August.

## 'More than just a green space': Matawa Health Co-op aims to grow community at its Wellness Garden

By: Charnel Anderson, Communications Generalist

On August 8, 2024, the Matawa Health Co-operative celebrated the grand opening of its Wellness Garden, a mindfully designed community and cultural hub located at the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre at 523 Algoma St. N. in Thunder Bay.

"We're so excited to welcome the community to our garden, which is already so much more than just a green space," said Crystal Bell, director of clinical and nursing services with



The Wellness Garden is centered around a geodesic greenhouse located at the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre, which was installed by Four Rivers, Matawa's environmental services group.

the Matawa Health Co-operative. "Countless staff, Elders, and volunteers have come out to start seedlings and water and tend to the plants, enjoying the fresh air and connecting and learning from one another."

The Matawa Health Co-op, with support from Matawa First Nations Management and the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre, has developed a functional, creative, and accessible garden aimed at promoting health and wellness and food sovereignty. The garden, which is focused on perennial plants and centered around a geodesic greenhouse dome, features over 150 varieties of plants with medicinal, culinary, and ceremonial applications.

Designed in collaboration with Myles Armstrong, a horticulturalist with Wild Arrow Botanical, the Wellness Garden was developed using ecologically-minded principles to create a self-sustaining "closed loop system" that relies on the organic waste produced by the garden to nourish the soil for future growing seasons.

"In designing the Wellness Garden, we focused on biodiversity and sustainability and creating a resilient, productive ecosystem," said Armstrong. "We also looked at creating a space that can be used as a gathering place, where people can come together and be empowered to learn new skills."

The Matawa Health Co-op has established a wellness program centered around the garden where staff and clients can experience the benefits of gardening, including increased physical activity, time in nature, and social connection, which can relieve stress and improve mood. Additional wellness and food sovereignty-related programming is in development, and there are plans to expand the garden in the future. ●



The Wellness Garden was designed with sustainability in mind said horticulturalist Myles Armstrong. It's full of native, pollinator-friendly perennials like black-eyed Susans and purple coneflower, which will grow back year after year. The greenhouse features edible plants including squash and watermelon, which will be used in Awashishewiigihiwaywi's Community Kitchen when it's ready for harvest.





The Matawa Health Co-op hosted its second annual Youth Mental Health Summit in June at the Norwester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

## Matawa Health Co-op prioritizing cultural teachings within mental health

By: Ethan Alatyppo, Youth Mental Health Promotions Worker

The Matawa Health Co-operative's (MHC) Mental Health Team has been active over the summer months, making significant strides in promoting mental wellness and cultural engagement within the nine Matawa communities.

Central to their recent activities was the second annual Youth Mental Health Summit, held June 12 and 13 at the Norwester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay. This two-day event was a landmark occasion, bringing together youth from the nine Matawa communities for an engaging experience focused on mental health awareness and cultural engagement. The 2024 summit featured a lineup of guest speakers – including Cree stylist

Scott Wabano and Nishinaabe fashion designer Ocean Kiana – and presenters who shared valuable insights, experiences, and resources on mental health. Attendees had the opportunity to explore a variety of information booths that provided knowledge and support.

The youth summit also included evening programming hosted by the MHC's Youth Recreation and Cultural Team. Participants enjoyed hands-on sessions such as healing blanket making, traditional beading, painting, and various sports, fostering both creativity and community spirit. The following day, the Cultural Team organized a social powwow for youth that celebrated traditional drumming

and dancing, adding a cultural dimension to the summit.

On July 25, the Mental Health Team organized a pop-up event in Eabametoong First Nation. This event was a hit, featuring health and wellness information booths, food, prizes, and a bounce house, which drew considerable community engagement.

On August 1, an in-service event was hosted by MHC in Aroland First Nation, providing a comprehensive overview of services available to community members, complete with information booths to help community members navigate and access these important resources.

Cultural impact has been a priority of MHC's Mental Health

Team's recent initiatives. The Team has been actively promoting traditional practices through various workshops and programs across all Matawa First Nations. These include healing blanket making, ribbon skirt and ribbon shirt making, and traditional beading workshops, contributing to the preservation and celebration of

cultural heritage. Elmer Atlookan, MHC's Cultural Coordinator, has played an important role in these efforts. Currently, he is working on creating a sacred drum for Matawa Health Cooperative, a project that understands the importance of cultural practices in mental health and healing. His involvement in cultural programs

has been important in integrating traditional practices into the mental health support framework.

The Mental Health Team of Matawa Health Cooperative continues to make an impact through its dedication to mental health, community engagement, and cultural preservation. ●



MHC's Youth Mental Health Summit, which brought together youth from all nine Matawa communities, featured a variety of cultural activities such as healing blanket making, a social powwow and traditional drumming and dancing.



## Matawa Health Co-op's new mobile clinic to hit the road

Submitted by: Carmen Blais, Nursing Transfer Co-ordinator

The new mobile clinic will expand access to healthcare services in Matawa communities including Aroland, Ginoogaming, Long Lake #58 and Constance Lake First Nations.

The Matawa Health Co-operative (MHC) purchased a new mobile clinic to increase access to healthcare services for people living in Matawa communities. Made possible by the generous funding of Indigenous Services Canada and the vision of the MHC Board of Directors, the new mobile clinic offers primary healthcare, health promotion programs and outreach services in drive-in Matawa communities including Aroland, Ginoogaming, Long Lake #58 and Constance Lake First Nations.

The mobile clinic, housed in a modified Dodge Promaster, was purchased to provide health services to patients who cannot access a health center or hospital due to “social determinants of health,” or non-medical factors that influence health outcomes, such as mobility issues, a lack of transportation, living in a remote location, financial restraints, language barriers, and wait times.

A person who cannot access

and will decrease adverse effects related to delayed healthcare while meeting people where they are at to receive health services.

MHC's mobile clinic will be staffed with physicians, nurse practitioners, foot care nurses and diabetes educators, and will provide preventative care, chronic disease management, education



MHC's mobile clinic will meet people where they are to offer outreach, primary healthcare services, and health promotion activities.

## International Indigenous educators evaluate Matawa's language program

By: Emily Shandruk, Special Projects Officer



From left to right: WINHEC visiting committee members Dr. Makalapua Alencastre, Lisa Johnsdatter Baal and Dr. Cathy Kanoelani Ikeda, Chief Judy Desmoulin, and Dr. Sadie Heckenberg and Sara Ellen Anne Eira in Long Lake #58 First Nation.

In late August, the Matawa Education department welcomed special visitors from the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC), who traveled to Thunder Bay to check out the amazing work that the Matawa Waka Tere program has done to revitalize Ojibwe, Cree, and Oji-Cree languages in Matawa First Nation communities and beyond.

From August 26 to 30, the visiting committee—including Dr. Makalapua Alencastre and Dr. Cathy Kanoelani Ikeda from Hawai'i, Lisa Johnsdatter Baal and Sara Ellen Anne Eira from Norway, and Dr. Sadie Heckenberg from Australia—were in northwestern Ontario to evaluate and document the work Matawa is doing to revitalize Indigenous languages and

seek accreditation to access sustainable funding for the Matawa Waka Tere program.

The WINHEC committee members visited Webequie and Long Lake #58 First Nations, where they met with local language teams, including students, tutors and Elders. They also experienced some yummy traditional foods, and were warmly welcomed by Chief Judy Desmoulin at The Point, where they had a lovely dinner along the water.

In Webequie First Nation, Chief Cornelius Wabasse welcomed the committee to the Simon Jacob Memorial Education Centre. There they enjoyed a delicious meal, listened to a drum group, and took a boat tour

to learn more about the community's connection to the land and water.

After a thorough evaluation, the committee will submit a report detailing their observations to the WINHEC Board of Directors. This report is crucial for Matawa Education department's efforts to secure accreditation and continue revitalizing Indigenous languages within Matawa First Nation communities. This visit shows the commitment of Matawa First Nations in preserving Indigenous languages and ensuring they're a vibrant part of community culture and identity for years to come. •



## Henry Coaster Memorial School celebrates SK and Grade 8 graduates

By: Olivia Merko, Student Nutrition Program Co-ordinator

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum, Marten Falls First Nation Chief Bruce Achneepineskum and NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler with a graduate of Henry Coaster Memorial School.

The community of Marten Falls First Nation came alive with pride and joy as students, teachers, families and Indigenous leaders gathered at Henry Coaster Memorial School to celebrate Grade 8 and Senior Kindergarten students at their graduation ceremony on June 26, 2026. The graduation – which was supported by Matawa Education PASS staff – marked a significant milestone for students as they transition from kindergarten and elementary to the next phase of their educational journey.

The ceremony, held in the Henry Coaster Memorial School's gymnasium, was a vibrant reflection



Henry Coaster Memorial School's 2024 Senior Kindergarten class.

of the community's culture and spirit. The hall was adorned with balloons and other decorations, and the air was filled with a sense of accomplishment and anticipation.



The graduation commenced with a heartfelt opening prayer and song delivered by Russell Achneepineskum, whose words set a tone of reverence and encouragement for the day's proceedings. School Principal Tom Recke addressed the audience, sharing his admiration for the graduates' hard work and resilience over the years. Recke spoke of the many challenges students had to overcome and expressed his confidence in their potential to make positive contributions to their community and beyond.

Henry Coaster Memorial School also had the honour of hosting Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum, who addressed the assembly with inspiring words emphasizing the importance of education in preserving and advancing the rich cultural heritage of Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Grand Chief Fiddler spoke of the role of education in empowering youth to become leaders and advocates for their communities, while Deputy Grand Chief Achneepineskum shared a message of encouragement, urging



HCMS graduation attendees enjoyed a community feast.

the graduates to remain connected to their roots while pursuing their dreams. Their presence added a special dimension to the ceremony, reinforcing the broader support and recognition for the achievements.

The highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of diplomas. The names of the graduates were called one by one, and each student walk across the stage to a chorus of applause and cheers from their families and peers, before receiving a personalized certificate and gift. The celebration also featured

a community feast, where attendees enjoyed a variety of traditional dishes and shared stories of the graduates' achievements.

The graduation ceremony at Henry Coaster Memorial School was not just a celebration of academic success but also a testament to the strength and unity of Marten Falls First Nation. It was marked by pride, tradition, and the unlimited potential of the next generation. •

# Words of wisdom from Matawa Waka Tere's Oshki Maachita Graduation

By: Carmalita Yesno, Matawa Education summer student

On July 18, 2024, Matawa Education celebrated 90 Ojibwe, Cree, and Oji-Cree language learners who graduated from the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Program. Indigenous leaders, students, tutors and Matawa Education staff spoke at the event, emphasizing the value of learning and passing on endangered Indigenous languages. Matawa Education's Summer Student Carmalita Yesno shares what you may have missed.



Sol Mamakwa, Minister of Provincial Parliament, Kingfisher Lake First Nation

MPP Sol Mamakwa expressed the importance of speaking Anishinaabemowin, as many parents and grandparents—including himself—were not allowed to speak their language in residential school. It's not right that institutions are charging fees to relearn the language, he noted. As a MPP, Mamakwa was deprived of speaking in his language in the legislature until May 28, 2024, the first time he spoke Anishinaabemowin at Queen's Park. "We are losing our languages at a very fast rate. We need to get our languages back. Losing our languages is like losing our way of life," said Mamakwa. "Everybody who is First Nations here and who does not speak the language—that's how oppression works, that's how colonialism works. We need to take that step to take our language back," adding and that it's important for him to support language initiatives such as the Matawa Waka Tere program.



Brittney Mendowegan, Matawa Waka Tere student-turned-tutor, Ginoogaming First Nation

For Brittney Mendowegan, the Ojibwe language is more than words, it's become a bridge for her to connect with her culture and ancestors, as each language lesson revealed the depth and beauty of Indigenous traditions and stories. "Learning Ojibwe has transformed my life. It's given me a stronger sense of identity and belonging. I feel more connected to my community and ancestors," said Mendowegan. "The journey has not only been about learning the language, but rediscovering our roots and understanding [the] importance of preserving our heritage" Mendowegan acknowledged her mentors, including her mother, and shared how powerful of an experience it is to learn the language for those who were deprived of it, and the importance of uplifting and supporting those on language learning journeys.



Chris Moonias, Chief of Neskantaga First Nation

Neskantaga First nation Chief Moonias opened the Matawa Waka Tere Oshki Maachita graduation ceremony speaking his mother tongue, Anishinaabemowin, the primary language he uses at home. Moonias shared that he learned to write Anishinaabemowin in syllabics, as a way to communicate with his family when he attended residential school as a young boy. Moonias, a former language teacher, encouraged new language speakers to learn to pronounce new words properly instead of laughing at them. Moonias asked attendees what language means to them, explaining that for him, "it means connection to the land, connection to the river, connection to who he is, his identity, connection to the teachings from his elders, from his past, from his father."



Stephanie Hogan, Matawa Education Education Co-ordinator

Education Co-ordinator Stephanie Hogan gave closing remarks on behalf of Executive Director Sharon Nate, congratulating graduates for their hard work. She also thanked Matawa community members, Matawa Education administration staff, tutors and assistants for all of their hard work behind the scenes to bring the wonderful graduation celebration to fruition. Hogan noted that of the 295 students enrolled in the Matawa Waka Tere program, 95 per cent are Matawa members, 90 students have graduated, and 180 have the option of re-enrolling in the second phase of the program. Hogan added that the program has created various community-based employment opportunities, including a department of administrative and language specialists.



Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief, Muskrat Dam First Nation

NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler spoke about how the language is a beautiful gift given to us by the Creator, and the importance learning and continuing to teach the language so it lives on, as many language speakers are leaving this earth. Fiddler also acknowledged the instructors, supporters, and our Māori relatives from New Zealand who have helped revitalize our Indigenous languages. "It's so emotional for us to see our language has a future, that we make sure our language does not die during our generation," said Fiddler. "We will do everything we can to make sure it lives on, through our children, through our grandchildren and those that will follow us." He also encouraged graduates to share their gift of language with children, as he hopes to see the language spoken more, highlighting the value of the Matawa Waka Tere program.

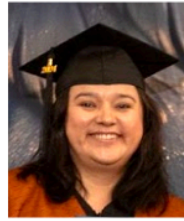


Dawson Mihichuk, Matawa Waka Tere Year 1 Oji-Cree graduate

Dawson Mihichuk, a Matawa Waka Tere Year 1 Oji-Cree graduate of Ukrainian descent, says he was encouraged by his employer Lise Vaugeois, MPP Thunder Bay—Superior North, to enroll in the program as a student. The opportunity to learn Oji-Cree with the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program was exciting because it was a way to better serve the community and connect with an important culture residing in the region, said Mihichuk. Mihichuk described his experiencing learning Oji-Cree as amazing, due to the tutors, students, staff, as well as the detailed curriculum that covers many things that were particular and specific to the communities and culture—including hunting, the bush, and dances. "I think it's extremely important for programs like this to exist because language is culture and you can't truly see the full picture of culture without knowing the basics of the language," said Mihichuk.



Kimberley  
Williams



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Cheechoo



Edward  
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Elmer  
Atlookan



Jasmine  
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Sarah Berry



Mona  
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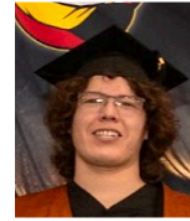
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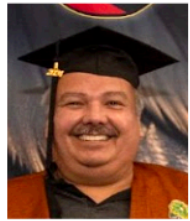
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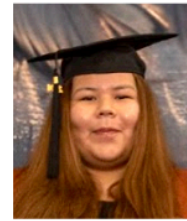
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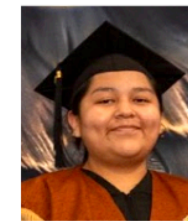
Noah Sisson



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Mary  
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### MATAWA EDUCATION 2024 OSHKI MAACHITA GRADUATION

#### Matawa Waka Tere

Certificate in Indigenous Pathways to Speaking the Language, Year One  
Languages: Ojibwe/Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree



Lawrence  
Therriault



Nancy Ritch



Joe Baxter



Cathy  
Therriault



Gordon  
Yellowhead



Eileen  
Wabano



Sharon  
Mendowegan



Bernadine  
Mendowegan



Andrea  
O'Nabigon



Cheyenne  
Patabon



Elizabeth  
Sugarhead



Coleen  
Moonias



Sariane  
Fiddler



Bentley  
Cheechoo



Wanda  
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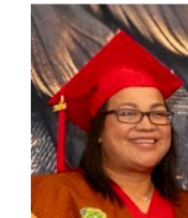
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Janelle Bear



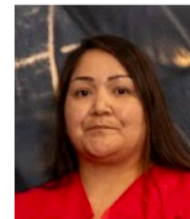
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Krystle  
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Shannon  
Slipperjack



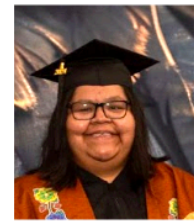
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Katherine  
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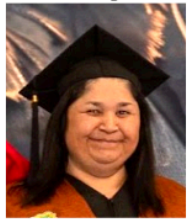
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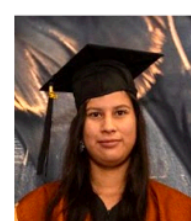
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Ann Waswa



Jean  
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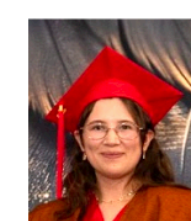
Sarah  
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Sophia  
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Elisa  
Bourdon



Janelle Bear



Brittney  
Mendowegan



Joseph  
Bedwash



Theresa  
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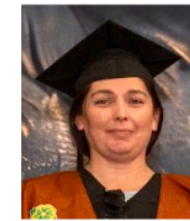
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Claire  
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Emma  
Fortier



Carla  
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Stacy Taylor



Marlene  
Mitchell



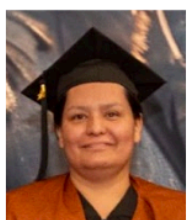
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Sakanee



Crystal  
Caputo



Dawson  
Mihichuk



Angela Sofea



Tara Dorval



Ryan  
Sakakep



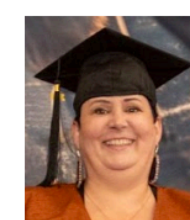
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Brenda  
Arvelin



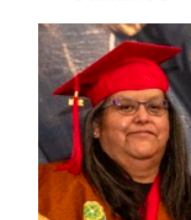
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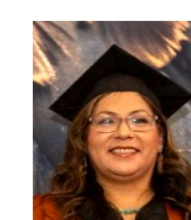
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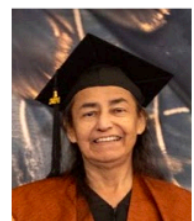
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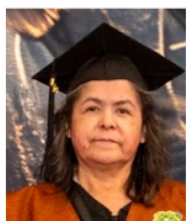
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Slipperjack



Autumn  
Yesno



Marjorie  
Elsayad



Doreen  
Solomon



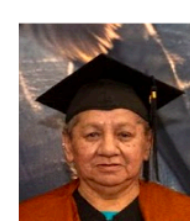
Irene Taylor



Lucy  
Okitchquo



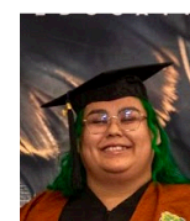
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Sutherland



Kathleen  
Taylor



Emma  
Solomon



Raven  
Gagnon



Ashley  
Labelle



Danielle  
Legade



Fred Patabon



Hannah  
Meshake



Juliette  
Patabon



Faye  
Shebagabow



Michelle  
Rahme



Joseph  
Moonias



Susanna  
Baxter

# Matawa Education 2024 Post-Secondary Graduates

Matawa Education celebrated 22 post-secondary graduates at its annual graduation and awards banquet, held on June 6, 2024 at the Superior Inn Hotel & Convention Centre in Thunder Bay. Congratulations to all the graduates.

*Cary Boere*  
Ginoogaming First Nation  
Medical Laboratory Technology Diploma  
Cambrian College

*Solomon Echum*  
Ginoogaming First Nation  
Electrical Techniques Certificate  
Georgian College

*Carly Brar*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Honours Bachelor of Social Work  
Lakehead University

*Trina Ferris*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Indigenous Wellness and Addictions  
Prevention Program Diploma  
Canadore College

*Maxwell Dickomeit*  
Ginoogaming First Nation  
Hons. Business Admin., Marketing &  
Consumer Culture Specialization  
Trent University

*Payton Gagnon*  
Aroland First Nation  
General Arts & Sciences Diploma  
Confederation College

*Megan Dickomeit*  
Ginoogaming First Nation  
Business - Accounting Diploma  
Algonquin College

*Catharine Kennedy*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Hairstyling Diploma  
Sault College

*Denise Magiskan*  
Aroland First Nation  
Business Diploma  
Confederation College

*Vincent Moonias*  
Neskantaga First Nation  
College Access Certificate  
Confederation College

*Rayli Nabigon*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Master of Science in Nursing – Nurse  
Practitioner  
Laurentian University

*Ashley Nadon*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Anishinaabemowin Diploma  
Georgian College

*Xaira Pemberton*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Early Childhood Education Diploma  
Red River College

*Valoria Rody*  
Webequie First Nation  
Dental Assisting Diploma  
Confederation College

*Hazel Smith*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Early Childhood Education Diploma  
Canadore College

*Angela Towedo*  
Aroland First Nation  
Master of Education  
University of Ottawa

*Lenny Spence*  
Webequie First Nation  
Business Diploma  
Confederation College

*Raris Waboose*  
Long Lake #58 First Nation  
Forestry Technician: Ecosystem  
Management Diploma  
Confederation College

*Allyson Taylor*  
Ginoogaming First Nation  
Special Education Diploma  
Cégep de l’Abitibi-Témiscamingue  
Campus de Rouyn-Noranda

*Curran Wesley*  
Ginoogaming First Nation  
Transitional Year Program Certificate  
University of Toronto

*Loey Therriault*  
Aroland First Nation  
General Arts & Sciences Diploma  
Confederation College

*Camille Vernier*  
Aroland First Nation  
Concurrent Education & Hons.  
Bachelor of Fine Arts  
Lakehead University

# Achieving the Dream Through Education Awards

Celebrating the achievements of Matawa Learners

Submitted by: Emily Shandruk, Special Projects Officer, and Jasmine Vardy, Matawa Education Summer Student

On June 6, 2024, Achieving the Dream Through Education recognized eighteen Matawa students—representing all nine Matawa First Nations—for their personal and academic achievements at the 2024 Matawa Post-Secondary Graduation and Awards Banquet. The ceremony at the Superior Inn in Thunder Bay was a celebration with family, friends, community leaders, and educators who have been a part of the recipients' lives, as they came together to acknowledge the students' accomplishments.

Achieving the Dream Through Education, a registered charity supporting Matawa youth, is thrilled to announce that \$23,000 in scholarships were awarded this academic year—a \$10,000 increase from last year. Students were recognized for their accomplishments, earning special accolades for their outstanding academic performance, leadership qualities, and determination to succeed.

As the students embark on new adventures, whether it be entering the workforce, furthering their education, or exploring other opportunities, we wish them all the best. Congratulations to the 2024 recipients! Your hard work and dedication have paid off, and we look forward to witnessing the incredible things you will accomplish in the future.



## 2024 Award Winners

**The Courage** (Alex Misewace)  
**Bursary:** Summer Kashkesh of Aroland First Nation, Cayla Wesley of Constance Lake First Nation, Nicole Wesley of Ginoogaming First Nation, Shaylin Wapoose of Webequie First Nation, Ciarra Roy of Constance Lake First Nation, and Leighton Wabano, Drew Okeese and Blake Boyce, all from Eabametoong First Nation.

**Achieving the Dream Through Education Directors Bursary:** Pierce Thompson of Marten Falls First Nation, Jayla Troutlake of Neskantaga First Nation, A.J. Sofea of Nibinamik First Nation, and Shaylin Wapoose of Webequie First Nation.

**Bonnie Moore and Blanche Swallow Sisters Bursary:** Keira Mendowegan of Aroland First Nation and Jasper Beaver of Nibinamik First Nation.

**Colliers Project Leaders Scholarship:** Emery Wesley of Ginoogaming First Nation and Jasper Beaver of Nibinamik First Nation.

**Gord Wickham Bursary:** Leila Mendowegan of Aroland First Nation.

**Jamie Campbell Bursary:** Keira Mendowegan of Aroland First Nation, Dora Ooshag of Eabametoong First Nation, and Destiny Kuszniier and Odessa Begin of Long Lake #58 First Nation.

## Matawa's 36th Annual General Meeting in Neskantaga First Nation

By: Carol Audet,  
Communications Manager



Matawa youth had the opportunity to voice concerns at Matawa's AGM, which resulted in a resolution calling for more job opportunities, education, mental health and addictions treatment and other support for youth.

From July 30 to August 1, Chiefs and Elder, women, and youth delegations from the 9 Matawa First Nations came together for Matawa's 36th Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Neskantaga First Nation. Elders Ronnie Moonias, Bruce Sheesheesh, and Alex Moonias provided prayers each day while Neskantaga's Spirit River Drum group opened and closed each day. The meeting was chaired by Gideon Winters and co-chaired by Vincent Moonias and was live-streamed on YouTube.

On July 30, the corporate meeting day, attendees received Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) department reports including: Awashishewiigihiwaywiin; Communications; Education; Four Rivers Environmental Services; Finance & Administration; Financial Advisory

Services; Matawa Health Co-operative; Health & Social Meno Biimadeswin; Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment and Training Services (KKETS); Matawa Housing; Rapid Lynx Telecommunications; Technical Services; Information Technology; and Quality Assurance.

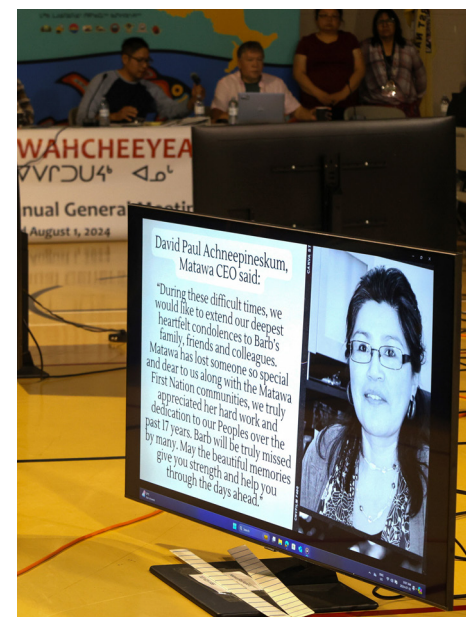
MFNM announced new appointments for the 2024/2025 Board of Directors including Joe Baxter for Aroland First Nation and Walter Oskineegish for Nibinamik First Nation. President Rosemary Moonias from Constance Lake, Vice President Peter Moonias from Neskantaga, Secretary/Treasurer Lisa Echum from Ginoogaming, and Board Members Charlie Okees from Eabametoong, Frank Onabigon from Long Lake #58, Robert Moonias from Marten Falls, and Roy Spence from Webequie continue

to serve on the board. As of the date of publication of this Messenger, the election of BOD officers has not taken place.

Preliminary financial reports from MFNM, Achieving the Dream Through Education, Four Rivers Inc., Matawa Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Matawa First Nations Property Inc., Gathering of Rivers for Community Care, Matawa Health Co-operative, Matawa Training and Wellness Centre, Rapid Lynx Telecommunications GP Inc., and KKETS were presented. Unfortunately, final audited consolidated financial statements for the year ending March 31, 2024, from the above departments were not available and therefore could not be accepted by resolution but will be reviewed and accepted in the immediate future.

Ron Wesley, President of KKETS, and Dave Neegan, KKETS Executive Director, provided remarks. Program Managers from KKETS Adult Learning Literacy & Essential Skills Program, Indigenous Skills & Employment Training and Drivers Education also reported. Miya Inkster and Izzak Wapachee from Mokwateh, and Indigenous-owned consulting firm, also provided a presentation regarding the scope and plan for MFNM's independent review, following up on the Matawa Chiefs Council resolution passed on July 27, 2023. A resolution proposing Matawa's 37th AGM will take place in Aroland First Nation from July 29 - 31, 2025, was also passed. The corporate meeting day concluded with a community-organized concert by the Canadian heavy metal band Helix.

The Matawa Chiefs Council meeting began on July 31 and included the opportunity for community members to raise concerns and presentations by Member of Provincial



A tribute to Barb Rabbit, who passed away in July, was presented at the AGM.



Matawa CEO David Paul Achneepineskum with MPP Sol Mamakwa and Ontario Regional Chief Benedict Abram at Matawa's 36th AGM in Neskantaga First Nation.

Parliament Sol Mamakwa, Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict, and members of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Executive Council. Ginoogaming First Nation Chief Sheri Taylor also made a statement to ORC Benedict. A video tribute acknowledging the tragic loss of our esteemed colleague Barbara Rabbit, who worked as a Membership Clerk at Matawa for 17 years and sadly passed away on July 4, 2024, was also presented.

On August 1, the second and final day of the Chiefs Council meeting, it was learned that a young man from Neskantaga had passed away in Thunder Bay. Out of respect for the family and community, the business of the AGM was suspended. The Spirit River Drum group provided healing songs, and time was allocated for youth to address the attendees.

Resolution #03-01-08-2024 'Support for the Recommendations of Youth at the 36th Annual General

Meeting' was developed and passed based on presentations by Matawa youth, including Jimmy Makoop from Nibinamik, Billy Wabason from Aroland, Kaia Moonias from Marten Falls, Dallas Fisher from Ginoogaming, Trayvon Wabano Wesley from Constance Lake, Bedahbun Moonias, Vincent Moonias and Antoine Moonias from Neskantaga, and Cheyra Crow and Jada Towegishig from Long Lake #58. One time-limited resolution regarding the continuation and expansion of the Matawa Waka Tere Language Revitalization Program was passed, and gifts were shared amongst the delegations and each other.

**Find Matawa's 2024 Annual Report and Chiefs Council Report at [www.matawa.on.ca](http://www.matawa.on.ca) under the "Reports" tab at the bottom of the homepage.**



## Matawa's PASS team receives \$90,000 for new books from Indigo Love of Reading Foundation

By: Shelby Ch'ng, Education Partnership Program Liaison

Matawa Education's Pathways to Achieve Student Success received the Indigo for the Love of Reading Grant, a 3-year grant prized at \$90,000. This will allow the PASS team to fund new books for five schools in Matawa, including the cost of new books, plus shipping costs for Simon Jacob Memorial School in Webequie, Johnny Therriault Memorial School in Aroland, Nibinamik Education Centre, Neskantaga Education Centre, and John C. Yesno Education Centre in Eabametoong.

Literacy Fund Grants are awarded to schools, and in some cases educational organizations, in high-needs communities that are committed to fostering a love of reading and have a robust plan for how they would utilize new books and resources to enhance their vision. Every year, hundreds of schools across Canada apply for this

grant to increase access to books for the children and youth they serve and while Indigo strives to reach as many as possible, generally only about 30 partners are selected. Grants are dispersed over a multi-year period, during which time the organization works with grant recipients to track short- and long-term impacts, amplify stories of change and ultimately inspire other schools, parents, communities, and organizations to invest in literacy, too. Other benefits of the partnership include access to professional development opportunities, classroom resources and more. ●



## Supporting neurodiversity in Marten Falls

Submitted by: Mary Ann Nawagesic



In July, Matawa Education's Pathways to Achieve Student Success (PASS) team and Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) staff traveled to Marten Falls First Nation to provide a workshop to equip parents with the skills needed to support neurodiverse children. During the visit, NAN's Early Learning Child Care Manager Kristy Hankila and Tiffany Sullivan hosted an informative workshop on autism and neurodiversity, offering strategies to increase safety and help neurodiverse children to thrive. Matawa's PASS team—including Arianna W., Kelly J., mental health lead Mary Ann Nawagesic and student nutrition program coordinator Olivia Merk—offered their support during this workshop by providing a creative, safe space for children so that their parents could participate in and enjoy the workshop.

Matawa and NAN provided pizza, salads, desserts and drinks. Everyone shared a meal together, and prizes were drawn for those who attended. "It was a great success, and all parties enjoyed the event," said Nawagesic. "Thank you, Marten Falls Education, and Chief and Council for their invite and hospitality." ●

## Henry Coaster Memorial School's Welcome to Kindergarten open house brings community together

By: Rita Mannella, Student Academic Lead

Celebrating a child's upcoming first day of school was the backdrop of Henry Coaster Memorial School's (HCMS) Welcome to Kindergarten open house held on June 24, 2024. Under the leadership of principal Tom Recke, Junior Kindergarten teacher Fiona Van Wissen, school staff, and Matawa's Pathways to Achieve Student Success (PASS) team, the HCMS community gathered to welcome parents, caregivers and their children who will soon reach an important milestone in the fall: their first day of school. With the support of this amazing group, I was able to organize this event and witness the community and school come together.

During the Welcome to Kindergarten event, parents, caregivers and children had the opportunity to meet school staff, meet children in the current kindergarten class, tour school facilities, and participate in the special unveiling of the school new logo, led by Doug Gagnon, Matawa's Cultural Education Coordinator. Gagnon's slideshow told the story behind the design and colors of the new logo. He also offered a smudge, explaining the ceremony to students and inviting everyone to participate.

There were five tables set up in HCMS's Kindergarten classroom featuring: math manipulatives like playdough, Mega blocks, and Lego

filled with age-appropriate items to enjoy over the summer provided by Matawa's PASS team. Of course, a celebration isn't complete without a refreshment table and door prizes.

Parents and caregivers were also provided with a new resource I wrote for them, known as the Kinderhappy Welcome to Kindergarten Parent/Caregiver Handbook. This guide offers an overview of the kindergarten program and activities to help their child prepare for their first day of school. The handbook includes frequently asked questions such as how to prepare for the first day of school, what to pack for lunch and some ideas to use over the summer to help their child transition from home to school.

As Matawa Student Academic Lead, I found it both refreshing and worthwhile to visit with the Marten Falls First Nation community, school staff, and students, and listen to their stories. This provided the Matawa team and I with an overview of some of their challenges and future needs, and it gave me a scope which will help define some of the work I hope to embark on and future meetings and conversations I look forward to having. ●



sets; culturally-themed coloring books and coloring pages with a literacy focus; land-based learning where each child was given a little pot to plant flower seeds to take home; and bags

# Welcome new Matawa staff

**Lauren McCulloch, Mental Health Intake Worker**

**Matawa Health Co-operative**



Hello, my name is Lauren McCulloch, and I'm excited to join the Matawa Health Co-operative team as the Mental Health Intake Worker. I have a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Lakehead University and am eager to bring my skills and enthusiasm to the Mental Health team. Outside of work, you can find me playing hockey year-round, and enjoying the outdoors, hiking, biking, swimming, canoeing, camping, and downhill skiing in the winter. I also spend most of my time with my family; I have a daughter and a son who keep life interesting and busy. Happy to be here, learn new skills, and work with all the wonderful people at Matawa.

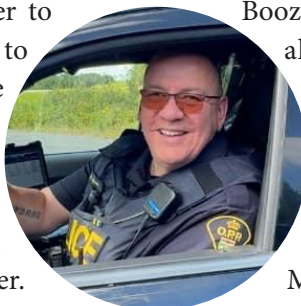
**Walter Monias, Housing Inspector/ Infrastructure Specialist Technical Services**



Hello, my name is Walter Monias. I am a member of Sandy Lake First Nation. I moved to Thunder Bay in 2011 to obtain my High School Diploma. I then went on to Confederation College to obtain my Construction Techniques Certificate and Civil Engineering Technology Diploma. After I graduated in 2018, I immediately started working

for a Tribal Council assisting First Nation communities in the areas of housing and infrastructure. I am pleased to be able to continue to work with First Nation communities in the housing and infrastructure fields with Matawa First Nations Management. When I am not working, I enjoy spending time with family and playing sports such as hockey, golf and softball.

**Darren Beebe, Security Lead Matawa Education and Care Centre**



Boozhoo/Tansi, please allow me to introduce myself to you as your new Security Lead for the Matawa Education and Care Center. My name is Darren Beebe and I was born and raised here in Thunder Bay. I am a very proud member of the Cross Lake Band of Indians, a Cree community situated in Northern Manitoba. For all of you Ernest Monias "the King of the North" fans, yes, he's from my reserve, and no, he's not my uncle, cousin, nor dad (no relation as far as I know). Haha.

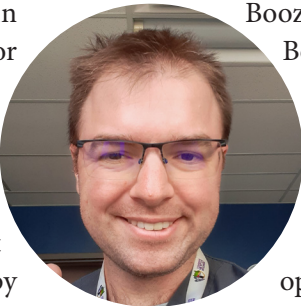
I come to you after a very rewarding 30-year career with the Ontario Provincial Police as a front line Constable where almost half of my work was done in the north in our First Nations communities prior to my retirement. I've been to, and have worked in, almost every Treaty 5, Treaty 9, and Robinson-Superior Treaty community here in Ontario.

I started my career as a First Nations Constable in 1995, hired by Webequie First Nation through the Ontario First Nations Police Agreement,

where I policed in that wonderful community until mid-1997. I then patched over to the OPP and was first posted to Minaki Detachment, where we were permanently assigned to police the community of Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) Independent Nation, where I worked until 2001. In 2001, I transferred home to Thunder Bay, and worked out of Thunder Bay Detachment until my retirement on August 8, 2024. I've always been passionate about working with our people and here I am again, enjoying retirement, and working with our people! My first day of work here was August 22, 2024, and I've been amazed at the environment already. I'm very proud of what I'm seeing here at the education and care center, and looking forward to the direction we're heading.

I look forward to assisting in keeping our students, staff, and the property as safe as possible here at Matawa. If you're ever around officer number D103, please stop by and introduce yourself as well! For any security issues, please don't hesitate to reach me at 807-633-8208 or at dbeebe@matawaeducation.ca.

**Justin Chapdelaine, Clinical Registered Nurse Matawa Health Co-operative**



Boozhoo, Whachiya, Bonjour and Hello: My name is Justin, I'm a five-year vet of the Matawa Health Co-operative (MHC). Over that time, I've worked as a community health

# Chi-Miigwetch to Matawa's 2024 Summer Students

nurse (CHN) across all 9 Matawa communities. My ancestry links me to Constance Lake First Nation (of which I am a band member) and Ginoogaming First Nation. Over the last year or so, I've been completing my nurse practitioner (NP) studies through Lakehead University and as of right now, all course requirements have been met and I am set to write my NP registration exam in a few short weeks. Until then, I will be working at the Chapples clinic, assisting with clinical duties and shadowing the team of providers. I can think of no place to start my practice besides the MHC, with all of you.

**Trista Penagin, Summer Student Matawa Health Co-operative**



My name is Trista Penagin. I'm student from St. Ignatius High School who enjoys participating in Indigenous-based events and volunteer work at school and the Indigenous Friendship Centre. I create many types of art, but prefer to stick with artistries or types that express my identity or the past in some way. During the year, I joined a youth council that recently gave Indigenous youth more responsibility, as well as a chance to make a change within the community. My role currently is community engagement, to help bring more of the youth into the community and to be less shy. I run social media as well as make posters to promote events at the Friendship Centre, and work with the Recruiter to

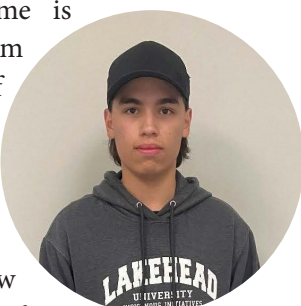
have more people join in youth council. While most of my time is spent doing these things, I also enjoy jingle dress dancing or going to powwows with my friends. I have currently been practicing several types of dances that I am interested in dancing one day.

**Ashlyn Echum, Summer Student Matawa Health Co-operative**



My name is Ashlyn Echum, I'm from Ginoogaming First Nation, and I'm a 16 year-old student that will be attending Grade 12 at Matawa Education this fall. I believe I'm a courageous, outgoing student that is willing to work to achieve my goals. Last year was my first time attending Matawa Education and I've never felt so welcomed and supported. The staff have given me many opportunities to become the greatest version of myself. I've also seen students from different communities gather together, make connections and gain friendships. I want to be able to give the help and support I was given, so what I want to gain from this experience of working at the Matawa Health Co-op for this summer is to really get to know all the communities and understand the challenges of the working environment. My overall goal is to learn new skills and make connections. I strongly believe the outcome of this experience will benefit me in many ways, so that's why I'm extremely grateful and proud to be working with the MHC. For my future

**Evan Wesley, Summer Student Matawa Health Co-operative**



Hello, my name is Evan Wesley, I'm a member of Ginoogaming First Nation and I'm excited to introduce myself as a new summer student for Matawa Health Co-operative. As I'm heading into Grade 12 at Hammariskjold High School, I wish to gain knowledge and experience throughout the summer and make many new friends.

Every Tuesday and Thursday I will be working at the garden at Bertrand Court, and every other day I will be around the main building to assist and support with work. I will be available to assist everyone with all sorts of work around the department, whether it be paperwork, labour, or inventory. I wish to learn from every new activity i take part in and contribute to our shared goals.

As the summer continues on, I cannot wait to be part of this organization and contribute to the wellbeing of this community. Thank you for accepting me into this position and I look forward to the opportunity to work with everyone. ●

# Living with us

## Paapaasay – Red-headed Woodpecker

Brought to you by  **Four Rivers**  
INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES GROUP

**T**he red-headed woodpecker is a medium-sized bird weighing between 56 and 91 grams—about the weight of 2 slices of bread.

As it's name suggests, the red-headed woodpecker's head, neck and throat are a bold red colour, with a black and white body and a light grey beak darkening at the tip. As it flaps through the air, you can see large white patches under the bird's wings.

Like other woodpeckers, the red-headed woodpecker nests inside a hole it makes in a tree—but unlike other woodpeckers, it will usually use the same nest for multiple years.

Their diet mainly consists of insects they find in trees, but these woodpeckers also enjoy eating seeds and berries. Like all woodpeckers, they wrap their long tongue around their brain for protection while it pecks into trees to catch insects. The tip of their tongue is barbed to help catch their prey!



### *Did you know?*

The red-headed woodpecker is listed as Endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* and is protected in Canada under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994*.

The main threats to this species are habitat disturbance and habitat loss.



Maybe you've seen this bird pecking at a dead tree in the forest in the Matawa homelands? If you have, let us know! The red-headed woodpecker will be featured in Four Rivers' 2025 Calendar! Watch for updates on the calendar's release on our Facebook page at Four Rivers Group. You'll also be able to learn more about Species at Risk, and other exciting initiatives Four Rivers is exploring.

