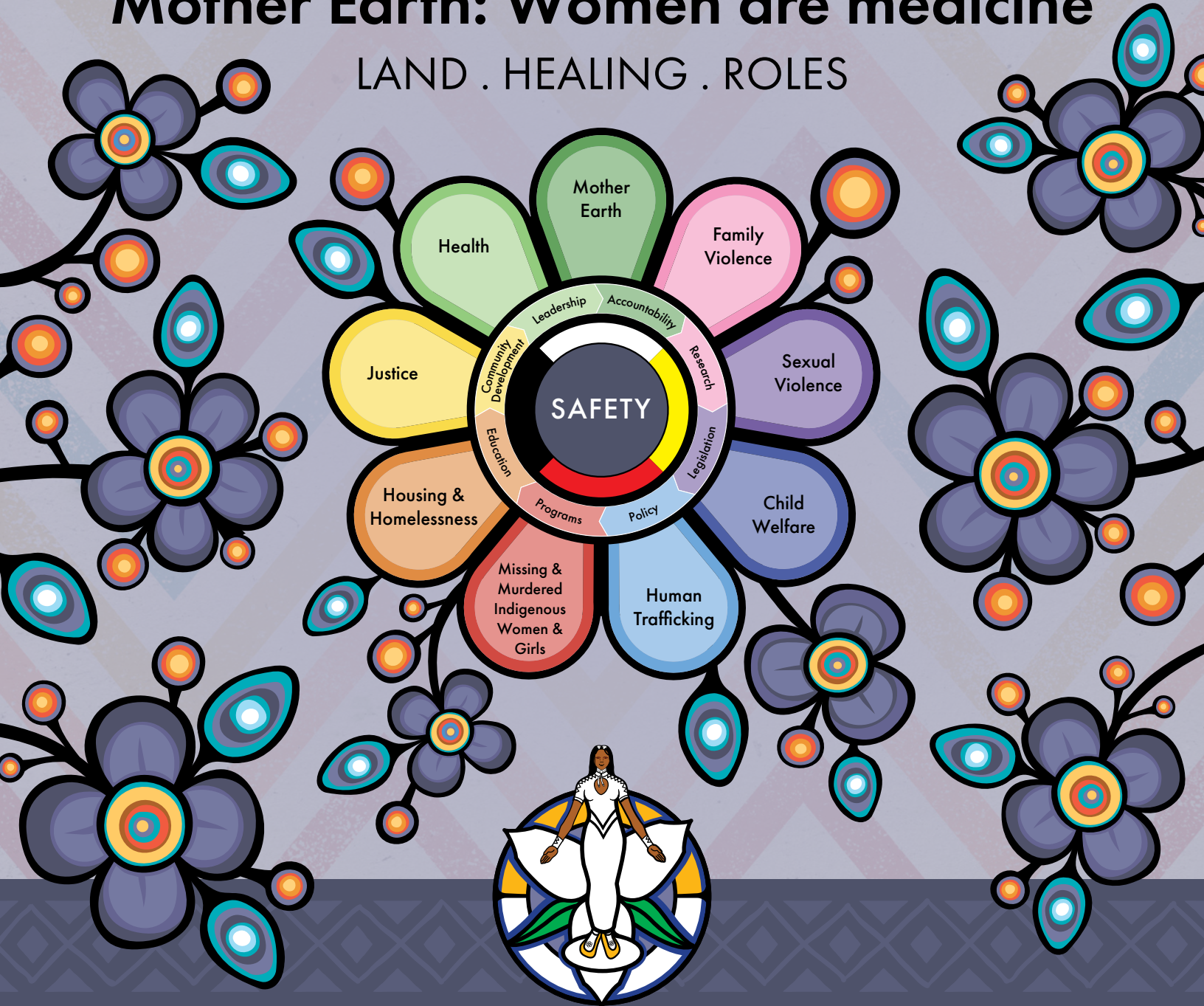


# ANNUAL REPORT

2022 - 2023

## Mother Earth: Women are medicine

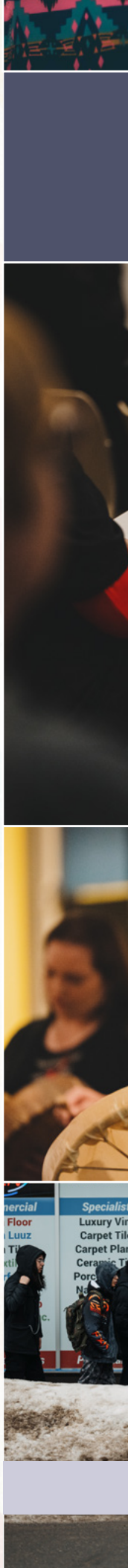
LAND . HEALING . ROLES



Ontario Native Women's Association

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"ONWA fought for me when I was not fully willing to fight for myself. I have a life today that I never even imagined possible. It wouldn't have been possible without ONWA, with the support I was able to get the help I needed...to build a new life."





## President's Message

As the President of the Ontario Native Women's Association's Board of Directors, each year I take a moment to reflect on

our accomplishments in supporting the lives of Indigenous women, their families and communities. This year, I am proud to share the progress we have made in working towards the goals set out in our 10-year Strategic Picture. Our journey this past year has been guided by this Plan and ONWA's commitment to celebrate and honour the safety and healing of Indigenous women.

ONWA's achievements this year have been substantial. ONWA worked tirelessly to secure increased funding, expand our membership base, and to continue to amplify the voices of Indigenous women at the provincial, national, and international level. We owe this success to the collective efforts of ONWA members, CEO, staff, our communities, and my Board of Director sisters and colleagues.

I was honoured this year to be part of ONWA's collective advocacy as part of ONWA's delegation at the 22nd Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I witnessed the strength of ONWA's leadership in action, the force of solidarity and united Indigenous voices speaking truth to power, and, importantly, the promise of our Youth Council members who stepped in and stepped up, reclaiming their voices to be heard. Our children and youth are sacred, a gift from Creator, and hold a vital responsibility in the survival and preservation of our Indigenous languages, agriculture, land protections, and so much more. They carry the wisdom and knowledge of their ancestors, and as we have always done, we must

continue to nurture and support them as they move through their life journey. I was pleased to see ONWA's leadership continue to invest in our present and future generations by supporting Indigenous youth to participate in international conferences. Indigenous youth are the future and the ones who will pave the way for positive change. We must continue to build their capacity and support young Indigenous women and girls to reclaim their roles within community as future leaders.

Looking ahead, I am filled with hope and determination. I know that ONWA will continue to work tirelessly to realize our strategic goals and build a better tomorrow for all Indigenous women today and for generations to come. This is our role and responsibility as Indigenous women. I encourage you to stand with us and support us.

Chi miigwetch,  
Debra Vermette





# Chief Executive Officer's Message

I am humbled by the depth and impact of the work we have been able to accomplish this year.

As we emerged from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are left with its impacts on our communities. These impacts are further compounded by the evolving climate crisis, growing inflation and cost of living, and ongoing systemic racism, sexism and discrimination against Indigenous women. As a result, we are seeing the increased demand for ONWA's safe, culturally-grounded, and Indigenous women-centred services and supports. Indigenous women continue to have to negotiate their safety to meet their basic needs often because of systemic barriers. I am proud to witness ONWA's programs and services continue to fill a critical gap in our communities.

In 2022-23, ONWA's direct 1:1 services grew by 42% from last fiscal year. We supported 489 Indigenous women and girls to exit human trafficking, prevented 218 children from being apprehended into the Child Welfare system, reunified 102 children with their families, and helped 480 Indigenous women and their families find safe and stable housing. Our successes are many and I am honoured to share them throughout this Annual Report.

These accomplishments were possible because our work is guided by the voices of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples, and because of the collective efforts of our members, staff, and communities. I am honoured that others joined us this year and reclaimed their leadership roles in their families, communities and Nations. As an organization, we grew by 11% this past year. As an Association, we welcomed new members to the ONWA community. I look forward to other Indigenous women joining their voices with ours in the coming year. Our work cannot be done in isolation – Indigenous women's organizations are stronger together.

To continue our success, the increased need and demand for services must be matched by increased and long-term resources. We continue to advocate for core funding for Indigenous women's organizations. This past year, I had the opportunity to grow ONWA's international advocacy work. I am taken by the common theme of short-term, project-based underfunding that I have heard from Indigenous sisters around the world, and echo their calls: create equality in funding models, and safety for Indigenous women. This is our right under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This means listening to Indigenous women, including us in decision making that impacts our lives, and providing long-term sustainable funding to Indigenous women's organizations who are on the ground and doing work with and in community. While both federal and provincial governments have endorsed UNDRIP, the time for action – not just words - is long overdue. In the coming year, we will continue to amplify the voices of Indigenous women and advocate for our rights both at home and aboard.

As we embark on the next steps of our journey, I know we are well on our way to becoming a Centre of Excellence for Indigenous women. We recognize the responsibilities that come with empowering Indigenous women and girls to support them in working towards systemic change. As we uphold these responsibilities, we are not only strengthening our present but also safeguarding our future. Let us unite in our commitment to prioritize the safety and well-being of Indigenous women and uphold the sacred roles we carry within our communities. Together we will create a legacy of strength and safety that will resonate for generations to come.

Chi miigwetch,

Cora McGuire-Cyrette



# Organizational Structure

## Our Vision

At the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA), we celebrate and honour the safety and healing of Indigenous women and girls as they take up their leadership roles in the family, community and internationally for generations to come.

## About Us

ONWA is the oldest and largest Indigenous women’s organization in Canada. Established in 1971, ONWA delivers culturally enriched programs and services to Indigenous women and their families, regardless of their status or locality. We are committed to providing services that strengthen communities and guarantee the preservation of Indigenous culture, identity, art, language, and our traditions. Safety for Indigenous women and girls is central to the organization but we also work tirelessly to ensure equal access to justice, education, health services, environmental stewardship, and economic development. ONWA insists on social and cultural well-being for all Indigenous women and their families, so that all women, regardless of tribal heritage may live their best life.

ONWA is both an Association of 13 Chapters (incorporated organizations providing frontline services) and 21 Councils (grassroots groups supporting community development models) as well as a front-line service delivery organization with 10 service delivery sites across the province.

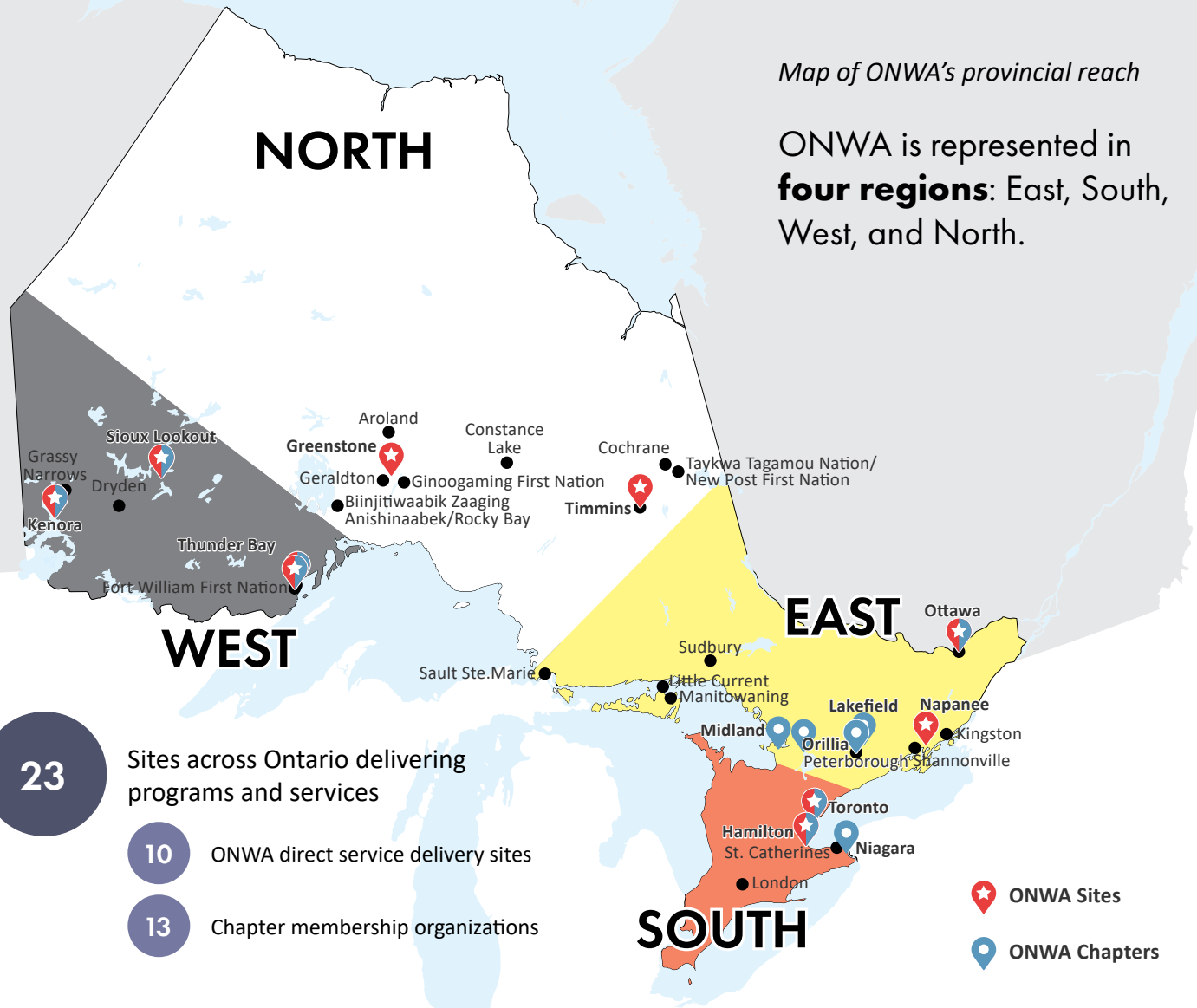
**ONWA Membership** provides Indigenous women the opportunity to collectively influence both national and provincial policies and legislation as it relates to issues that affect them. Chapters and Councils are registered by regions (North, East, South, and West) based on the Medicine Wheel so that the voices of Indigenous women are heard from all four directions. Collectively, we work in solidarity with Indigenous women’s organizations across Canada and internationally.

ONWA’s leadership is based on a **policy governing Board of Directors** comprising of twelve Indigenous women, including four youth Director positions to ensure the mentorship and voices of our future generation is reflective in our work. All the Directors are elected from ONWA’s membership. A regional Grandmothers’ Council provide advisory and mentorship support to the Board of Directors.

The current Board of Director’s listing can be found at: [onwa.ca/about](https://onwa.ca/about)

Map of ONWA's provincial reach

ONWA is represented in **four regions**: East, South, West, and North.



23

Sites across Ontario delivering programs and services

10 ONWA direct service delivery sites

13 Chapter membership organizations

ONWA Sites

ONWA Chapters

## ONWA Membership

### 13 CHAPTERS

#### Eastern Region

1. Biinaawzogin Regional Aboriginal Women's Circle (BRAWC)
2. Georgian Bay Native Women's Association
3. Lovesick Lake Native Women's Association
4. Minwaashin Lodge
5. Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekweg Services Circle
6. Orillia Native Women's Group

#### Southern region

7. Hamilton Wentworth Chapter of Native Women Inc.

8. Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
9. Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.

#### Western region

10. Beendigen Inc.
11. Biidaajiwun Inc.
12. Kenora Anishnaabe-Kweg Aboriginal Women's Organization
13. Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle

#### Northern Region

- N/A

### 21 COUNCILS

#### Eastern Region

1. All Our Relations
2. Bawating Anishnabeqwewok
3. Indigenous Women On-Line
4. Kingston Thunder Women
5. Rainbow Women
6. Tyendinaga Native Women's Association
7. Waibejawong Anishnabequek
8. Wikwemikong Anishnawbekwek

#### Southern region

9. Deshkan Zii Bi Indigenous Women's Association
10. Indigenous Women of Niagara
11. Métis Women's Circle

#### Western region

12. Grassy Narrows Women's Group
13. Mindemoyag Women's Group

#### Northern Region

14. Anishnaabe Kateri Association
15. Anishnabequek Timmins
16. Aroland Ladies of 242
17. Constance Lake Anishinawbe Quek
18. Ginoogaming First Nation
19. Mamowedew
20. New Post Women's Group
21. Rocky Bay Women's Council



**66**

Programs/Projects/Services



**188,000**

(187,565)

Total Community Impact

**136,000**

(136,398)

Direct 1:1 Services

**480**

People ONWA has helped find  
safe and stable housing

**489**

Women ONWA has helped  
exit human trafficking

**218**

Child Apprehension Preventions  
(Children ONWA assisted in  
prevention of CAS apprehension)

**102**

Child Reunifications  
(Children ONWA helped reunified  
with their families)



## A Year in Review

2022-23 marked year two of our Strategic Picture 2021-2031. ONWA is pleased to share the progress made in alignment with achieving the vision and goals set out in our Plan. We are well on our way to achieving our overarching goal of becoming a Centre of Excellence, recognized nationally, and continuing our growth built on a strong foundation of Indigenous women’s cultural knowledge and practices.

To ensure we get there, we developed a comprehensive annual operational plan that maps out the work we need to do and steps we need to take. This is no small task and required many concurrent and ongoing actions to move us forward over the course of a year. We cannot capture it all here – instead, we are sharing our highlights and encourage you to connect with us to learn more.

All our work aligns with the four goals outlined in our Strategic Picture 2021-2031. In this section, we’ve provided a snapshot of some of our achievements and key activities. In the next section – [Making Progress on ONWA’s 9 Strategic Issues](#) – we provide additional information on our progress on the four goals and accomplishments across our nine strategic issues.



# Goal 1: Strong and Stable Organization

To be a strong and stable organization, ONWA must continue to create networks, resources, and tools for Indigenous women's organizations to reclaim Indigenous women's leadership.

That's why we developed the **Building Indigenous Women's Leadership (BIWL) Program**. It provides capacity-building opportunities to support organizational development and skills through workshops, information sharing, events, funding, networking opportunities, and membership-led initiatives across ONWA's 9 strategic issues. The BIWL Program allows ONWA to continue to strengthen our relationship with members and effectively support members' needs and goals through ongoing engagement, evaluation and direct support.

In 2022-23, the BIWL Program:

- Hosted 21 workshops, 12 regional activities and 3 campaigns, including International Women's Day, Louis Riel Day and Honouring our Mothers campaigns.
- Increased membership by nearly 6% this year compared to last year, by supporting 2 organizations to become new ONWA members – *We welcomed Biminaawzogin Regional Aboriginal Women's Circle (Orillia) and Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services Circle (Peterborough) to the ONWA community!*
- Supported 3 Councils on their path to becoming Chapters by supporting incorporation applications – *We look forward to welcoming Kateri Anishnawbekwe Association, Tyendinaga Native Women's Association and Wiikwemkoong Anishnawbekwek as Chapters in the near future!*

We also continued to see ONWA's organizational strength demonstrated through the success of our **Centralized Intake (CI) Program**, which works to seamlessly connect Community Members to ONWA programming that best meets their unique needs. All Intake Staff specialize in the delivery of immediate, brief services, internal and external referrals, systems navigation, and provide trauma-informed, culturally grounded wholistic services.

In 2022-23, the CI Program:

- Provided over 117,000 individual services and supports across the province through a network of 23 service delivery locations, including:
  - 10,385 short/long term case management supports
  - 32,911 immediate services
  - 42,360 brief services
  - 31,612 supports with other services such as access to social assistance, obtaining a status card, and advocacy related to Jordan's Principle
- Coordinated hampers for food security to 500 Community Members over the holiday season
- Assisted 273 Community Members to maintain or acquire safe housing
- Supported 26 Community Members to attend residential addiction treatment
- Saw a substantial increase (34%) in service requests compared to the previous year, which speaks to how ONWA is meeting communities' needs by filling a critical gap in support for Indigenous women and their families
- Expanded from Thunder Bay to Ottawa, Hamilton, Kenora, and Timmins to meet growing demand for services and address system gaps



*"I am a 60's scoop survivor. I don't know how to reward myself. After attending the workshop, she shared that she learned that not all rewards have to be purchased, the reward can be an internal feeling and how you see yourself."*

*"I found the presentation useful and reminded me how easily we use lateral violence unknowingly. Will make me really think before I speak next time."*

*"I will remind us to be kind...build our young and older people up, not tear them down. Celebrate their accomplishments instead of being jealous."*

Finally, ONWA knows that to be a strong and stable organization, we need to look to the future. This is why we have a keen focus on empowering youth as leaders and encouraging youth to hone their knowledge. In 2022-23, this was demonstrated through the **Indigenous Youth Scholar Research Capacity Building Pilot Project**.

In recognition of the lack of opportunity provided to Indigenous junior scholars, early career researchers, and new graduates, ONWA launched the Pilot Project to provide 6 Indigenous students from across Ontario with hands-on training in qualitative data analysis and experience using data management and interpretation software.

As a result of the Pilot, the students gained training, work experience, and marketable skills that may help them enter the workforce. The Pilot Project is in its final stages and will be evaluated in summer of 2023. ONWA looks forward to continuing to use this model to build the leadership of Indigenous youth.



### **Recognizing Indigenous Women's Leadership**

As ONWA continues to grow its mandate and influence, including expanding our reach nationally and internationally, our organizational size and expertise are growing too. To support this growth in alignment with our Strategic Picture, in April 2023 ONWA's Board of Directors approved changing the Executive Director job title to Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This change was made to better recognize Indigenous women's leadership roles, offer a model for other Indigenous women's organizations, better support succession planning and individual growth and development, and more accurately reflect the responsibilities and scope of this position.

## Goal 2: Strong Cultural Foundation

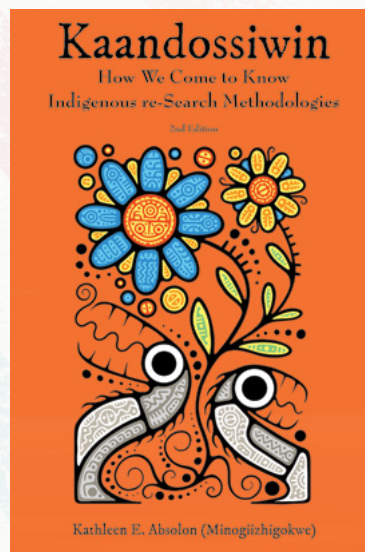
At ONWA, we know that all of the work we do is grounded in and guided by Indigenous matriarchal ways of knowing and being. The success of our work is intrinsically linked to our strong cultural foundation, and we ensure that all of our advocacy, research, relationship building, and programming is designed by and for Indigenous women.

In 2022-23, this was reflected in the **She is Wise Capacity Building Program**, which provided training in four areas that were identified by Indigenous women as important to their wellness individually and as they contribute to community: lateral violence, cultural-based practices, reclaiming voice, and healing.

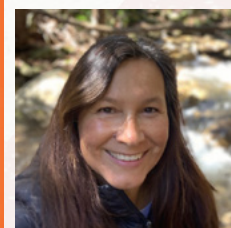
In 2022-23, the She is Wise Capacity Building Program held workshops and events rooted in Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and being, such as RATTLE teachings, water teachings, moon time teachings, and 13 Grandmother Moon workshops. The Program also created resources and toolkits for ONWA Chapters and Councils across ONWA's 9 strategic issues to use with their communities, providing opportunities for Indigenous women to strengthen their leadership skills and abilities. Resources included How to Host an Event/Workshop, 13 Grandmother Moons Workshops, How to Host Book Club, and a Drum Song Book.



*"I am a new Nookmis-grandmother and am eager to teach my granddaughter about her culture."*



*"We regenerate knowledge grounded in Indigenous people's truths, to restore humanity, we restore possibility."*  
-Dr. Kathy Absolon, Minogizhigokwe



### Kaandossiwin 2nd Edition Book Launch

In June of 2022, ONWA hosted a virtual Book Launch to celebrate the *Kaandossiwin, 2nd Edition, How We Come to Know Indigenous re-Search Methodologies*, by Dr. Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogizhigokwe). Dr. Absolon is an Indigenous scholar who is a Director at the Centre for Indigegogy and Professor in the Indigenous Field of Study in the Master of Social Work program, at Wilfred Laurier University. It was an honour to celebrate the release of the Kaandossiwin 2nd Edition, a work that focuses on Indigenous women's ways of knowing and being. We know the importance of the Indigenous methodologies centered in Indigenous approaches that reflect Indigenous worldviews which better communicate and translate Indigenous analysis within research. Dr. Absolon is committed to knowledge sharing that reflects how Indigenous women have come to know who we are in our communities and the practices that have sustained us from time immemorial.



## Goal 3: National Leader

As ONWA continues to work towards realizing our goal as a Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Women, we know that uplifting and amplifying Indigenous women's voices at all levels of government and across systems is critical. That's why in 2022-23 we developed an **International Engagement Strategy** to intentionally guide our work and advocacy in alignment with our vision and goals in our Strategic Picture 2021-2031.

ONWA's international work builds our capacity as an organization and our reach and advocacy profile internationally. It allows us to meet and develop new relationships with other Indigenous women and Indigenous peoples' organizations, and provides an opportunity for solidarity and collective advocacy with Indigenous peoples around the world. Building the leadership capacity of Indigenous youth is a key focus of our international work and members of ONWA's Youth Council are active participants in international opportunities.

In 2022-23, ONWA's international engagement and advocacy included:

- ONWA's CEO being selected as a member of the official Canadian Delegation at the **67th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW67)** – ONWA's CEO actively worked to ensure space was held for Indigenous women's rights and safety in all discussions and as it related to the Session's theme: innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender-equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.
- Attended the **United Nations 2023 Water Conference** with ONWA Youth Council members – to ensure that Indigenous women's leadership as water carriers and water and land protectors are upheld in environmental action and climate change responses.



Watch ONWA's CEO and Board Members making formal interventions at UNPFII22:

**Lisa Echum - The importance of preservation of Indigenous knowledge and language:**

<https://youtu.be/xS5LjosFxxk>

**Cora McGuire-Cyrette - Systemic change for violence against Indigenous Women:**

<https://youtu.be/OyLfcfr1kAA>

- Participated in the **22nd Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII22)** with ONWA's Board of Directors. ONWA's CEO and Board Members, including Youth Council members made four formal interventions at the Session, these were:
  1. to call on government to uphold Indigenous women's rights as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);
  2. ensure Indigenous women are included in decision making on issues that impact their lives;
  3. revitalize Indigenous languages; and
  4. end the violence against Indigenous women and girls, including indigenous water and land protectors.

ONWA is not only demonstrating leadership at the international level, but also at the local level. We are a member or chair for several committees aimed at supporting the safety and leadership of Indigenous women. For example, ONWA is the sponsoring agency for the **Thunder Bay Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee (UAAC)**. This committee is made up of 7 urban Indigenous agencies, 5 urban Indigenous community representatives, (including 1 youth rep), government, and other community partners who service the collective interests of urban Indigenous people in Thunder Bay. In 2022-23, the Thunder Bay UAAC met 7 times and engaged, identified, and addressed the local priorities and needs of the Thunder Bay Indigenous community through partnership development, community engagement and collaboration. Key priorities and needs identified align with ONWA's 9 strategic issues.

## Goal 4: Systemic Change

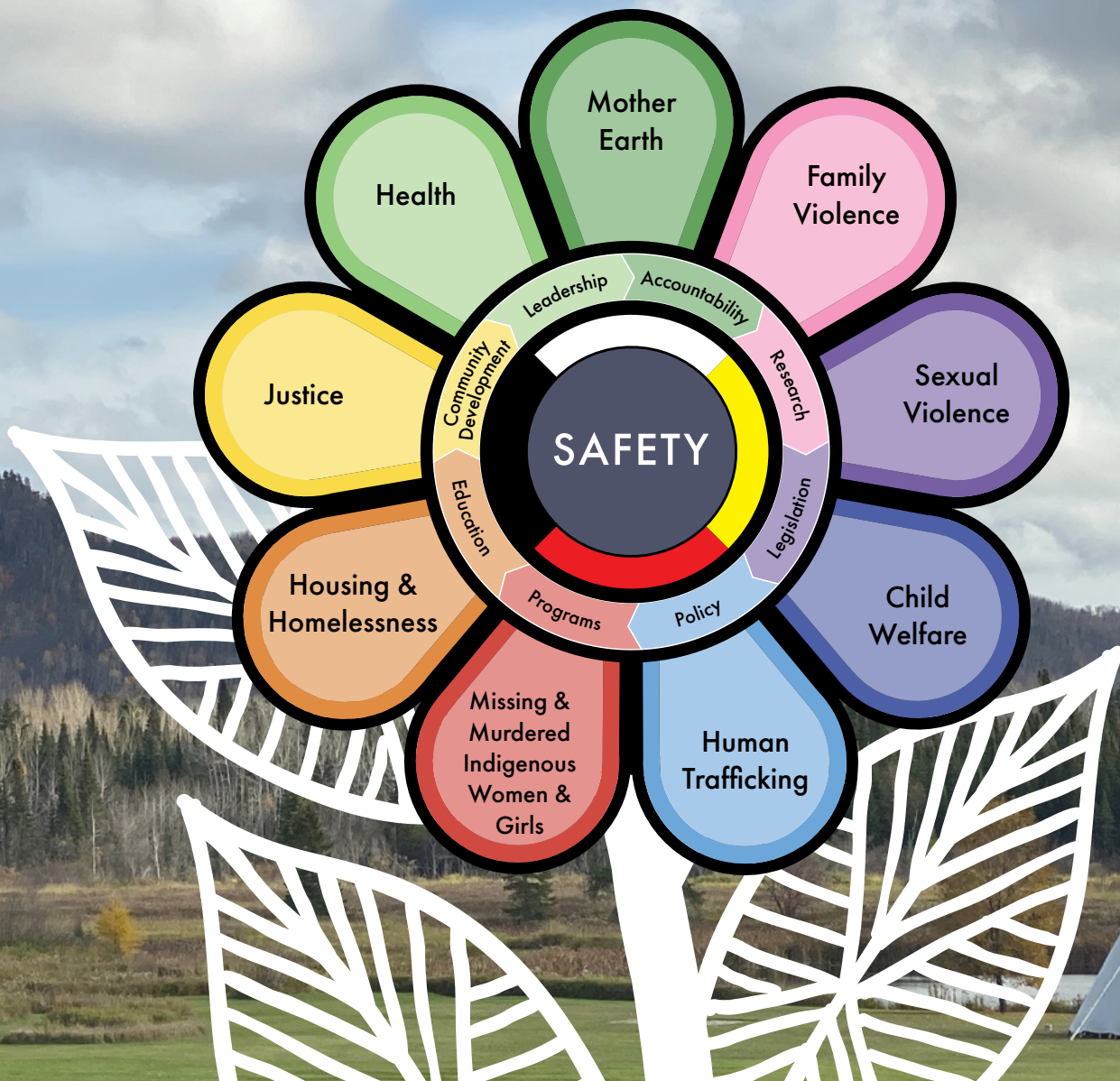
ONWA actively works to make sustainable systemic change by deconstructing current systems and reconstructing Indigenous women's leadership by centering Indigenous women's experience, knowledge, and stories. This is the foundation for systemic and legislative change focused on the safety and healing of future generations. That's why, in 2022-23, ONWA significantly **increased our advocacy with all levels of government**. Through meetings with government, ONWA is developing a strong relationship with senior level officials and Ministers to ensure ONWA's members' voices are present and at the table in government policy, legislative, and funding equity issues. In 2022-23, to amplify Indigenous women's voices and advocacy, ONWA's Senior Leadership had over 50 meetings with senior government officials and Ministers in the provincial and federal governments.

A key focus of ONWA's advocacy towards systemic change in 2022-23 was on the Federal government's current distinction-based/nation-to-nation engagement and funding approach. This continues to discriminate and exclude Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations - those who are not represented by national organizations, such as urban Indigenous women. We strongly advocated for a **distinction based/nation-to-nation PLUS approach**, which includes urban Indigenous women and is required under the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

UNDRIP recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples and makes specific note of the distinct rights of Indigenous women. In June 2021, the Federal government formally committed to the Declaration by bringing the UNDRIP Act into force. To implement UNDRIP and the



commitments made under the Federal legislation, the Federal government developed the UN Declaration Act (UNDA) Action Plan. ONWA prepared a response to the Federal government's draft UNDA Action Plan, which intended to ensure all federal laws in Canada are consistent with the UNDRIP. ONWA reiterated the need for meaningful engagement with Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations, and for further clarity on the implementation of the proposed Action Plan. ONWA's response was grounded in the voices and feedback from our members. We engaged with approximately 100 Community Members and ONWA Members at both our Annual General Assembly and through individual engagement sessions. ONWA will continue to monitor progress on the Action Plan and work with all levels of government on how best to uphold their commitments to reconciliation and the implementation of UNDRIP.



## Making Progress on ONWA's 9 Strategic Issues

ONWA's work is based on the knowledge and wisdom of our members and Indigenous women across Ontario. We recognize that they are the experts on the issues they face, but more importantly they hold the solutions needed in their community.

Our work is guided and directed by 9 strategic issues of importance for Indigenous women with safety at the centre of all we do, as depicted in the flower diagram (above). Each of the strategic issues are both distinct and interconnected.

This section of our Annual Report highlights our accomplishments and key activities by strategic issue so that we can show how we continue to progress towards addressing the numerous issues that Indigenous women continue to face due to colonization, sexism and racism.

# Mother Earth

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women are life-givers, caretakers, protectors, and knowledge holders in relation with Mother Earth. Indigenous women carry the wisdom of their ancestors, who entrusted them with the sacred duty of nurturing Mother Earth. ONWA's Mother Earth work is grounded in Indigenous women's roles, responsibilities, and rights.

## Program Highlights

### Land-Based Healing

ONWA's Land-Based Healing supports and services are incorporated into several of ONWA's Programs. Land-Based Healing builds on cultural healing and community connectedness. Elders and Knowledge Keepers transfer knowledge and provide guidance on ceremony, teachings, and interventions using land and cultural camps to support individual, family, and community-based healing practices. Family members are encouraged to begin their healing journey by attending programming together as a whole family unit. Land-Based Healing offers sessions throughout the four seasons to foster Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and re-claiming. Of importance, is participating, protecting, and encouraging the healing of Mother Earth and the water, medicine, and agricultural teachings she provides. Over 10,000 Community Members participated in almost 1,000 land-based events using both in-person and virtual platforms. Cultural programming included bear fat rendering, hide camps, hunting and trapping, medicine harvesting, and ceremonies.

### Youth in Transition (YIT) Program

In 2022-23, the Youth in Transition Program supported 40 Indigenous youth to connect with the land, culture and Indigenous identity, and to meet their specific needs and goals. Through the YIT Program's teachings, connections and support, the youth were:

- Empowered to take the lead in establishing their cultural goals:
  - Created their own jingle dresses and learned the teachings, protocols, roles, and responsibilities of a jingle dress dancer
  - Supported and welcomed into the Pow Wow community and danced at ONWA's 2022 Annual General Assembly
  - Started or continued their identity journey through safe adult and peer relationships in an environment that encouraged youth to explore their identity and culture as Indigenous people
- Supported through the justice system:
  - Education and awareness of the historical colonial barriers and current societal influences that have ultimately led youth into the Canadian justice system
  - Wrap-around services that supported 28 youth with court appearances and assisted 3 youth to be successfully housed following discharge from the corrections system
- Provided an environment that communicated a sense of pride and belonging, so that they began their healing journey in a good way. They were nurtured in reclaiming their identity and their culture through a partnership with the School of Indigenous Learning (SOIL).







*“Since I started attending ONWA’s programs, I have met new friends and feel more connected to my culture.”*



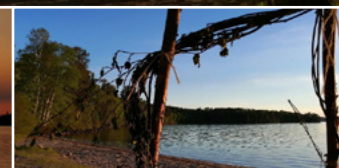
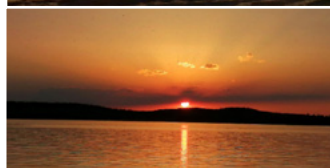
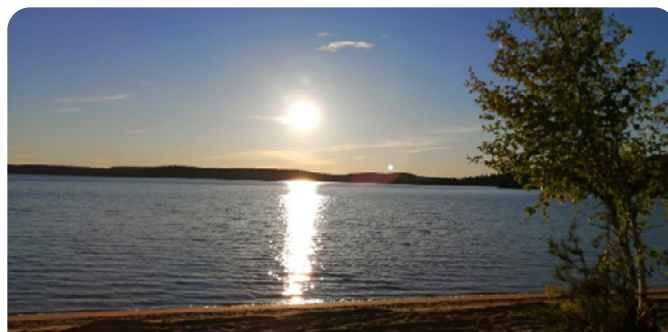
## Membership Highlights

Over the last 10 years, ONWA members have called on ONWA, through resolutions, to take action to protect and sustain Mother Earth. ONWA is committed to developing an internal and external Mother Earth Strategy that reflects Indigenous women’s responsibilities, traditional ecological knowledge, and practices with measurable impacts, acknowledging our ancestors, future generations, and all our relations. We look forward to developing this Strategy with our members and sharing this soon.

## Advocacy Highlights

### Emphasizing the Critical Importance of Land-Based Healing

ONWA’s advocacy efforts directed at the Provincial government over the past year have focused on the intersectionality of all our 9 strategic issues and, specifically, highlighting our responsibility to care for Mother Earth. A special focus was paid to emphasizing Indigenous women’s leadership through solution focused, land-based program designs and how having access to land, capital, and funding to support these programs is critical to Indigenous women and their communities’ wellbeing. Indigenous women have solutions to the issues that their communities are facing, but they require equitable funding and access to land so that Mother Earth can be protected and so that they have access to traditional healing modalities that have supported Indigenous women since time immemorial.



The devastating mercury crisis in Grassy Narrows First Nation has persisted for decades, ever since 9 tonnes of mercury was dumped upstream in the 1960s, with little action from governments to help the people. To this day, 80% of Grassy Narrows members get no compensation for the serious impacts of the ongoing mercury crisis on their health, culture, and livelihoods. To make matters worse, Ontario is still proposing mining exploration on Grassy Narrows lands against Grassy Narrows’ will and refused to respect Grassy Narrows’ Indigenous Protected Area. **Grassy Narrows Women’s Group**, an ONWA Council, and all Grassy Narrows people are powerful leaders in the movement for Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice. They have shown us that we can fight for justice against all odds and make real gains. As they did in 2022-23, this coming Fall (on September 27, 2023 at noon) Grassy Narrows youth and Community Members will march again in Toronto to demand action from Ontario and Canada and to achieve mercury justice and freedom. Go to [FreeGrassy.net](https://FreeGrassy.net) for more information.

## ONWA Mother Earth Strategy Commitment at the United Nations 2023 Water Conference

At the UN 2023 Water Conference, ONWA shared our plan to develop our Mother Earth Strategy as a commitment under the Conference's Water Action Agenda. We understand that to be a national and international leader, and to make real systemic change for Indigenous women, we must begin with land, water, and ceremony. In doing so, we will demonstrate the strength of our culture and continue the healing and wellness that ceremony, land and water-based practices have brought to Indigenous women for thousands of years.

Learn more about our commitment to the Water Action Agenda here:

[sdgs.un.org/partnerships/ontario-native-womens-association-mother-earth-strategy](https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/ontario-native-womens-association-mother-earth-strategy)

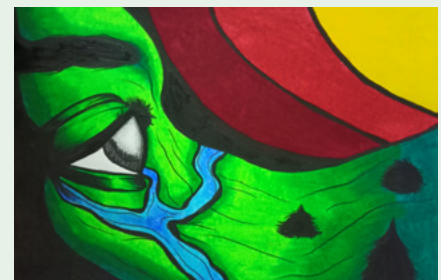


### Mother Earth Art Contest

To honour Mother Earth Day, ONWA encouraged Community Members to submit a photo, video, or story about the steps they have taken to protect Mother Earth. ONWA knows the wellness of the land is linked to the wellness of Indigenous women and their families. We can all individually take responsibility for our impact on Mother Earth.



**Nevada Anwhatin**  
(1<sup>ST</sup> place winner)



**Ravindra Subramanya**  
(2<sup>ND</sup> place winner)



**Mackenzie Shawanamash**  
(3<sup>RD</sup> place winner)

# Family Violence

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women and girls are strong and resilient, despite the systemic, physical, and emotional violence that they have been subjected to and the multiple barriers they experience when seeking help. The traditional roles of Indigenous women, girls, and Elders at the centre of their families and communities must be recognized as integral to the health and wellbeing of the community.

## Program Highlights

### Babaamendam – Trauma-Informed Program

The Badaamendam-Trauma Informed Program assists Indigenous women and their families to navigate various systems by working directly with them to access traditional healing and land-based therapy alongside other Western practices (i.e., a Two-Eyed seeing approach) as part of their treatment plans and healing journeys. The Program supports families involved with the Child Welfare system through advocacy, early intervention supports, and prevention services in order to support reunification plans. In 2022-23, the Badaamendam-Trauma Informed Program:


- Facilitated 86 healing and wellness programs with 1174 participants across the province
- Provided 122 formal and informal referrals
- Engaged 365 individuals in prevention-based services
- Supported 79 individuals with addiction intervention support
- Provided 70 families with Child Welfare early intervention and prevention services leading to the development of 21 reunification plans.

The COVID-19 pandemic added additional stressors to family dynamics. It is important for families to have access to safe spaces. As a result, in 2022-23, the Badaamendam-Trauma Informed Program:

- Completed 505 safety plans
- Supported 56 Indigenous women in navigating the justice system for sexual, domestic, and violent crimes
- Supported 109 cultural interventions
- Supported 26 women to navigate health services

### Community Wellness Program: Sacred Tree Program

In 2022-23, the Community Wellness Program facilitated 40 specialized programs focused on keeping families safe. The Sacred Tree Program which helps participants understand and identify unhealthy relationships patterns of co-dependency, power and control, and thoughts and behaviours that are challenging to their and their family's wellness. In 2022-23, the Program was updated with new concepts using a prevention-based approach to domestic violence that focuses on traditional and cultural teachings. Participants were encouraged to find wellness, wholistic balance, manage difficult emotions, and build strength, resilience, self-love, and healing.



*"I like how the teaching of the Sacred Tree honoured my role as a mom. It's hard being a mom and having the support of the group made me feel heard."*

2,964

Families supported to improve outcomes through the BFFV Program

102

Children reunified with their families

218

Children prevented from being apprehended by a Child Welfare agency in Ontario

What did you find most helpful about the BFFV Program and Worker?

*"...Closing my Family Services File. Allowing my family to grow."*

### Breaking Free from Family Violence (BFFV) Program

Over this past year, the BFFV Program continued to support Indigenous women and their families experiencing violence and involvement with Child Welfare. These crucially needed services were provided in 10 sites, in 10 different communities across the province. Program sites worked collaboratively across the province through regular, ongoing networking activities, training sessions (including the annual BFFV Workers training), and meetings to ensure program consistency, knowledge sharing, and positive outcomes for participants.

### Membership Highlights

**Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services Circle's** Indigenous Child Witness to Violence Support Program provided early intervention to child witnesses of violence against women in order that they may heal from the harmful effects of witnessing violence and thus avoid the later need for more intensive supports. They also offered the NiSafe Pets Program to provide temporary homes for pets of women fleeing domestic violence.

*The BFFV worker was able to support the mom in articulating her position and what had taken place which helped identify that she was a caring and very capable mother...if the BFFV Worker was not available to her, the CAS would have re-apprehended the children and made the mother wait for several weeks for this outcome." -Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle BFFV FSW*

*"Sharing and making something so very special with my children." - Niagara Chapter Virtual Healing Blanket Workshop*



Through **Georgian Bay Native Women's Association** programming, children and youth were taught how to take care of their traditional bundles. The Waabano Kwe Program, which in Ojibwe translates to "New Dawn Woman", provides women who are victims of violence or within the child welfare system with opportunities to identify and establish their knowledge and understanding of what is Mino Bimaadziwin "the good life."

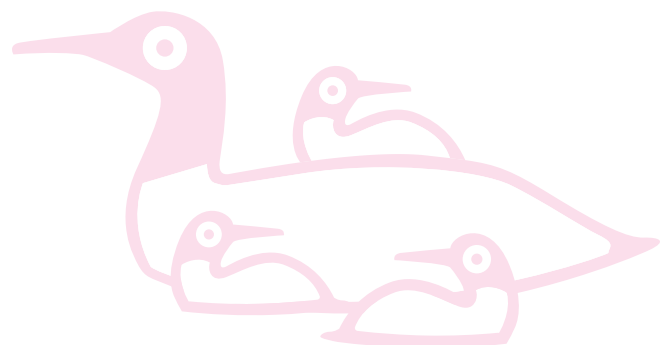
The **Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto** worked to provide family violence services, referrals, support, and case management to clients to address/respond to existing and emerging health, healing and wellness issues, or violent situations. The priority focus is related to reducing family violence. In one instance, the ONWA Chapter attended court with a client, providing her with a sense of safety and confidence and support to navigate family court. After court, they debriefed and planned for next steps.

**Minwaashin Lodge's** "The Courage to Soar" Program supported Indigenous women who are survivors/at risk of domestic violence and require support to identify practical holistic steps to education and training opportunities and career options. Their Oshki Kizis Lodge offers a 21-bed shelter for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and children who are fleeing abuse.

## Advocacy Highlights

### Highlighting Indigenous Women's Experiences of Family Violence in our Advocacy

With an understanding of the unique considerations of Indigenous women who are matriarchs, mothers, and caregivers, ONWA knows that Indigenous women's experiences of violence are underpinned by dynamics of the family. Consequently, throughout our advocacy and actions, ONWA stresses the importance of centering Indigenous women's safety, family re/unification (where possible), and access to culturally grounded healing in support of the wellbeing of Indigenous women and their families.



# Sexual Violence

ONWA recognizes that to end sexual violence, there must be collective cultural acknowledgment of the intersecting colonial and social systems that maintain and perpetuate gender-based violence against Indigenous women. Indigenous women's safety is integral to addressing sexual violence.

## Program Highlights

### Indigenous Sexual Violence Awareness Training (ISVAT) Program

The ISVAT Program provides workshops and training for Indigenous agencies on ending violence against Indigenous women, girls, and their families. In 2022-23, the ISVAT Program:

- Partnered with 29 Indigenous agencies including violence against women centers, Indigenous partner agencies, school groups and sexual assault centers across the province
- Provided 100 workshops with 1,703 participants

### ONWA's Sports-Based Programming

ONWA's sports-based programs offer Indigenous youth opportunities to engage in culturally-grounded sports activities, feel empowered, support their healing journeys, be physically active in a culturally relevant manner and enhance their feelings of safety. In 2022-23, 426 Indigenous girls ages 11-18 participated in the SHE IS STRONG Boxing Program and 124 Indigenous boys ages 11-18 participated in the newly launched pilot, STAND UP Boxing. Both programs emphasize ending violence against women.



## Sexual Violence Research Project

ONWA's Research and Evaluation Team has led a Sexual Violence Research Project. In May 2022, ONWA presented an overview of the Sexual Violence Research Project to over 115 federal civil servants from the federal Department for Women and Gender Equality. ONWA highlighted the importance of applying Indigenous research methodologies in our project and the significance of ceremony as the first consideration in research practice. ONWA also spoke with civil servants about self-determination in research, data sovereignty and Indigenous women's role as knowledge protectors. It was impressed upon the attendees that Indigenous women are the central source of knowledge in our work. While it is their collective voice that directs our work, ultimately, Indigenous women own their stories.

## Membership Highlights

The **Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto's** Trauma Support Program creates innovative approaches to support survivors of sexual violence, harassment and human trafficking, while building a body of evidence about what works to improve service delivery outcomes. In 2022-23, the Program provided more timely and effective supports and assisted to build capacity of organizations (community, justice, health, education) to better meet their local needs and pilot evidence-based programs/approaches that demonstrate improved outcomes for survivors of sexual violence, harassment and human trafficking.

## Advocacy Highlights

### United Nations' 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence

As part of promoting the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, ONWA hosted a Youth Art Contest on what ending violence towards Indigenous women looks like for Indigenous youth. ONWA also facilitated 10 workshops throughout the 16 Days of Activism

*"Knowing this information earlier in life would have made a big difference on how much violence I faced in my life."*

*"I feel safer and more confident walking around in my community."*

*"Every woman should know these skills."*



on a variety of subjects related to personal safety and ending gender-based violence. The workshops were provided to both Community Members and front-line staff from several agencies across the province. A toolkit was also provided to members on how to promote the 16 Days of Activism in their own communities. In addition, 242 participants attended ONWA's Strong Hands Stop Violence Annual Poetry Night, a provincial event held to observe the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – the first day of the 16 Days of Activism.

### Provincial Interministerial Table on Indigenous Women's Immediate Needs for Safety

ONWA, working in collaboration with Ontario's Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, held a relationship table with key senior leaders across several provincial ministries. Indigenous women's safety and addressing their immediate needs to prevent violence was a key topic of discussion, as was the need for stable, dedicated investments in Indigenous women's organizations so that we can continue to provide programming that is responsive to Indigenous women's safety needs and their healing journeys. ONWA also highlighted the critical need for government to engage appropriately with Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations when developing policies, programs, and/or legislation, as well as in the evaluation and assessment processes to ensure they are actually responsive to Indigenous women's safety needs.



*"This evening was very lovely, venue was nice, I love the poetry submissions and entertainment."*

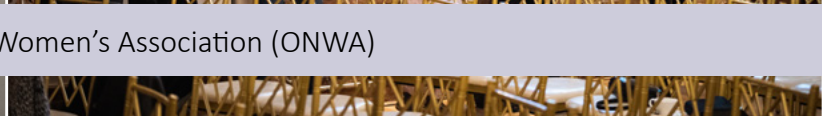


### Strong Hands Stop Violence Annual Poetry Night

ONWA's 7th Annual Poetry Night was held using a hybrid approach (virtually and in-person in Thunder Bay). It brought together poets, storytellers, writers, musicians, and spoken word artists to raise awareness of violence against Indigenous women and girls, and included poets Al Hunter and Mary Black, and singers Susan Aglukark and Sara Kwe. Poems gathered from across the province will be published in the next annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Book. A toolkit was also provided to Chapters and Councils on how to host a Poetry Night their own communities.



*"So very important, so very powerful!!"*





# Child Welfare

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women's voices and experiences must be centred in all efforts to change the systemic overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare system. Indigenous women should not have to negotiate their safety and wellbeing over fears that their children will be apprehended by child welfare authorities.

## Program Highlights

### Indigenous Healthy Baby Healthy Children (IHBHC) Program

The Indigenous Healthy Babies Healthy Children (IHBHC) Program focuses on strengthening relationships with Community Members and their families. In 2022-23, the IHBHC Program:

- Made 11,565 direct outreach contacts to 466 Indigenous women to build relationships and provide additional parenting education, support, and access to cultural practices.
- Conducted developmental assessments and goal plans to determine early intervention, referrals, and advocacy strategies, which included supports such as:
  - 309 cultural interventions
  - 37 new lives received welcome ceremony and resources
  - 27 mothers assisted to gain safe, independent, and stable housing
- Provided 737 wrap-around supports to Indigenous women and their families, prenatal to age 6, through service coordination and case management.

In 2022-23, through the IHBHC Program, ONWA established new partnerships throughout the province with the Métis Nation of Ontario, Indigenous Midwives, Anishinawbe Mushkiki, Métis Child and Family Services, Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, Meno Ya Win Health Centre, Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre, Independent First Nations Health Authority, Sioux Lookout Public Library, and the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre's Maternity Centre. Our ongoing partnership with the School of Indigenous Learning (SOIL)

*The IHBHC Program was introduced into the Kenora Public School Board where we collaborated on a cultural language and art project in the Kindergarten classes at the Keewatin Public School. Classrooms (approximately 37 children) completed a project about Wabooze, combining art and traditional Anishinaabe language. The project was a success and was displayed at the school. Teachers read the children a story with Anishinaabe animal words over the days prior to the project.*

*When I first started working with the Community Member, she was deep into her addiction and struggles with mental health. Her resiliency was truly inspiring as she was deeply affected by trauma, intergenerational trauma, and colonialism. She has now successfully graduated from treatment and has reunified with her two beautiful girls.*

continues to provide access for grassroots teachings and ceremony to support women and their families in their healing journey.

### Community Wellness Program: Circle of Security and Parenting Program

In 2022-23, the Community Wellness Program facilitated 40 specialized programs focused on keeping families safe. The Circle of Security and Parenting Program supported families as they navigated experiences of domestic violence and the child welfare system. The Program is offered in both a group format and an individual approach and helps participants to understand the complex requirements placed on families by the Child Welfare system. In 2022-23, the Program made 1,520 direct contacts with families.

*“Thank you! You are the biggest support I have right now. I’m so grateful for you and ONWA and workers who care.”*

## The Maamawi “All Together” Parenting Program

In 2022-23, ONWA developed the material for the Maamawi “All Together” Parenting Program – a nine-week group parenting program that will provide an interactive group environment for parents/caregivers to learn, share and practice integrated traditional and modern parenting knowledge. The Program includes detailed facilitator and participant guides that can be amended to meet unique needs and learning styles of participants. Over the next year, ONWA staff and members will be provided with training and supports to begin delivering the Program throughout the province.

## Membership Highlights

### Parenting Across the Lifecycle (PAL) Pilot Project

The PAL Pilot Project is a branch of BFFV Program that helps ensure the readiness and well-being of Indigenous mothers, families, and communities to reconnect with their children. The Pilot Project is intended to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care through supporting parenting skills and addressing family violence using a wholistic and Indigenous gender-based approach.

In 2022-23, 1 ONWA service site and 4 Chapters - Sunset Women’s Aboriginal Circle, Beendigen Incorporated, Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc. and Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association - delivered the PAL Pilot Project.

ONWA Chapters served a total of **2,054** people, through services, parenting supports, and traditional activities

### Beendigen’s Parenting Support helps Indigenous Family

*“A woman and her children had been consistently coming to my programming. She opened up to me about her addiction issues that initially caused her to have involvement with CPS [child protective services]. She spoke about going to treatment, getting mental support, and getting support for her children as well. She said coming to my workshops gave her an outlet to express her creativity while also providing her parenting skills to help her regain her role as a mother. She was consistent with programming, our meetings and her case with CPS was officially closed. She still has been attending programming since then and we chat often about the exciting things she has planned for herself and her family in the future.”*

-Beendigen’s Parenting Support Worker

The **Sunset Women’s Aboriginal Circle’s** BFFV worker helped a mother who had a file open in the Child Welfare System for 4 years and is a human trafficking survivor to close her file. Mom has obtained full-time work and doing well.

Through the support of the **Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.**, a kinship maternal grandmother was able to take 11 grandchildren into her home. She refused to allow her grandchildren to be taken into child welfare. Niagara BFFV was able to provide advocacy and wrap around supports, through an Indigenous child advocate and family items, that assisted in creating safe spaces.

The **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association’s** Youth Red Road Program supported youth who experienced violence and/or abusive relationships. Participants benefited from supports focused on healing, confidence building, improving self-esteem, learning healthy habits, and coping mechanisms.



## Advocacy Highlights

### Centering Indigenous Women and Children and Prevention Work in Child Welfare

In 2022-23, ONWA continued to participate in the provincial Métis, Inuit, Urban Indigenous Technical Table (MIUI) and to monitor and advise the provincial government on Ontario’s Child Welfare Redesign.

ONWA continues to advocate for timely and significant investments into Indigenous women’s organizations doing child welfare prevention work. ONWA was recognized as a designated Prevention Focused Indigenous Service Provider (PFISP) under the *Children, Youth and Family Services Act*. PFISP designation allows ONWA to deliver critical prevention services within Ontario’s child and family services systems to support Indigenous mothers and reduce the number of Indigenous children in care. ONWA’s advocacy, including PFISPs regulation development, will continue through 2023-24.

### Provincial Interministerial Table on Indigenous Women’s Experiences with Child Welfare and Human Trafficking/Sexual Exploitation

ONWA, working in collaboration with Ontario’s Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, held a relationship table with key senior leaders across several provincial ministries. Indigenous women’s experiences with child welfare and human trafficking/sexual exploitation was a key topic of discussion, which centered on the over-representation of Indigenous children in Children’s Aid Societies, as well as the how Indigenous children are being especially targeted by traffickers when involved with child welfare. ONWA provided recommendations to government to improve these experiences with an emphasis on “lifting and shifting” funding to Indigenous-led preventative and intervention programs in support of family unification – a critical shift given in 2021-22, only 5% (\$104,633,623) of Ontario’s Children & Youth at Risk transfer payment funding envelope went to Indigenous community and prevention support, while 85% (\$1.65 billion) was invested in Child Protection Services.

#### Child Welfare Engagement

– To ensure our work continues to be grounded in and informed by Indigenous women and community, in 2022-23, ONWA engaged with **228** people to hear their experiences with and feedback on the current Child Welfare System and to inform our policy, research and advocacy.

*“When I was saying - I don’t really feel refreshed like I should from my counseling - I do get that feeling when we talk. I’m really grateful for workers like you, I just want you to know that you do an amazing job. So, thank you for being there for us.”*

# Human Trafficking

ONWA is a leader in culturally grounded human trafficking supports, as our Courage for Change program is the largest Indigenous-led anti-human trafficking program in Canada. ONWA acknowledges the bravery, wisdom, and leadership of all survivors as they are the experts, and their advice informs all aspects of our anti-human trafficking/sexual exploitation work to keep Indigenous women, girls and their families safe.

## Program Highlights

### **Courage for Change – Anti-Human Trafficking Program**

ONWA's Courage for Change Program continues to support Indigenous women and youth to exit human trafficking/sexual exploitation. The Courage for Change Program uses a living model to anti-human trafficking which requires the program to adapt the needs of Indigenous women and youth through individualized outreach and programming that changes to fit the needs of each Community Member. The Program is highly successful at providing safe and successful human trafficking outreach and exits.

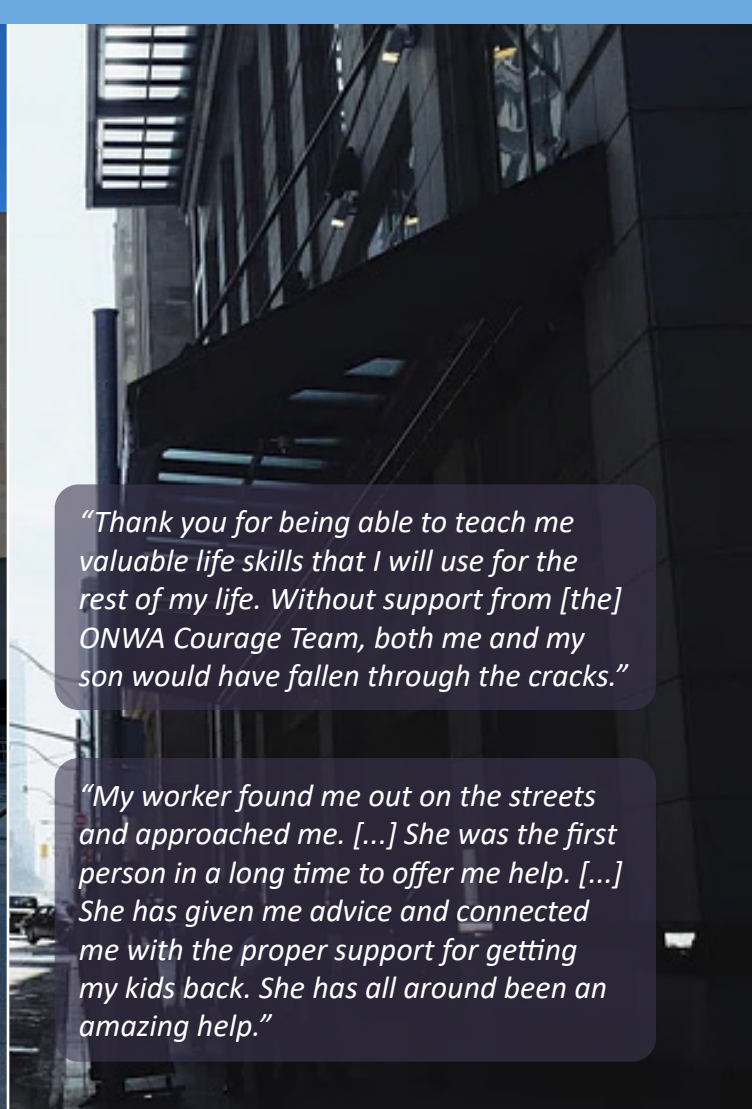
In 2022-23, the Courage for Change Program:

- Supported 489 Indigenous women and youth to exit human trafficking – a huge success (In 2021, there were 552 police-reported incidents of human trafficking across Canada; however, due to the hidden nature of human trafficking this number is an underestimate)
- Expanded the Program to 7 additional communities: ONWA service delivery sites in Ottawa, Kenora, and Timmins, and with Chapters in Sioux Lookout (Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle), Ottawa (Minwaashin Lodge), Niagara (Native Women Inc.), Midland (Georgian Bay Native Woman's Association) and Hamilton (Hamilton Wentworth Chapter of Native Women's Centre)
- Provided over 4,812 street-based outreach services

- Prepared intensive case management and treatment plans for 579 Indigenous women to access addiction treatment services and healing lodges
- Supported 39 survivors to access traditional healing
- Assisted 64 Indigenous women to navigate the criminal, sexual, and domestic court system
- Created 20 new partnerships, including the Ontario Provincial Police
- Provided frontline training to social work students who will soon be graduating

### **Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison (IAHTL) & Indigenous Anti Human Trafficking Mental Health Liaison (MHA-IAHT Programs)**

The IAHTL & MHA - IAHTL Programs continue to provide survivor support, capacity building and resource development to ONWA staff, members, and community partners to increase Indigenous women's safety and prevent human trafficking. The Programs build and maintain relationships with Survivors and community partners through ongoing engagements including 1:1 sessions, workshops, cultural land-based camps, and art therapy-based projects. The Programs are provincial in scope and delivered by ONWA members and community agencies, including the Native Women's Resources Centre of Toronto, Métis Nation of Ontario, Fort Frances Tribal Area Health Services, Minwaashin Lodge, and Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario. In 2022-23, through the Programs, ONWA delivered culturally appropriate mental health and addiction resources and training as it relates to Indigenous



*“Thank you for being able to teach me valuable life skills that I will use for the rest of my life. Without support from [the] ONWA Courage Team, both me and my son would have fallen through the cracks.”*

*“My worker found me out on the streets and approached me. [...] She was the first person in a long time to offer me help. [...] She has given me advice and connected me with the proper support for getting my kids back. She has all around been an amazing help.”*

Human Trafficking to ONWA staff as well as several organizations, including the Ontario Provincial Police, Georgian College, Pic Mobert First Nation, Peel/Dufferin Region and Rama Reserve.

### **Guns and Gangs - Community Safety Liaison (CSL) Program**

The CSL Program provides culturally relevant supports for Indigenous women currently entrenched in, as well as Survivors of, gang involvement. The Program’s framework is rooted in a cross-sectional wrap around approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of gangs, human trafficking, the justice system, and the restoration of the family through the empowerment of Indigenous women. In addition to direct supports, the Program also works to increase service provider and community capacity

on pathways to gang life and best practices for supporting survivors. In 2022-23, through the CSL Program, ONWA established 24 community partnerships to address gun and gang violence through an Indigenous perspective and support individuals to safely navigate existing services in their communities.

### **Membership Highlights**

The **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association’s** Aakwa’ Ode’ Ewin – Courage for Change Program assisted in providing immediate response to women at risk of human trafficking or leaving a situation of trafficking, by providing immediate response and stabilization with transportation to safe housing and access to supports, as they require.

### Educate Yourself, Educate Others Campaign

In 2022-23, ONWA launched the “Educate yourself, Educate Others” province-wide campaign to educate communities and provide information on how to create community driven safety planning for their communities and survivors of human trafficking and gang entrenchment. The campaign used digital billboards, subway, metro, and social media messaging, and allowed anyone with a smartphone to scan a QR code and instantly connect to ONWA’s Human Trafficking resource page ([onwa.ca/learning-resources-ht](http://onwa.ca/learning-resources-ht)).

## Advocacy Highlights

### ONWA’s Affidavit for the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform vs. the Attorney General of Canada

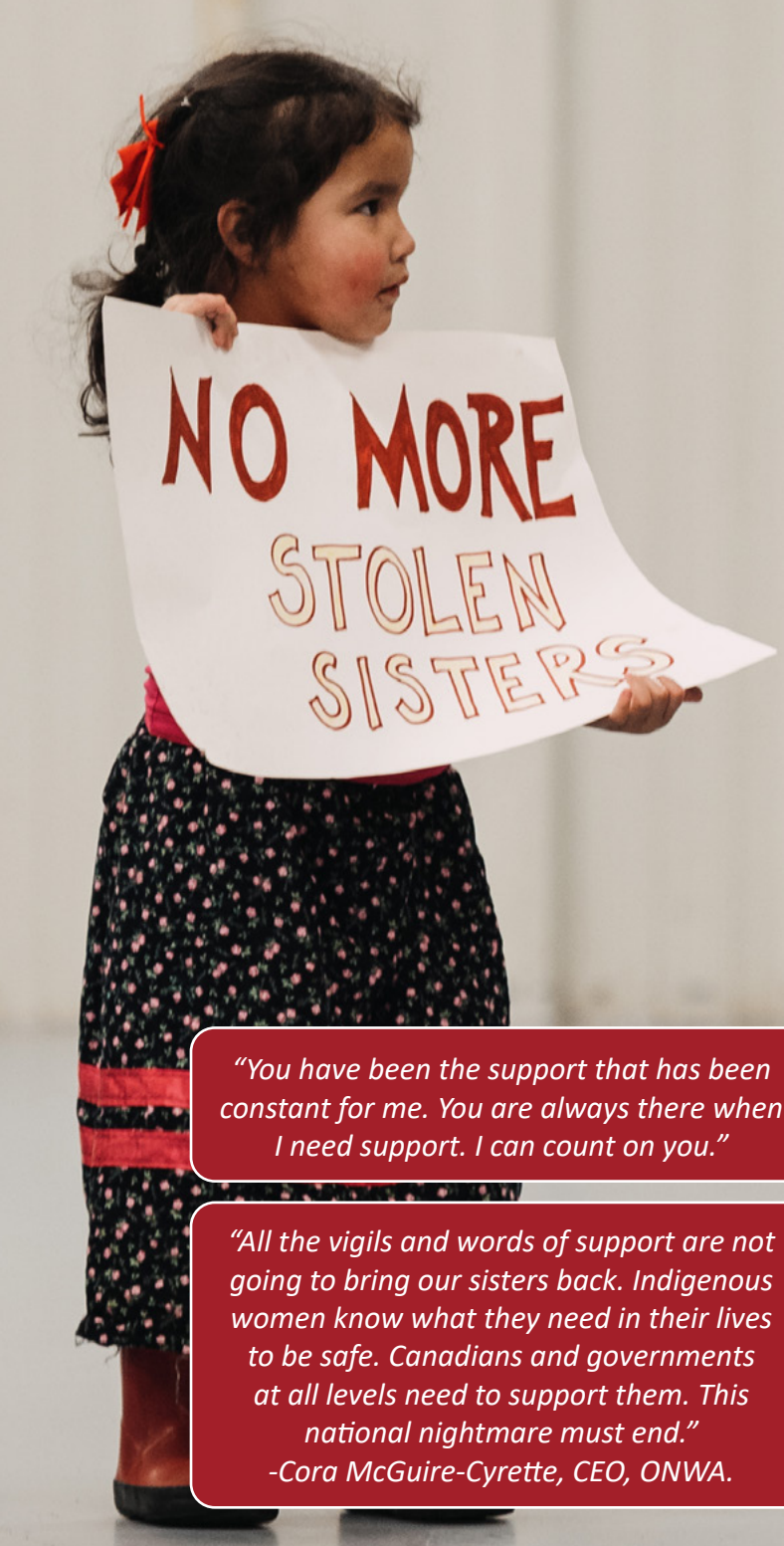
In March 2021, the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform challenged the constitutionality of the adult sex trade provisions in the Criminal Code at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. Most of the provisions being challenged were enacted by Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act. In 2022-23, ONWA submitted an affidavit to intervene in the case. ONWA’s affidavit spoke to how colonialism has effectively groomed Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people to be targeted for sexual exploitation and human trafficking. ONWA’s position is that Indigenous women’s lived experiences are inherently different than non-Indigenous women due to systemic barriers, discrimination, and racism. ONWA will continue to monitor the outcome and decision about the constitutionality of Criminal Code provision which will be decided by the Ontario Court of Appeal, likely later in 2023.

### Amplifying the Voices of Indigenous Women with Lived/Living Experience of Human Trafficking/Sexual Exploitation

In March 2023, ONWA’s CEO, Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, participated in a panel of witnesses for the House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Status of Women to provide testimony on the experiences of Indigenous survivors of human trafficking. Ms. McGuire-Cyrette’s testimony acknowledged the bravery, wisdom, and leadership of all survivors as they are the experts and focused on how to prevent and address the trafficking of Indigenous women and girls, and ways to improve law enforcement’s ability to identify and hold offenders accountable.

# Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Indigenous women have the fundamental right to live in safety. Yet, Indigenous women are still not safe and continue to have to negotiate their safety to meet their basic needs, often because of systemic barriers. ONWA honours the bravery, wisdom and leadership of all survivors and family members for their tireless grassroots efforts to raise awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and call for government action.



*"You have been the support that has been constant for me. You are always there when I need support. I can count on you."*

*"All the vigils and words of support are not going to bring our sisters back. Indigenous women know what they need in their lives to be safe. Canadians and governments at all levels need to support them. This national nightmare must end."  
-Cora McGuire-Cyrette, CEO, ONWA.*

## Program Highlights

### Indigenous Victim and Family Liaison (IVFL) Program

The IVFL Program supports Indigenous women and youth in their most vulnerable time. In 2022-23, the IVFL Program made referrals to addiction services, provided women with cultural interventions and supported women to secure independent housing post-domestic violence and reunify with their child after closing child welfare files. In addition, in 2022-23, the IVFL Program:

- Assisted 81% of Indigenous women and youth referred to the IVFL Program to navigate the justice system post-sexual assault
- Completed 2,037 direct outreach supports
- Created 142 safety plans to support individual healing journeys.

Due to its success, the IVFL Program will be expanded in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, and Hamilton soon.

### Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) - Supporting Families Program

The MMIWG - Supporting Families Program provides support to families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls through group-based healing activities or by providing direct family supports that promote healing and honour loved ones. In 2022-23, ONWA supported family members to attend local ceremonies, vigils, pow wows, memorial walks, and other events. ONWA also hosted its annual Honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Pow Wow and the Sisters in Spirit Vigil.

## Membership Highlights

ONWA welcomed the **Grassy Narrows Women's Drum Group** at the annual MMIWG Pow Wow. The Grassy Narrows Women's Drum Group is a group of women that are family. Their lineage comes from their late grandmother Hashinokwe, Sarah Kejick (aka Stone). Hashinokwe's mom carried a big drum, and her name was Kokoko o kwe. This means she carried and used a big drum over 175 years ago. The drum group has attended many gatherings, MMIWG gatherings, sun dances and ceremonies. Although they have had their share of extreme heartbreak and struggles with addictions and family breakdown, as a group of family members that sing with the drum, it has only enhanced their ability to be understanding advocates for their people. Today, they travel with the drum, in the hopes that the young girls of the family are mentored through song and ceremony. It is important that the next generation will carry on the knowledge and songs shared to them from many different nations of Indigenous women big drum singers.

## Advocacy Highlights

### Indigenous Women's Advisory Council

ONWA's CEO co-chairs the provincial Indigenous Women's Advisory Council (IWAC). IWAC works collectively to improve the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls, and advance positive and systemic outcomes. In 2022-23 the Ontario government released Ontario's first Pathways to Safety Progress Report, which IWAC played an instrumental role in accomplishing. Throughout 2022-23, IWAC convened four times to support progress on *Pathways to Safety*, and ONWA supported the facilitation of a newly formed Indigenous Caucus to foster relationship building and align on priorities. ONWA will continue to participate on IWAC and advocate collectively so that every Indigenous woman, girl and Two-Spirit person and their families can live their lives free from violence.

### Ending the National Nightmare of MMIWG

ONWA continues to strongly advocate to put an end to the disproportionate violence that Indigenous women face, in solidarity with Indigenous women leaders across the country. ONWA spoke with other Indigenous women's organizations and to amplify their message, we leveraged our social media and communications through different mediums (including highlighting the crisis in Winnipeg to global partners at the United Nations). In addition, ONWA shared several press releases calling for action to respond to the murders of Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, and Buffalo Woman by an alleged serial killer in Winnipeg, Manitoba. ONWA also raised the lack of progress on the National Action Plan at the first Federally coordinated Roundtable of Indigenous Leaders and Representatives and Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers (FPTI) on MMIWG and 2SLGBTQI+ People.

### MMIWG Oversight and Accountability

In 2022-23, ONWA continued to advocate for the development and implementation of an oversight mechanism for the Federal government's MMIWG National Action Plan. Through several engagements with the Federal government and written submissions, ONWA reiterated the need for the safety of Indigenous women to be centred in all aspects of the National Action Plan's implementation and evaluation, and for increased engagement with Indigenous women's organizations across Canada. ONWA remains committed to tracking the full implementation of all 231 MMIWG Calls for Justice to ensure meaningful and systemic changes are achieved that prioritize the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls.



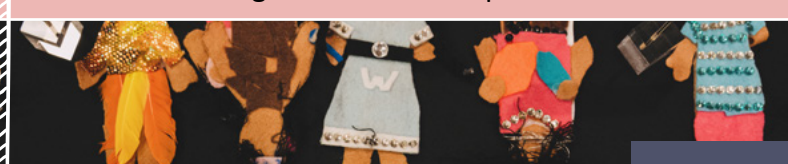


**MMIWGMB2S+ Valentine's Day Memorial Walk**



**Medicine Lines of Womanhood – MMIWG Commemorative Art Project**

The Medicine Lines of Womanhood - MMIWG Commemorative Art Project brought together family members/loved ones of MMIWG to develop art pieces in commemoration of their respective loved ones. The artwork was undertaken with the support of Art Therapy Helpers, Grief Counsellors, Knowledge Keepers, Elders and a network of family members who gathered during the Project. The overarching goal of the project was to create a space of healing for those directly connected to the trauma of MMIWG and to bring awareness to MMIWG through stories and art pieces.



# Housing and Homelessness

ONWA recognizes that housing is a critically important foundation for Indigenous women's safety, healing, and empowerment. Indigenous women require access to a variety of culturally relevant, safe, adequate, and affordable housing options across their life journey with specialized wholistic wrap-around housing supports. ONWA is a leader in culturally grounded housing supports.

## Program Highlights

### Nihdawin Program

The Nihdawin Program assists Indigenous women who are at risk of homelessness, and those experiencing homelessness. In 2022-23, the Nihdawin Program:


- Expanded from Thunder Bay to 4 additional communities: Kenora, Hamilton, Ottawa, and Timmins
- Housed 480 Indigenous women across Ontario in safe, secure, and affordable housing
- Provided 77 safety plans
- Assisted with 3,059 referrals to community supports and services

Through the Nihdawin Program, Indigenous women were supported with child welfare early intervention/prevention supports like sustainable housing, leading to successful family reunifications. The Program reduces significant barriers to housing for Indigenous women and youth due to substance misuse, assists with access to addiction treatment services to support their housing goals, and provides Indigenous women with aftercare services to sustain housing and begin their addiction healing journey.

### Youth in Transition Worker and Housing Supports (YITW) Program:

The YITW Program supports Indigenous youth (ages 16 to 24) in their transition from the child welfare system and assists youth in navigating systems, creating community connections, including with traditional Elders and Knowledge Keepers as they transition into adulthood, and accessing independent housing. Since the start of the pandemic, the YITW Program has seen a 69% increase in intakes and brief services, and 77% of youth participating in the Program have been supported post child welfare involvement. In addition, in 2022-23, the YITW Program:

- Supported youth to obtain safe housing that created a sense of belonging and well-being
- Provided life skills workshops that empowered youth to take the lead on their goal setting
- Assisted with resume building, how to cook on a budget, and learning cultural teachings, such as creating their own regalia
- Conducted a spirit name ceremony to provide youth with their traditional name and colours which helped them further discover their identity and connect to their culture
- Assisted youth to engage with post-secondary education engagement and training
- Created new partnerships with the Métis Nation of Ontario, Yes Employment Services, the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board, Lakehead District School Board, and the School of Indigenous Learning (SOIL).



*"I am now happily in my own apartment that meets my medical needs as well. I honestly believe that without support, I would have continued to be homeless. [This] work matters. [It] changed my life for the better."*



*“Thank you to ONWA for all you do. I am happy my daughter was able to make a jingle dress and now wants to dance and attend every Pow Wow. My daughter is teaching me stuff I was never able to learn and I’m so happy she was connected to ONWA and she’s become a more confident young girl!”*



## Membership Highlights

The **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association’s** Indigenous Housing Coordinator and Worker assisted Indigenous individuals and families living in the Midland and Penetanguishene area who experienced homeless or were at risk of homelessness in securing, or maintaining safe, affordable and appropriate housing. The Program also provided property management services to the GBNWA Aazhoogamin Wiigwaamon Gaamig Affordable Housing Project. Four out of eight new housing units are now complete.

The **Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto’s** Housing Outreach Program provides services for housing stabilization (referrals, provision of resources, furniture, hygiene products) with the goal of connecting Community Members to emergency shelters and maintain permanent housing. The Housing Program provided housing assistance and support services to clients who in need of housing or at-risk of becoming homeless. The Program helped to reduce and prevent homelessness through eviction prevention, housing access, and housing retention support services by liaising with external agencies, building community capacity, and advocating for housing opportunities.

**Beendigen Incorporated’s** Wakaigin has 15 transitional and 12 permanent housing units throughout the City of Thunder Bay. The rent is geared to the income of the individual and each unit comes equipped with a fridge and stove. Supportive services were provided to families in transitional units by outreach workers, and tenants were able to access programming and services offered by Beendigen. Memengwaa, which means, “butterfly” in Ojibway, Transition

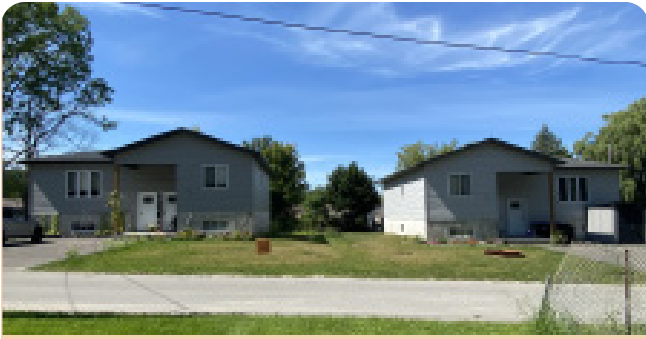
House was opened in December of 2020 and operates as a bridge for residents between emergency shelter and permanent housing. Community Members leaving the Crisis Home can move into Memengwaa and work with Beendigen’s Transitional Housing Support Workers to secure stable housing.

**Minwaashin Lodge’s** STORM Street Outreach Team provided emergency transportation to medical facilities, detox centers, homeless and VAW shelters, and other locations to meet Indigenous women’s needs through outreach 20 hours/day, 6 days a week.

## Advocacy Highlights

### Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)

OAHS is an Indigenous-led non-profit housing provider mandated to provide safe and affordable housing to Indigenous communities and individuals in urban, rural, and northern areas in the province. OAHS is the largest Indigenous non-profit housing provider in Canada, providing critical housing services to over 10,000 Community Members through 3,300 units in 2022-23. Since its incorporation in 1994, OAHS has supported over 2,000 Indigenous families in home ownership. Over the next 2 years, OAHS is working towards a minimum of over 1,400 units to help lift Indigenous families out of core housing need. As a Director Member Organization (DMO), OAHS is governed by a Board of Directors comprising representatives from ONWA, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). ONWA’s CEO continues in her role as



In 2022, Georgian Bay Native Women Association completed occupancy of 2 new buildings (4 units) in Penetanguishene

the Chair of the OAHS Board of Directors and supports OAHS' continued growth, the forging of new paths and partnerships, and making a meaningful difference in the lives of Indigenous people, including prioritizing Indigenous women affected by violence across Ontario.

In 2022, ONWA's Chapter, the Georgian Bay Native Women Association, completed occupancy of 2 new buildings (4 units) in Penetanguishene. ONWA celebrated this development that provided affordable and supportive housing with priority for Indigenous women and their children fleeing violence, escaping human trafficking, living in a shelter or over-crowded conditions. Indigenous women and children are able to transition into affordable, safe housing that is culturally rooted, and provides them with the stability and the necessary supports to maintain an independent lifestyle.

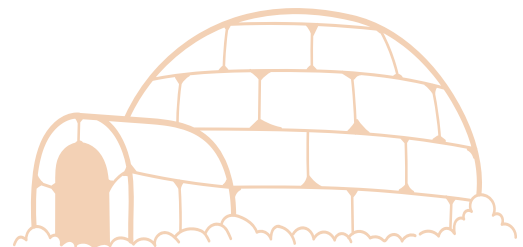
In 2022-23, ONWA continued to work in partnership with the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, OAHS, and MNO on the design and development of the Indigenous Youth Transitional Housing project in Thunder Bay. This initiative will see the creation of 58 units for First Nations, status and non-status, Inuit, and Métis youth experiencing homelessness, along with the provision of Indigenous cultural programming, intensive case management and assistance to graduate to independent living with aftercare supports. ONWA looks forward to construction commencing in September 2023.

## Urban, Rural, and Northern (URN) National Indigenous Housing Strategy

In late 2022-23, ONWA provided a submission to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) on their Urban, Rural, and Northern (URN) National Indigenous Housing Strategy. ONWA's submission was centered on ensuring that Indigenous women's organizations are included in the design, development, implementation, and delivery of URN Indigenous housing in Canada and the URN Indigenous Housing Strategy. ONWA emphasized the ongoing need for engagement, Indigenous gender-based analysis, and evaluation of the Strategy. In 2022-23, ONWA also signed onto the National Urban, Rural, Northern Indigenous Housing Coalition Declaration, which was created to drive a for-Indigenous, by-Indigenous URN Indigenous Housing Strategy.

## Provincial Interministerial Table on Indigenous Women's Housing and Homelessness

ONWA has been advocating and engaging with Ontario government leaders across several provincial ministries to improve Indigenous women's experiences related to housing and homelessness. Indigenous women's over-representation amongst individuals who experience homelessness in Canada was a key area of focus of our advocacy, as well as the linkages to experiences of intergenerational trauma and colonization, child welfare, gender-based violence, and human trafficking/sexual exploitation, and recommendations to improve Indigenous women's access to safe and secure housing.



# Justice

ONWA recognizes the urgent need for drastic changes to colonial justice systems. Indigenous peoples make up approximately 5% of the Canadian adult population yet, as of April 28, 2022, the number of incarcerated Indigenous women reached 50% of the female federal prison population (there were 298 Indigenous women and 298 non-Indigenous women in federal custody). ONWA plays an essential role in preventing and mitigating justice involvement through reclaiming Indigenous women's roles as leaders in their lives, communities, and nations.



*"Sincere thanks go out to the entire ONWA team for putting together the packages. The impact a discharge bag can have cannot be understated. I foresee our partnership with ONWA producing many exciting and beneficial opportunities and we look forward to finding new and unique ways to help our inmate population both inside and outside the institution."*

## Program Highlights

### Corrections Discharge Planning

Indigenous women who are being discharged from correctional facilities often face significant barriers in meeting their basic needs. In 2022-23, ONWA partnered with Thunder Bay Correctional Centre to establish a monthly intake table and programming, like discharge planning, and to provide human trafficking training to corrections staff. As a result, discharge planning may now include safety plans and referrals prior to release or an ONWA discharge bag to ensure Indigenous women and youth have ONWA's contact information, community resources, and basic hygiene items. In 2022-23, 128 Indigenous women received discharge bags to support their exit from the corrections system.

### Gladue Program

ONWA's Gladue Program recognizes the strength and resiliency of all Indigenous women and provides supports and services to ensure her voice is heard in the justice process. In 2022-23, Gladue Writers and Aftercare Case Workers continued to establish healing and release plans to empower Indigenous women and youth in navigating the criminal justice system. This resulted in significantly reduced sentencing time and eliminated current and pending charges. The Gladue Aftercare Case Workers supported Indigenous women and youth post incarceration with aftercare safety plans prevention-based services.

- 53% of the women and youth in the Gladue Program were connected to addiction supports through aftercare services.
- 91% of the women and youth in the Gladue Program had experience with the impacts of child welfare involvement, historical abuse, racism and oppression, human trafficking exploitation, and/or family violence.

## Advocacy Highlights

### ONWA CEO's Leadership within Thunder Bay Police Services Board Governance Committee

ONWA's CEO, Cora McGuire-Cyrette, was appointed for a two-year term to the Thunder Bay Police Services (TBPS) Board Governance Committee. Through this work, Ms. McGuire-Cyrette helps to inform Board policies to ensure that Indigenous women's unique safety needs are considered and addressed through local policing practice in Thunder Bay, and that Board policies are not discriminatory, sexist or racist.

*"I'm feeling grateful today. It's hard to believe the gift that's been offered to me from ONWA. I want you to know that it's sincere, thank you so much."*

*"ONWA was that family support I should have had as a child."*

*"Senator Murray Sinclair provided a pathway towards restorative justice in addressing systemic racism, I've made the decision to take on this responsibility to work on developing a path towards the implementation of the recommendations through accountability at a governance level. This is not an easy task, but our collective community cannot wait any longer for, we must begin action now."*

*– Cora McGuire-Cyrette, CEO, ONWA*



# Health

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women have inherent knowledge about wellness, and how to heal themselves, their families, and communities. Yet, Indigenous women in Canada experience poorer social determinants of health, poorer overall health outcomes, higher rates of illness and chronic disease than non-Indigenous women, and often lack access to healthcare that meets their needs.

## Program Highlights

### Mental Health and Wellness Program

The Mental Health and Wellness Program provides Indigenous women and their families with access to culture and ceremony through land-based therapy. In 2022-23, the Mental Health and Wellness Program:

- Provided over 1500 participants specialized family self care and mental wellness workshops
- Collaborated with Grief Recovery Specialists and Elders to deliver specialized 4-day grief recovery groups that focused on grief experiences and responses to loss. Community Members explored practices for processing emotions related to grief and participated in a sharing circle with a sacred fire to honour their experiences.
- Made over 3400 outreach contacts to Community Members experiencing mental health and addictions
- Created a 4-week pre-treatment group called Planting Semah to support individuals beginning their addiction journey. The group is founded on sacred medicine teachings and explores the traditional teachings of Tobacco, Sage, Cedar, and Sweetgrass to build knowledge and skills. Participants planted tobacco seeds with the intention of being gifted to the next session participants and messages of positivity are written on the planting pots to support a sense of encouragement and community.



*"I wouldn't be able to survive without the help that ONWA and your (Ska-Be) programs offers."*

*"The Ska-Be worker has helped me and my daughter and I can't thank her enough. Thank you for being a friend."*

### Ska-Be Program

The Ska-be (Helper) Program supports seniors and those with chronic illness or disabilities to live independently by filling a critical gap in elder services, food security, housing, on-site supports, and safety. By placing a high priority on culture, tradition and identity, the program offers a high-quality services, advocacy and culturally safe care and programming to Indigenous seniors. This service helps to keep seniors in their home through 1:1 supports, and minor home care services. In 2022-23, the Ska-Be Program was delivered by 2 ONWA members - Georgian Bay Native Women's Association and Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc – and at 1 ONWA site. Together they:

- Offered programming and home visiting services
- Made 664 direct case management contacts with Community Members
- Supported 145 Community Members with cultural intervention supports such as Pow Wow, smudging kits, and traditional medicines, and 98 individuals received health services and transportation supports.



**835**  
Participants

**1,010,536**  
Minutes of Exercise Logged

### Mocc Walk Challenge

The annual Mocc Walk Challenge is a highly successful annual walking challenge to support and increase physical activity amongst Indigenous women and their families, and increase knowledge that diabetes can be managed and/or prevented by adopting a healthy eating and physically active lifestyle. ONWA also introduced a Classroom Challenge in 2022-23, to encourage youth participation and build understanding of cultural teachings about how playing sports can promote wellness through all sections of the medicine wheel.

### Indigenous Diabetes Education Program (IDEP)

The IDEP increases awareness by providing Indigenous women and their families with information, resources, and support to control and prevent diabetes within the Indigenous community. In 2022-23:

- Educational topics focused on diabetes screening and prevention, basic foot care, basic diabetes information, smoking cessation, and the importance of being physically active.
- Fitness sessions were incorporated into programming such as Pow Wow dancing, laughter yoga, home workouts and ONWA’s annual Mocc Walk Challenge
- A provincial campaign was held in November 2022 recognizing and addressing Diabetes Awareness
- Weekly workshops and classes were held promoting medicine wheel teaching, various forms of exercise classes and art therapy sessions.

### Responsible Gambling Awareness (RGA) Program

The RGA Program provides community awareness, education, prevention, and individual referrals to Indigenous women, Community Members and their families in a culturally appropriate manner. In 2022-23, the RGA Program:

- Provided presentations such as “The Art of Balance” and “Gaming & Streaming Safety” to provide information on the signs of over usage, signs of problem gambling/gaming, and personal self-assessments.
- Hosted a provincial awareness campaign that launched weekly webinars focusing on gaming and streaming safety on the internet and where to find help.
- Distributed 250 sets of the dice game “Legend of the Four Winds” which are story cubes created as a tool to bring communities closer together through sharing circles and story.
- Incorporated cultural teachings and mentored 5 youth in fire keeping teachings and protocol.

### Youth Life Promotion (YLP) Program

The YLP Program supports Indigenous youth as they learn culturally grounded skills, as well as a positive role development. The program provides culturally grounded teachings to address, build awareness, and prevent youth suicide. Youth and a cultural mentor work together as youth learn and experience new skills to help support themselves and their community. The YLP Program’s land-based activities promote strong cultural identity and traditional knowledge practices. In 2022-23, the YLP Program:

- Hosted two large events: Dancing Our Way Back – Reconciliation, Healing and Gathering Together to Spread Kindness
- Worked with Indigenous youth to make a complete ribbon skirt
- Supported youth to take up their leadership roles – youth participated in ONWA’s vaccination radio ad campaign



## Mindimooyenh Health Clinic

The Mindimooyenh Health Clinic provides culturally safe access to COVID-19 vaccines, flu vaccinations, traditional medicines, and land-based healing programs in Thunder Bay. The Clinic continued to have a 99% overall Community Member satisfaction rating. In 2022-23, the Clinic:

- Hosted 184 vaccination clinics, administering 1,434 COVID-19, and 454 flu vaccinations
- Provided training and guidance to ONWA staff and members regarding PPE, COVID-19 vaccine doses and safe return to office practices
- Provided 23 cultural, land-based workshops to 324 participants on topics such as healthy sexuality, blood pressure monitoring, traditional medicine use, daily foot checks, diabetes related information, healthy eating, and the importance of physical activity.
- Launched a provincial media campaign to address vaccine hesitancy associated with booster doses, including social media, digital billboards, videos of real time vaccine experiences within our Clinic, Community Member messages on radio and public television, and a radio campaign featuring ONWA staff and youth to combat vaccine hesitancy in younger population and to promote safe practices over the holiday season.
- Increased its outreach to Indigenous youth to address vaccination hesitancy and increase COVID-19 vaccinations. The Clinic collaborated with the Thunder Bay school systems, Indigenous partner organizations and the City of Thunder Bay and participated in major City events to raise awareness and education and increase the number of youth getting vaccinated.
- Provided services such as first aid, vaccinations and health teachings at community events through the mobile clinic. The mobile clinic provides an opportunity to vaccinate underserved populations such as those with mobility or sensory concerns in their homes.



## Indigenous Women's Health Program

The Indigenous Women's Health Program is delivered by 3 ONWA members – Niagara Chapter of Native Women, Georgian Bay Native Women's Association, and Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle – and focuses on the prevention and awareness of diabetes in Indigenous women and their families. The Program supported Community Members in a variety of ways and in 2022-23 ONWA members continued to bring a medicine wheel approach to health into focus through workshops, 1:1 supports and system navigation. In addition, 14 workshops on self-care, family gathering, joyful activity, harvesting traditional and local foods, traditional ceremonies, and personal financial knowledge were provided.

## Indigenous Health Outreach Program

The Indigenous Health Outreach Program is located in 3 communities across Ontario: Thunder Bay by Biidaajiuwn Inc, in Sioux Lookout by Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle and in Greenstone at ONWA's service delivery site. Health Outreach Workers organized and facilitated health promotion, illness prevention and family violence workshops and presentations, and referred Community Members to Indigenous cultural resources and appropriate health service providers and agencies. Health Outreach Workers also provide Community Members with supports, including home visits, and liaise with Indigenous and mainstream health service providers to increase Community Members' access to these services. A priority for this Program is to increase Indigenous representation on health decision-making bodies. In 2022-23, the Indigenous Health Outreach Program provided:

- 397 Community Member based services
- 918 Community Member with 88 group based activities



*“The Niagara Chapter of Native Women and the Ska-be program has been amazing to my family. The Ska-be worker is an amazing person and she is always happy and very helpful. She always cheers me up and brings me things that just brighten up my day. Thank you, Ska-be worker, for all you do!” - Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc. Ska-be participant.”*

## Membership Highlights

To address food security, **Sunset Women’s Aboriginal Circle’s** Indigenous Women’s Health Worker in Sioux Lookout held programming providing health foods resources to Community Members, including Bakade: Feeding the Hungry Program, Community Kitchen, and Smoothie Making.

Through the **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association**, each week Community Members gathered for Chair Yoga on Zoom. It was wonderful to see the improvement of the participants range of motion. Everyone was eager to try new stretches, and some stated they were able to touch their toes, and they haven’t been able to in years. In addition to mobility, this gathering time was joyful as all could see each other virtually and have some friendly discussions.

The Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association’s Miiigwe Miijim (Giving Food) Program offered a monthly top up of milk, bread, eggs, cheese, yogurt, potatoes, and a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables to senior Community Members in need. Recipients of the monthly top up were supported based of health, mobility and financial concerns.

In addition, the Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association IDWHP Worker created a large equipment lending program, that provided yoga mats, foot care kits, Fit Bits, Fit Kits, iPads, and urban pole/“walking sticks.”

## Listening to members: advocating against racism and discrimination in the health care system

ONWA’s work is guided by the voices of our members. In 2021, ONWA was directed by members to build relationships with health care providers and governments to develop and advance anti-racism strategies and to advocate for Indigenous-specific cultural safety education to be provided to all members of the health agencies in Ontario. ONWA continues to support and assist Indigenous women when accessing health systems and advocates for improved health care services for Indigenous women, girls, and their families. In 2022-23, ONWA:

1. Developed Indigenous women’s specific cultural safety training for health care providers.
2. Improved relationships with key players in the health care system to advocate for Indigenous women’s safety in accessing health care.
3. Advocated for increased funding for ONWA to offer culturally safe, trauma-informed health services for Indigenous women in Ontario.

*“Braiding in Tenderness Event was a 3-day event celebrating Indigenous women’s success stories. During this 3 day retreat we saw Elders talking with women, children running around laughing, connections, and newfound relationships. This event supported Indigenous women who have shown the courage for change.” - Georgian Bay*

*“The fishing days were a huge success for individuals, as many that joined the fishing events, had never been, or hadn’t been in years. Allowing these individuals to relive their passion of living off the land was amazing to see.” - SWAC*

## Advocacy Highlights

### Research Partnership Development

Over 2022-23, ONWA worked to establish the Research and Evaluation department and build relationships with national research networks, including engaging with academic institutions to discuss possibilities for partnerships and community led collaboration. In 2022-23, ONWA met with several potential research partners including the Carleton University to explore grants and funding available through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and direct partnerships with the university. Research partnerships are an opportunity provide ONWA the space to discuss the needs of Indigenous women when research is conducted.

### Provincial Health Collaboration and Advocacy

ONWA continues to advocate for anti-racism and equitable access to health care through the work of the Urban Indigenous Health Table and the Joint Ontario Cancer Care Committee led by Ontario Health. In 2022-23, ONWA participated in engagements with Ontario Health to review

and provide feedback on a proposed Indigenous Health Framework. ONWA will continue to work with Ontario Health through the refinement of this framework as well as through the eventual development of an Indigenous specific Health Plan. Through these activities, ONWA continues to advocate for Indigenous women’s safety in healthcare and action on our 2021 membership resolution to support anti-racism initiatives.

### Provincial Interministerial Table on Improving Indigenous Women’s Experiences in Health Care

ONWA, working in collaboration with Ontario’s Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, held a relationship table with key senior leaders across various provincial ministries on improving Indigenous women’s experiences in health care. ONWA emphasized the need to centre Indigenous women’s inherent knowledge about wellness and how to heal themselves, their families, and their communities, as well as the colonial and discriminatory practices that Indigenous women face in healthcare, and the ongoing lack of Indigenous representation and healing methodologies within health systems.



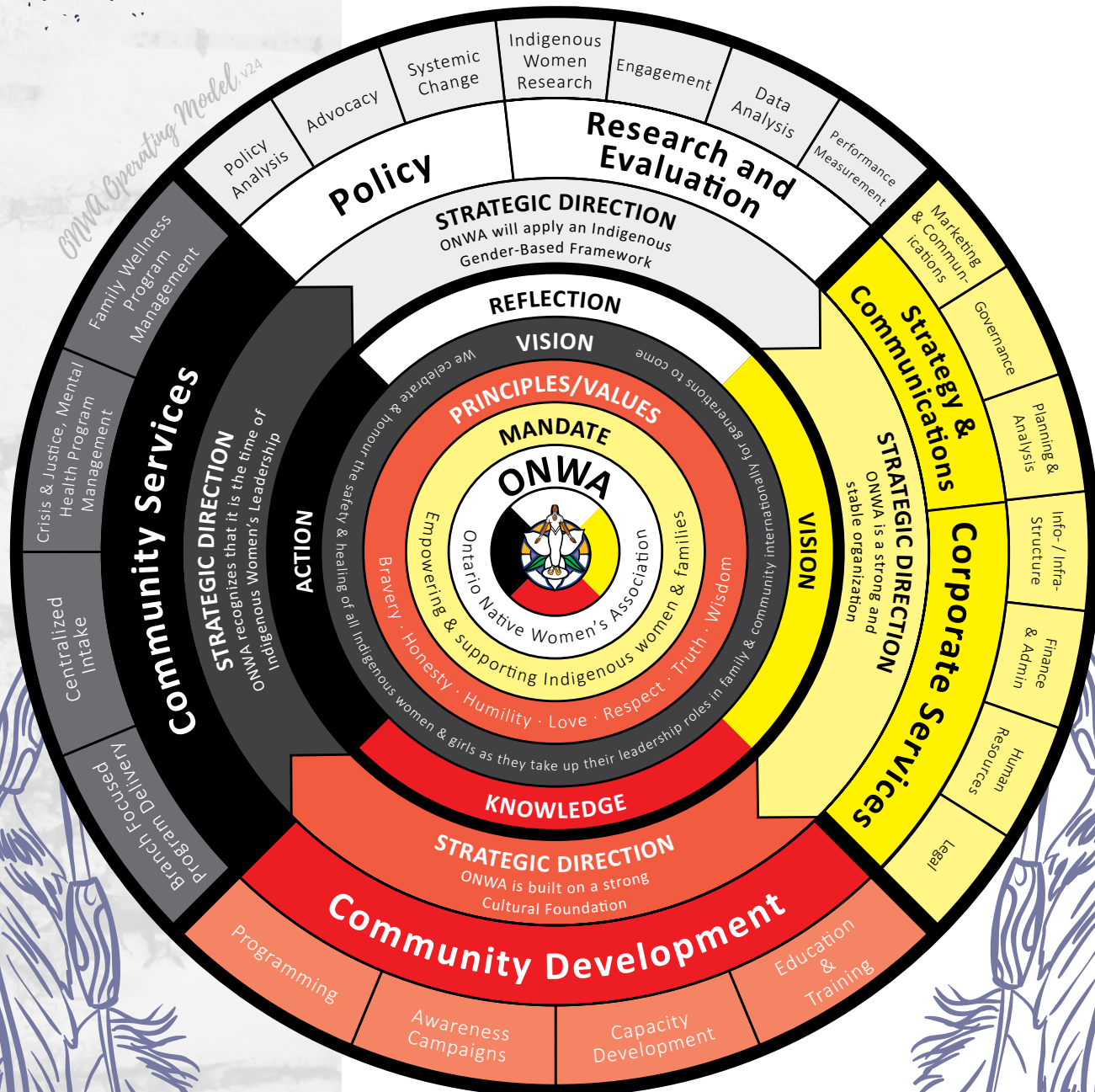
ONWA has been working in partnership with the Registered Nurses Associate of Ontario (RNAO) since 2020 on becoming an Indigenous-focused **Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO)**. As part of this work, in 2022-23, ONWA completed and implemented two Best Practice Guidelines (BPG): *Woman Abuse: Screening, Identification and Initial Response*, and *Promoting Smoking Reduction and Cessation with Indigenous Peoples of Reproductive Age and Their Communities*. This work is critically important to bring an Indigenous perspective to BPG. ONWA understands Indigenous women and Community Members are the experts in their wellbeing and uses this lens when reporting on BPG.

# Our Operating Model

At ONWA, we do not see one person as more important than the other, but rather, we focus on each of our responsibilities as part of the whole. We come together in unity and work towards one vision. ONWA's Operating Model places women at the center surrounded by our vision, principles, and mandate. Our portfolios – Strategy and Communications, Governance, Corporate Services, Community Development, Community Services, Policy, and Research and Evaluation - drive our work on our four key goals to empower Indigenous women's leadership as outlined in our Strategic Picture 2021-2031.

Learn more about the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) at:

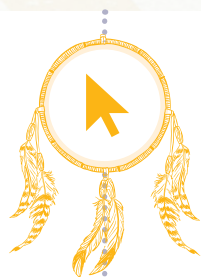
[onwa.ca/about](http://onwa.ca/about)



# Marketing and Communications Highlights

In 2022-23, Marketing and Communications (MarCom):

- Created ONWA's YouTube account (August 18, 2022)
- Created, deployed, and released:
  - 2 new editions of ONWA's She Is Wise Magazine
  - 2 large billboard advertising campaigns
  - "Year in Review 2021-22" video
- Supported, developed creative, and managed multiple livestreams (~19) and promotions (~8) across ONWA's website and social media
- Expanded and refined ONWA's website, including a refresh of the programs and services section



## Website (onwa.ca)

**106,539** impact  
**94** content items (website blog articles)  
 Sessions by device (approx.):  
**48%** desktop  
**50%** mobile  
**2%** tablet



## YouTube (@onwa\_official)

**77,730** impact  
**41** content items (videos)  
**284** followers  
**314.0** hours (approx.) of watch time



## Facebook (@ONWA7)

**2,623,000** impact  
**950,674** paid impressions  
**986** content items (posts)  
**16,934** followers



## LinkedIn

**318,832** impact  
**1,235** content items (posts)  
**5,344** followers  
**2,898** new



## Instagram (@onwa\_official)

**364,310** impact  
**1,174** content items (posts)  
**2,875** followers



## News

**599,704,860** impact  
**71** content items (posts)  
**6,861** media exposure (number of articles)



## Twitter (@\_ONWA\_)

**296,600** impact  
**1,447** content items (posts)  
**5,707** followers



## Advertisement

**38,415,540** impact



# Building Our Organizational Capacity

## Our Workforce

Recruitment has been very competitive over the last year with the “Great Resignation” (an employee’s market) impacting all employers. It has posed challenges for ONWA in terms of attracting and retaining qualified Indigenous applicants. Despite this, we continue to see progress. Our workforce represents the Community Members we serve with 65% of our workforce being Indigenous peoples and 62% of these being Indigenous woman. We have seen an increase in our Indigenous workforce by 4% over last year. This will continue to be our focus in 2023-24.

## Our Recruitment

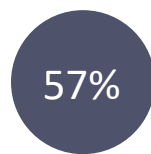
ONWA continues to focus efforts to engage interested Indigenous applicants through a variety of methods including radio, newspapers, social media platforms, and publications throughout the province. We have also expanded our reach to include more Indigenous partners, organizations, and stakeholders, and have participated in more Indigenous focus career fairs.

When compared to the previous year:



Increase in those applying to us

- 1,756 applicants in 2021-22
- 3,950 applicants in 2022-23



Increase in our job posting views



# Looking Forward

As ONWA heads towards 2023-24, we continue to grow as an organization; as we have, exponentially, since 2015. Working in partnership with our members, we will continue to meet our strategic goals.

We know that by strengthening and stabilizing our organization (Goal 1), we lay a solid foundation for ONWA's long-term sustainability which allows us to continue advocating for and empowering Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people for the next seven generations. All ONWA's work will continue to be guided by our teachings and matriarchal knowledge as Indigenous women, and our responsibilities and roles as grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, and aunts (Goal 2). ONWA embraces the diversity of our experiences and creates a safe space for all Indigenous women. To do this work, we must continue to reclaim our leadership at the local, national, and international level (Goal 3). Through ONWA's programming, research, and advocacy, we will continue to work in the coming years to provide a strong support system for Indigenous women across the province, nationally and internationally. Our efforts are strengthened by Indigenous women's stories, their truth, and their resiliency – we know these are the foundation for systemic change (Goal 4) and guide our unwavering commitment to systemic and legislative change focused on the safety and healing of our future generations.

We look forward to continuing to work alongside our members to empower Indigenous women in Ontario and walk with them in their healing journeys and as they reclaim their leadership roles.

## Our Wellness

We continued to focus on employee wellness and developed tools to measure employee's emotional well being. These tools included a staff survey that gave us much needed insight to develop effective strategies for positive change.



ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

# Empowering Indigenous Women Throughout Ontario

*A Voice for Indigenous Women's Issues*



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