



Strategic Picture

2021-2031



Ontario Native Women's Association



Acknowledgements

This strategic picture is based on the wisdom and knowledge of thousands of Indigenous women throughout the province of Ontario. We are honoured to bring Indigenous women’s wisdom forward by actioning their recommendations for change. We thank our membership, our Board of Directors, and all the courageous Indigenous women who continue to share their wisdom and bravely take up their responsibilities every day. Lastly, we acknowledge our staff, partners and helpers who walk this journey with us.

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Protection of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Stories

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) values the protection of Indigenous women's rights, and the rights of the collective community to own their stories, wisdom, and knowledge. In using the term "Indigenous women" we are speaking to the collective term for First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and their communities¹. In doing so, ONWA recognizes that we cannot own someone else's story or wisdom and must always acknowledge their expertise as the narrator of their own lives and experiences. Indigenous women's voices are critical to the whole and ONWA encourages that they be heard and respected. ONWA's approach is to give credit to those who share their story with us, as we amplify but do not own other women's voice or stories. In recognizing the owner of any story, experience, poetry, or art, we make space for that person's knowledge. It is our collective responsibility to recognize all Indigenous women's work, their experiences, and their knowledge that has been shared with us. This is the way we have been taught by our Elders, helpers, and leaders.

ONWA ensures that there is a balanced approach of recognizing and reclaiming Indigenous women's voices, knowledge, stories, and leadership that are protected by Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stating:

1

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports, and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

2

In conjunction with Indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.

Therefore, any work produced or included by ONWA is protected by Article 31 of the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). Any reference to our work, knowledge or teachings must be done so within the teachings around Reciprocity, Respect, Humility and Honesty by recognizing and giving credit to Indigenous women.



Introduction

"Bring the youth voices to the table, as this is important, as it is our world too"
Autumn Sky Cooper, AGA 2021

Established November 1971, ONWA is the oldest and largest Indigenous Women's agency in Canada. We are a not-for-profit organization mandated to empower and support all Indigenous women and their families in Ontario through research, advocacy, policy development, and programs that focus on local, regional, and provincial activities. ONWA is a voice for Indigenous women's issues.

ONWA's work encompasses a wholistic change model based on Indigenous women's frameworks for knowing and being. This knowing and being is interwoven into every portfolio (Community Development, Community Services, Corporate Services, Policy, Research and Evaluation, and Strategy and Communication). ONWA uses a living program and service delivery model to ensure the voices of Indigenous women inform the design and delivery of services they access. Our community development and community

services approaches support Indigenous women's organizations, grassroots Indigenous women's councils, and Indigenous women in community. Restoring and reclaiming Indigenous women's leadership, voices, identity, and safety forms the basis of ONWA's systemic change model in policy, research, and evaluation.

Over the last 10 to 15 years ONWA has had several visions and strategies that reflects ONWA's concept of a "Living Agency". The recent growth in capacity at ONWA has been instrumental in achieving the last Strategic Plan's Goals planned across five years within three years. The work and growth in capacity has met ONWA's Mandate and truly represented and implemented an Indigenous Women's approach in all the work we do. This includes supporting systemic change within individuals, families, communities, and Nations. This is how we take up our responsibility for the next 7 generations to come.

The work we do as an agency is focused on celebrating and building on those previous voices, work and leadership of Indigenous women who came before us. We balance what they have taught us, with Indigenous women's needs and issues of the present to create a safer community for today and for our future generations.

¹ We recognize the distinct cultural, social, economic and political characteristics of communities, and that each one is distinct.

“When we work with people who have been traumatized, those that society refuses to see, we need to understand the collateral damage that they have endured. When we as helpers serve, we must be in the best place to do so. We need to ensure that we are well so that we do not harm others with our own trauma. This is the responsibility of helpers.”

Al Hunter

Our Strategic Picture is developed from a thoughtful intersectional and relational lens, understanding that everyone has a specific role and responsibility in addressing the complexity of issues we work to resolve at ONWA. All the work we do as an agency is led by Indigenous women’s knowledge and solutions to restore balance for our grandchildren’s grandchildren.

When doing our work, we recognise that we still must work towards intergenerational healing. To support us in doing this work we utilize our traditional teachings as tools to help support us along our journey.

The teachings of the Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz are used daily at ONWA as a resource in gently reminding us that we are all on our own journeys and that we as helpers must also focus on our own wellbeing to support and provide the best quality care and services for Indigenous women.

The Four Agreements

by Don Miguel Ruiz & Don Jose Ruiz

AGREEMENT 1

BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD

Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using your words to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your words in the direction of truth and love.

AGREEMENT 2

DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY

Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

AGREEMENT 3

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

AGREEMENT 4

ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST

Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self Elements, self-abuse and regret.

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, provincially, nationally, and internationally for generations to come.



Values

ONWA is committed to using a human rights framework for our work. As our foundation, we use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This framework supports Indigenous women’s individual and collective rights to have their own agencies, to be directly and meaningfully engaged on issues that directly impact them and the reclaiming of their leadership.

When we are reclaiming our leadership, we must ensure that we are not duplicating colonized processes. To assist us, we use our original teachings that we are taught to honour all cultures, ways of being and work towards restoring balance. For ONWA, that means beginning with Indigenous Women and Girls. We honour and acknowledge that gender is fluid, and we take an intersectional approach to our work that acknowledges all the intersectional identities that Indigenous women have (E.g., differences of gender and/or sexuality). We acknowledge and respect all our 2 Spirited relations in the work we do.

It is important to note that Indigenous women’s work does not take away from our families or communities, including men. Our work is based on the principle that when Indigenous women and girls are healthy and safe, our communities then become healthy and safe. We know that in lifting the most vulnerable, we ensure the safety of all. We look to the men in our communities to walk besides us in our healing journey and to

RECLAIM

Indigenous women’s role as matriarchs (leadership) in their families and communities.

RESTORE

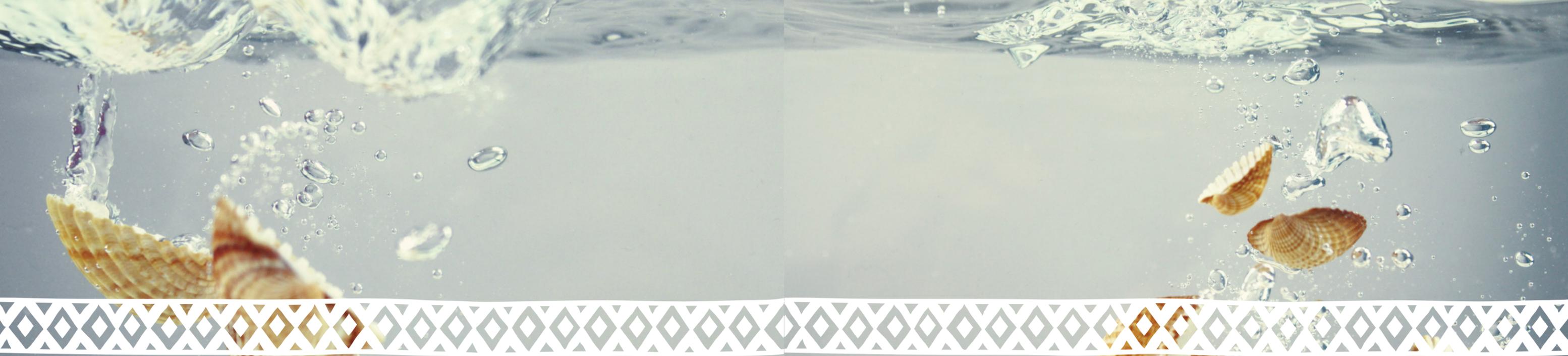
Indigenous women’s identity and inherent rights beyond a jurisdictional approach.

RECONCILE

relationships to ensure that Indigenous women have a right to safety regardless of location.

RECOGNIZE

that Indigenous women are the medicine needed to heal ourselves, families, and communities.



help us in recovering what was once ours, our voice, and our leadership. That is the premise of our work. From the UNDRIP framework, we have conceptualized the framing of our values of Reclaiming, Restoring, Reconciling and Recognizing which will restore balance with Indigenous women and girls.

When planning we use the teachings which are based in our values. The teaching we use when planning is the medicine wheel. We do this by starting our work in the East, this is where we sit within natural law and build our intention through the creation of a Vision. We then move to the South, where we remain humble, seek, and gather knowledge from *all our relations*, to empower our work and ensure that we have the knowledge needed to fulfil our Vision. It is only once we have created a Vision and built our knowledge that we are able to move to the West towards Action. These are the specific things we will do to realize our Vision. In the North, we sit with Grandmother Moon and reflect on the journey we have taken and learn from our celebrations so that we can adapt and build our bundles to continue our journey. This is how we build and tell our story. This is how we lead; this is ONWA.

Indigenous Women's Advocacy Issues

In ONWA's work of "Recognizing and Reclaiming" we have experienced multiple barriers, inequality, and systemic discrimination, but also racism, lateral violence, and exclusion from Nation-to-Nation policy engagements.

According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) These should be the first steps in making change:

- Aboriginal leaders should take a firm public stand against violence and work with their communities to develop zero tolerance standards and policies.
- Aboriginal governments and organizations should assure the full and fair representation of women in decision making.
- Aboriginal governments should support the work Aboriginal women are doing to solve health and social problems and recognize their expertise in relation to family violence." *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), Minister of Supply and Services Canada 1996*

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) further found that "many told us that healing must take place before self-government can succeed. As they put it, only healthy people and healthy communities can create healthy nations...Aboriginal women want to see their leaders and communities take a zero-tolerance stand against family violence. They see a great need for more culturally appropriate counselling services for both perpetrators and victims."

In everything we do at ONWA, across all Portfolios, we advocate for increasing Indigenous women's healing and safety on a physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental level. Throughout the last 50 years, ONWA has been a leader in engaging with Indigenous women to bring forward, the issues that Indigenous women and their families deal with daily. ONWA will continue to tell their stories, share the issues they are facing and work to create systemic change across the nine thematic areas.

Many other reports² have also identified the same nine themes that we continually hear (represented in the flower diagram below) from the Indigenous women we engage with.

The repeated disclosure of these issues is why we continue the deliberate work with the systems that discriminate against Indigenous women. We advocate for those systems to make space for Indigenous women to design both policy and programs that will create solutions to the problems they are facing, because of colonization, discrimination, racism, and sexism.

We believe that standing together makes us stronger, and that our voice and leadership must be heard. We will not be silent when Indigenous women have the poorest outcomes in the 16 most accepted social determinants of health in our country. We will not be silent when Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately at risk for violence, human trafficking, and homicide. These outcomes for Indigenous women and girls, in a country as rich and developed as Canada, is a national shame, and we will continue to advocate for equality and change in each of these nine thematic areas that intersect with Indigenous women, girls and their families' lives.

² National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. 2019; The Final Report of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015; No more Stolen Sisters. Amnesty International. 2008.



“Getting the women to gather to make the world a better place”

Krystal Brant, ONWA AGA 2021

Strategic Plan

ONWA has identified four strategic goals to focus on as an organization; these goals have been brought to our attention by Indigenous women in the organization, community, and our membership. These four goals intersect across the organization within every Portfolio.

Each of these goals will have specific outcomes evaluated each year to measure meaningful change for Indigenous women in community. Our strategic plan and goals were developed from and based on:

1. Supporting Indigenous women in their Chapter, Council or Community to identify the issue of concern, listening and through meaningful engagement.
2. Supporting and listening to Indigenous women when they describe the change they want to see, from a restorative model.
3. Listening to Indigenous women when they are identifying holistic strategies/goals to action the change.
4. Assembling what we heard, identifying the themes and gaps to develop the long-term strategic vision.

The strategic plan will support ONWA to becoming a centre of excellence, recognized nationally, and continuing its growth built on a strong foundation of Indigenous women’s cultural knowledge and practices. ONWA will also, most importantly, continue to work collaboratively with different levels of government to create systemic change for Indigenous women.

Goals

Indigenous women’s work is complex, it’s largely unfunded and unrecognized BUT also the most rewarding. Many agencies have one main scope of practise such as advocacy or providing client-based services or a limited focus on only supporting their specific membership. ONWA works in a multitude of areas to create change and to fill the necessary gaps because Indigenous women have a right to quality support and services. Each portfolio’s Director is responsible for understanding how their portfolios’ goals align and support the overall strategic plan.

We do not work in silos; we work relationally at ONWA. It is important for each employee to understand how other area’s goals support and interconnect within their area of responsibility as well. We must be in relationship across the agency to ensure that we are working as a collective towards ONWA’s mandate, vision, and strategic overall plan.

Our overarching goal is that ONWA is an Indigenous Women’s Center of Excellence for specialized services, programs, community development and advocacy for Indigenous Women.

We begin this journey by focusing strategically on the following 4 key strategic goals on a foundation of culture, innovation, and excellence through a two-eyed seeing approach³.

³ The two eyed seeing approach is a model that uses both traditional Indigenous healing approaches and western healing approaches. Traditional Indigenous healing models, medicines, ceremonies, etc. are used first and as the foundation. Western approaches are used to augment where needed or would be beneficial.

“To me, a leader is a visionary – individuals who can see the big picture and bring a team together with the goal of bringing it to life. Leaders are in every aspect of our lives; they are our mothers, fathers, family, and friends. They are throughout our communities and our world.”

Debra Vermette, President ONWA Board of Directors

Goal 1

ONWA is a strong and stable organization that is committed to supporting Operational Excellence across all portfolios to ensure long term sustainability and foundational legacy. We will continue to create culturally engaging, safe, and respectful spaces for all employees and Indigenous women, community, and membership.

ACTIONS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1.0 ONWA will continue to build internal and external capacity while we grow the organization. ONWA will incorporate a risk management approach across the entire organization and utilize processes that are transparent and accountable to those we serve.</p> <p>1.1 ONWA will increase strong leadership from our membership, governance, and employees by developing an internal and external training and certificate program that serves as a central of excellence by utilizing collaborative leadership, innovation, and information technology. In the development, ONWA will honour the past 50 years of Indigenous women’s voices while ensuring Indigenous women have access to agency for the next 7 generations.</p> | <p>1.2 Continue to advocate for all Indigenous women’s agencies to have equitable services that includes secure long term core funding to meet the needs of Indigenous women and their families in each community. ONWA will have a resilient and diversified funding strategy that focuses on supporting our work within the strategic plan.</p> <p>1.3 ONWA will continue to conduct regular ONWA membership needs assessments and program evaluations for the continued evaluation of our systems and structure to support operational and service excellence.</p> |
|--|---|

“Every day is Ceremony”

Marie Linklater,
She Is Wise Conference

Goal 2

ONWA will continue to build the organization based on a Strong Cultural Foundation that is inclusive of all communities’ (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) cultural practices and free from judgement. ONWA will continue to guide all the work we do based on teachings and cultural guidance, as well as our responsibilities and roles as grandmothers, mothers, and aunts to allow us to work in the best way possible with other Indigenous women.

ACTIONS

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>2.0 ONWA will develop an internal and external Mother Earth protection strategy that reflects Indigenous women’s responsibilities, traditional ecological knowledge, and practices with measurable impacts, acknowledging our ancestors and generations to come.</p> <p>2.1 ONWA will work to reclaim Indigenous women’s roles as leaders in their lives, communities, and nations. ONWA employees will role model Indigenous women’s leadership by unpacking the impacts of colonization with a focus on collective empowerment to develop a specific strategy on lateral violence.</p> | <p>2.2 ONWA will continue to work with youth to establish a youth council that focuses on developing a provincial youth strategy focusing on youth priorities and initiatives. Within the strategy, ONWA will continue to invest in the future generations by supporting Indigenous youth to participate in Healing our Spirits Worldwide Conferences and to begin building capacity at an early age to support young Indigenous girls to reclaim their role within community become future leaders.</p> |
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“We call on Indigenous women across Ontario to take up their leadership role in the family and in the community.”

ONWA Board of Directors

Goal 3

ONWA recognizes that it is the time of Indigenous women’s leadership by reclaiming our individual, family and community roles and responsibilities through our collective voices and healing. ONWA will continue to create safe hubs and safe spaces through developing and delivering excellent programs for Indigenous women and by becoming a National leader in Indigenous Women Crisis, Justice, Mental Health, and Family Wellness using specialized service delivery and community development approaches.

ACTIONS

- 3.0 ONWA will develop and strengthen community responsive programming that supports Indigenous women’s wellness across the lifecycle, telling the story of our work from a strength-based perspective.
- 3.1 ONWA will continue to be strong advocates for change based on the truth. We will do this through comprehensive community planning that focuses on Indigenous women’s needs in the community.
- 3.2 ONWA will continue to support our membership and leadership structure which are foundational in reclaiming Indigenous women’s voice and leadership as they provide us the purpose of our work. In doing this, ONWA will continue to grow and strengthen the collective Indigenous Women’s movement by increasing our organization’s membership, which increases safe spaces for Indigenous women to gather and reclaim their space within their community.
- 3.3 Increase ONWA & Indigenous Women’s Voices at National and International Forums

“If we want sustainable change then we need to deconstruct the current systems and reconstruct indigenous women’s leadership, their voices, their honour and empowerment.”

Cora McGuire-Cyrette, Executive Director, ONWA

Goal 4

ONWA will continue to affect systemic change for Indigenous women by continuing to tell their stories, truth, and resiliency provincially, nationally, and internationally. ONWA’s policy, research and evaluation frameworks centres Indigenous women experience, knowledge, and stories as the foundation for systemic and legislative change focused on the safety and healing of future generations.

ACTIONS

- 4.0 ONWA will continue to develop key reports that reflect Indigenous women’s needs outlining actions and recommendations for change. ONWA will continue to honour the truth of Indigenous women which are required for much needed systemic change.
- 4.1 ONWA will continue to utilize accountability tools we have developed and advocate at Indigenous and Government tables to amplify Indigenous women’s voices, make recommendations and develop strategies to make a positive systemic impact for Indigenous women.
- 4.2 ONWA will continue to be committed to ongoing collaboration that reflects and supports meaningful engagement with Indigenous women and their agencies.
- 4.3 ONWA will continue through ongoing collaboration that reflects our interconnected relational approach, ensure that the truth continues to be told and that Indigenous Women’s voices, expertise and recommendations for change are supported and reflected at Provincial, National and International systemic change opportunities.

Evaluation

ONWA's Strategic picture is considered by us to be a living document. Conceptualizing this work as living is an ongoing reminder that we need to assess the health of our organization in its ability to meet our goals, which requires regular check-ups and check-ins. This means we will establish ongoing monitoring at regular intervals and a comprehensive annual review. Each action within the strategic plan will have key performance indicators that will allow ONWA to ensure progress is being made on our commitments. Important in this work is instilling performance indicators that are predicated on what matters and is meaningful to Indigenous women. It is also important to understand that success can be seen in both small impacts and large-scale social change.

The methods we use to measure our success will be grounded in balanced evaluation systems that recognize and operationalize Indigenous knowledges systems. Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing are instrumental in our approach to evaluating our work as these are

best suited to respond to the needs of Indigenous women. Some of these methods include:

- Application of an Indigenous women centered and intersectional research framework that establishes ethics, principles and best practices for data collection, data analysis, data sovereignty and protection of privacy
- Conversational approaches to knowledge gathering, including kitchen table talks, sharing circles, and Indigenous methodologies
- Fireside knowledge sharing model as a means of information dissemination and mutual knowledge sharing between researchers, policy developers and strategic planners with Indigenous communities

When we come together in ten years, we will be able to see our progress in achieving our over-arching goal: to be a Women's Centre of Excellence for specialized services, programs, community development and advocacy for Indigenous women. ONWA will evaluate our programming, our relationships, and our work in community through a variety of tools including an annual membership survey, regularly occurring

site visits, and an annual report card following our whole of organization health assessment. By tracking the implementation of the actions, we set ourselves up to achieve our four strategic goals and we will be able to trace the impacts of our strategic plan as a whole and identify issues and risks. Following are examples of some of the many ways in which we will measure outcomes.

Tracking related to our first goal, which speaks to operational excellence across all portfolios, will measure the growth in membership and graduation rates from our Center of Excellence training program, both internally and externally.

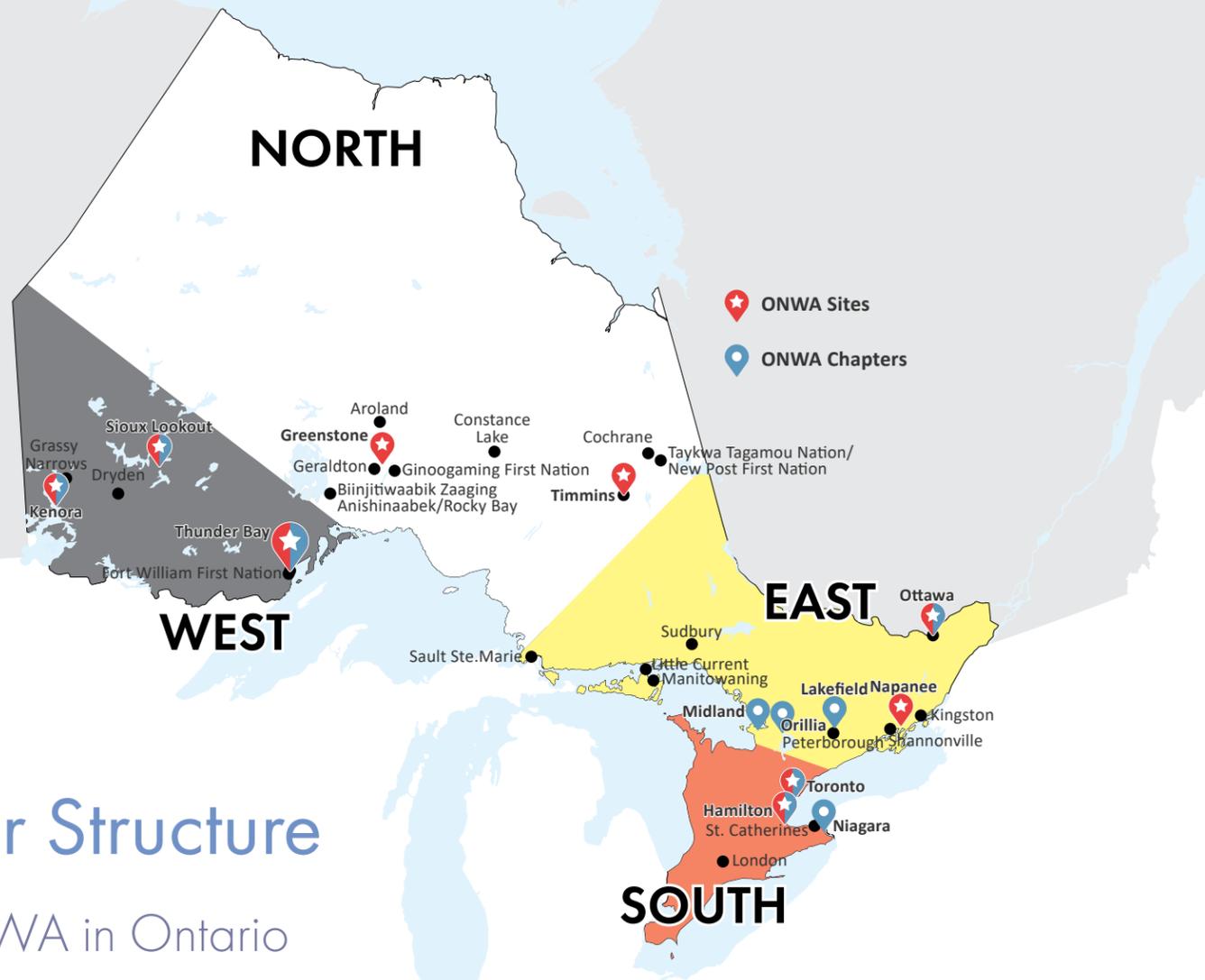
Evaluation of the second strategic goal, which addresses building an organization grounded in culture, can be measured by the increase in the creation, development, and expansion of program and policy resources designed and led by Indigenous women to meet the specific needs of their communities.

Our third strategic goal is about leadership and Indigenous women leading change. Examples of ways to measure our success may include an increase in the number of Indigenous women at decision-making tables locally, provincially,

nationally, and internationally and/or the number of safe spaces for Indigenous women.

Our fourth strategic goal speaks to being accountable to Indigenous women in how ONWA makes recommendations on systemic change based on the knowledge and expertise they share with us. Ways to measure our success may include the monitoring of the implementation of recommendations ONWA puts forward and an increase in the number of ONWA interventions in all matters that impact the lives of Indigenous women.

As a living agency, our whole of organization health check relies on connection across our organization and how our systems interconnect. The next section looks at how ONWA is structured, Indigenous women's knowledge and models that have been created as frameworks to guide the work. It reveals that our strength and well-being are intricately related to Indigenous women's knowledge and how our internal and external systems rely upon a model that centres Indigenous women in a circle of coordinated collaboration and communication.



Our Structure

ONWA in Ontario

ONWA's leadership is based on a Policy governing board of Directors comprising of (twelve) 12 Indigenous women, including four (4) 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. Our membership also appoints a Grandmother's Council to support the Directors with good guidance.

As of June 2022, ONWA's membership consists of eleven (11) Chapters (incorporated organizations providing front-line services) and twenty-one (21) councils (grassroots groups supporting community development models), representative of ONWA's four regional directions – North, South, East, West – throughout the province⁴.

Our structure is truly representative of the purpose of ONWA which is the restoring of Indigenous women's leadership.

Reflected in the map, ONWA is currently delivering services and programs in 21 sites across Ontario. Ten (10) of these sites are direct service delivery sites, whereas the remaining 11 are through our Chapter membership organizations.

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women's agencies are stronger together as a collective and we will continue to build relationship and capacity with Indigenous women and their agencies as a result our membership numbers may change from year to year.

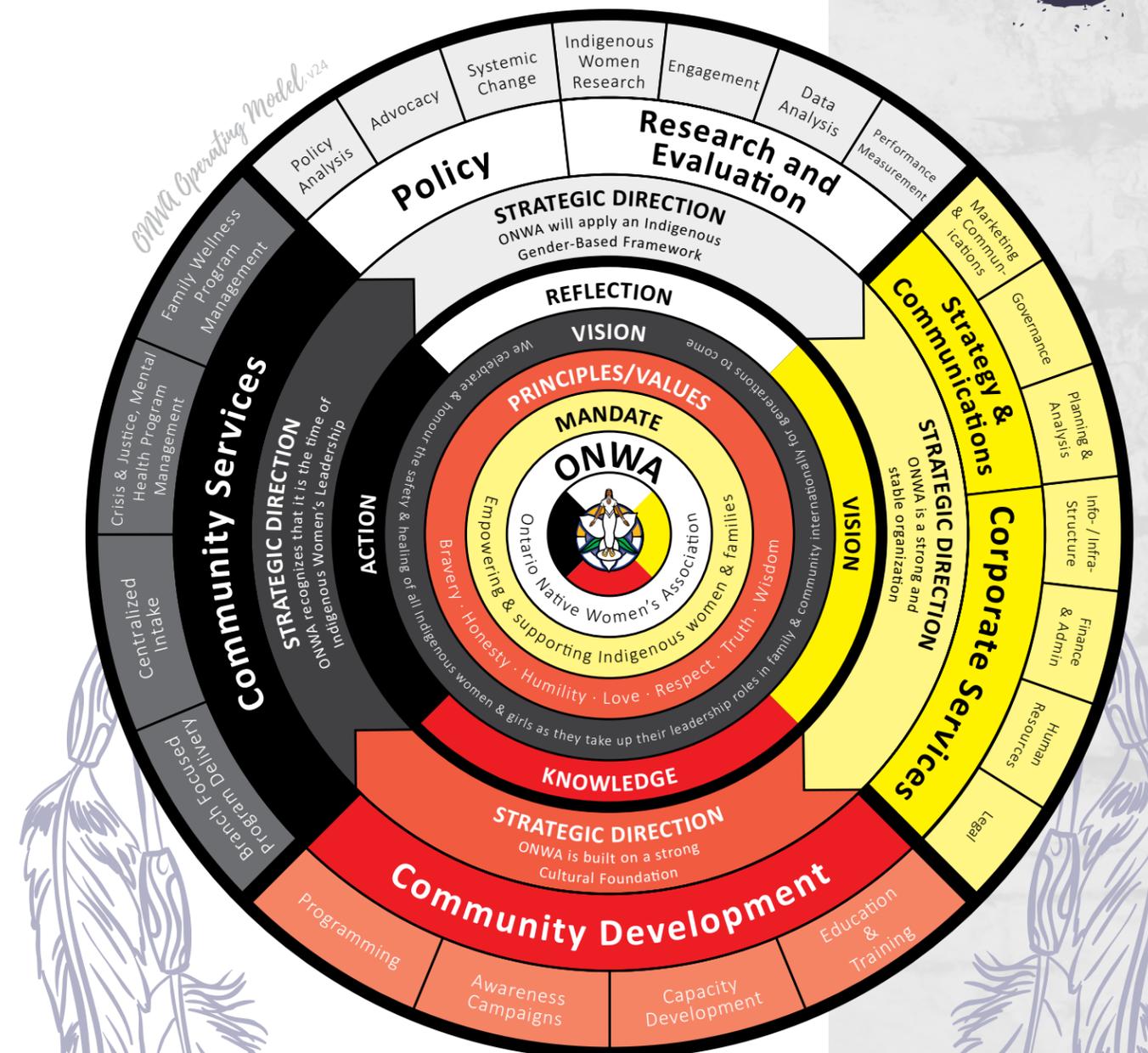
⁴ This number is likely to increase as ONWA continues to work with communities and expand the membership.

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 (below) places Indigenous women at the centre surrounded by our vision, principles, and mandate. Our operating model is reflective not only of our organizational structure but also reflective of the intersectionality of our work as an agency and focuses on everyone's responsibilities as leaders within the agency.



Learn more about the 7 Sacred Teachings (7 Grandfather Teachings) at: onwa.ca/7-sacred-grandfather-teachings





Community Development

ONWA's Community Development approach is based on the foundation that Indigenous women have a fundamental right to community and agency regardless of where they live. This is an inherent right that is affirmed within Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution and further supported through international mechanisms such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizing that these rights existed long before Canada's colonization of these lands and peoples.

The United Nations definition states that Community Development is a *"process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems."* We further expand on this definition through our collective responsibilities as Indigenous women to role model the reclaiming of healthy leadership in our communities.

ONWA's work is based on the knowledge and wisdom of our membership 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. ONWA works to support their work through meaningful engagement, programming, education & training, advocacy, and capacity building.

Community Services

ONWA's essential Community Services portfolio ensures an opportunity for community to share, restore, build wellness, and align together to create pathways to safety and healing that meet the needs of Indigenous women and their families.

Using multiple platforms and land-based therapy ONWA connects community members to services, traditional teachings, interventions, medicines, and ceremony.

Community Services options included crisis response, supporting women and their families' immediate needs of a multitude of supports and healing; System navigation for Indigenous women and their families, because often times they are excluded from service system designs, which are complex and not user friendly; Case management which allows us to intensively support people with their healing journeys; Addiction focussed programming rooted in traditional healing ceremonies, traditions and culture; And numerous other specialized programming which is designed to meet the needs of Indigenous women and their families no matter where they live in Ontario.

Across the entire organizations, this multisectoral collaboration, supports community based holistic joint action with the goal to further improve the safety and social determinants of health affecting the wellbeing of Indigenous women, their families, and communities across the province of Ontario.

Corporate Services

This Portfolio ensures a strong and stable organization responsible for administrative effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and quality, as well as risk management. The Corporate Services is committed to supporting Operational Excellence across all portfolios and to create culturally engaging, safe, and respectful spaces for all ONWA employees, the community, and members.

The Corporate Services Portfolio is an internal service responsible for the development and oversight of operational processes to ensure effective resource management and the safeguarding of ONWA assets by analyzing financial and operational performance of the agency.

Policy

ONWA tells the truth Indigenous women's lived reality, and amplifies their voices, knowledge, leadership, and advocates for systemic change. The Policy Portfolio brings forward the truth of Indigenous women's lives and realities in Ontario at local, provincial, national, and international settings to advance strategic priorities and recommendations. Through an Indigenous Gender-Based and human rights lens, the Policy Portfolio analyzes policies, government mandates, and legislation impacting and affecting the lives of Indigenous women, their families, and their communities. By working collaboratively with community and government partners, and engaging across all ONWA Portfolios, the team employs a wholistic approach to ensure the intersectional realities of Indigenous women's lives are captured and reflected. The Portfolio's work incorporates the wisdom from past generations and guidance from current generations to ensure the safety, healing and social and cultural well-being of Indigenous women and girls, now and for generations to come.



Research and Evaluation

The Research and Evaluation portfolio is responsible for ONWA’s research, engagement, and evaluation strategies across the organization. All this work is guided and directed by issues of importance for Indigenous women. Critical to this work is the need to ensure that Indigenous methodologies, practices, approaches, and designs are the foundation of all our work. We apply an Indigenous women’s lens that focuses on bringing issues to the forefront for academic institutions, governments, and community action. Research and evaluation are focused on bringing literature based on Indigenous women’s knowledge to other researchers and institutions that intersect with Indigenous women in Ontario, Canada and Internationally. We work across the organization to support and leverage community action that focuses on improving Indigenous women and their communities’ lives and wellbeing. This portfolio also leverages our skills to work with the entire organization and all programs to monitor and evaluate the work we are doing, and how each program area has cumulative impact in Indigenous women and their families’ lives.

Strategic Planning and Communications

The Strategic Planning and Communications (SPC) portfolio will contribute to the development of a strong overarching strategic plan, including communications and marketing. SPC co-ordinates and strategizes with each portfolio to develop an organization wide approach to reaching the strategic goals guided by the wisdom and knowledge of Indigenous women. SPC’s will also focus on amplifying Indigenous women’s recommendations through thoughtful plans, implementation actions, communications, and the development of short- and longer-term strategies. SPC will leverage each portfolio’s unique strengths and contributions to tell the full story of ONWA’s Vision. SPC will utilize a marketing and communications approach that is guided by Indigenous women’s truth and strength to bring women together so that collectively they can restore their inherent rights as leaders and roles within the community. SPC will also identify relationship opportunities and work with different governance bodies (municipally, provincially, nationally, and internationally) to amplify Indigenous women’s organizations and the value of creating space for Indigenous women to lead. This Portfolio manages the overall organization’s performance management framework so that we can tell the story of ONWA and the work we all do.

Indigenous Women’s Frameworks for Knowing and Being

ONWA developed frameworks based on Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous women’s lived experiences. The frameworks are based on how Indigenous women describe their own ways of knowing and being.

The first framework is ONWA’s Theory of Change which recognizes that Indigenous women are experts in their lives and know the solutions to issues they experience.

The second framework is ONWA’s Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis (IGBA) which recognizes that constructs of Indigenous women in Canada, a country built on colonization, reduces Indigenous women to victims and never builds them as leaders in their lives, their families, communities, or Nations. Applying an intersectional framework, we realize that Indigenous women occupy multiple social identities; some that negatively impact Indigenous women’s lives directly influencing the level of violence they experience.

The third framework is She is Wise which positions Indigenous women’s knowledge and practices in an understanding of Indigenous women’s leadership. It provides guidance to define policy and deliver programs that support Indigenous women’s experiences and moves Indigenous women into their leadership roles.

We developed the frameworks with trusted Knowledge Keepers.

2022, March

Co-developing distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation – Submission to the Government of Canada.

2022, February

ONWA Comments on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous Women and Girls.

2022, February

Ontario 2022 Budget Consultations Submission.

2021, June

Written and Oral Intervention: “Effective Participation, Consultation and Consent of Indigenous Women and Girls in Policy and Public Life.” Submission Prepared for: United Nations Committee on the Elimination and Discrimination Against Women. Day general discussion on “the rights of Indigenous women and girls.”

2021, June

Written Submission: Effective Participation, Consultation and Consent of Indigenous Women and Girls in Political and Public Life” Submission Prepared for: United Nations Committee on the Elimination and Discrimination Against Women, Day general discussion on “the rights of Indigenous women and girls”.

2021, May

Written Submission - Human Trafficking and Bill 251, prepared by the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA) for consideration by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

2021, May

Sex Trafficking of Indigenous Peoples, prepared by the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA) for consideration by the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

2021, February
Ontario 2021 Budget Consultations Submissions.

2021, February
Federal Budget 2021 Consultations Submission.

2020, November
Feedback on United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Draft Legislation, Bill C-262.

2020, October
Reconciliation with Indigenous Women: Changing the Story of Indigenous Women and Girls, Ontario Native Women's Association Report.

2020, October
Ontario Fall 2020 Budget Consultations Submission.

2020, August
Ministry of Health Submission: Feedback on Proposed New Regulations under the Connecting Care Act, 2019.

2020, April
Poverty Reduction Strategy - Ontario Native Women's Association Submission.

2020, February
ONWA's 2020 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission.

2019, October
ONWA collaborated on submissions to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the *Canada National Review Report Briefing and the Recommendations from the CSO North American Indigenous Women Sub-Group*.

2019, October
Oral Speech: Indigenous Women's Issues in Canada. Beijing Platform for Action Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland.

ONWA's Theory of Change

ONWA's Theory of Change recognizes the work Indigenous women undertake and is rooted in the personal, reflecting issues they face daily. For hundreds of years, patriarchy and colonialism have been impacting Indigenous women and their families. This has resulted in physical, sexual, psychological violence, and murder which was most recently documented in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Inquiry and Report. ONWA's Theory of Change frames our work around Indigenous women's safety, security, and success. ONWA's Theory of Change is based within a community development approach with the underlying principle being that Indigenous women are the foundation of strong communities and nations. We also recognize that Indigenous women are the bringers of generations to come. In knowing this, ONWA supports Indigenous women to take leadership roles in their lives and communities. ONWA's Theory of Change is foundational for moving towards Indigenous women continuing to successfully "hold the world together" (Mindimooyenh) for themselves and their families. The Theory of Change is the base which the Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis and the She Is Wise Framework stand upon.

Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis

ONWA's IGBA was developed for us to gain a deeper understanding of issues facing Indigenous women and the multiple systems they navigate. Twenty-eight (28) systems were identified from listening to Indigenous women as the experts in their own lives. In their current practice, these systems contain racism and continually perpetuate violence against Indigenous women. An intersectional approach recognizes systems like patriarchy and colonialism harm people, but especially Indigenous women.

IGBA is based on the teachings of the turtle. It starts with an understanding that we are ALWAYS moving in a direction – forward, backwards, or sideways. When we are in balance as Indigenous women, we can be guided by Creator and culture. The turtle's head represents Creator's purpose for us. Every Indigenous woman has a purpose and gifts to fulfill that purpose. The turtle's tail represents community needs. Each Indigenous woman is intended to use her gifts to contribute



2019, September
BEIJING +25 Report from Civil Society – Canada: Co wrote: Chapter on Indigenous Women.

2019, May
Journey to Safe Spaces: Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Engagement Report 2017-2018, Ontario Native Women's Association.

2019, March
Supported Position Paper to end sex discrimination in the Indian Act.

2019, February
ONWA 2019 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission.

2019, January
ONWA Submission to the Federal Anti-Racism Strategy Engagement.

2018, December
ONWA Closing Submission to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

2018, June
Written Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights study on Human Trafficking in Canada.

2017, October
Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada Report to the Human Rights Council on Canada's Third Universal Periodic Review. Feminist Alliance for International Action & Ontario Native Women's Association.

2017, February
Ontario Pre-Budget Submission 2017.

2016, February
Sex Trafficking of Indigenous Women in Ontario.

2015, March

Breaking Free, Breaking Through Report, Ontario Native Women's Association, Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres.

2012, August

Summit V to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women: For Generations to Come Final Report, Ontario Native Women's Association, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Metis Nation of Ontario, Independent First Nations, and Chiefs of Ontario.

2011, May

Summit IV to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women Final Report: Protecting our Children from Violence; Our Sacred Responsibility, Ontario Native Women's Association, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Metis Nation of Ontario, and Independent First Nations.

2009, February

Final Report: Strengthening the Circle to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women – Summit III to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women, Ontario Native Women's Association, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Metis Nation of Ontario, and Independent First Nations.

2007, September

Achieving Justice: Aboriginal Communities and the Ontario Justice System Working Together – Report from the Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women: Part II, Ontario Native Women's Association & Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.

2007, March

Final Summary Report of the Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women, Ontario Native Women's Association & Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.

1989

Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence, Ontario Native Women's Association.

1981

ONWA's leadership lobbied for the Equality clause to be included in the 1982 Canadian Constitution.

to her community's restoration and maintenance of balance. The turtle's feet represent four roles Indigenous women need to maintain:

Self – Our role as strong and healthy Indigenous women in the world.

Family – Our role to restore and maintain a strong and healthy Indigenous family.

Community – Our gifts and skills to rebuild and restore Indigenous communities. Our organizations can sometimes be our community.

Nation – Our gifts and skills to rebuild and restore Nations (Indigenous, First Nation, Provincial, National, International).

ONWA's IGBA is built from an analysis of existing anti-violence work ONWA has led over the last 50 years. It is designed to identify and eliminate factors that create any form of violence against Indigenous women.

The following picture is a representation of the 28 systems and our roles and responsibilities based on teachings from the turtle.

She is Wise Framework

ONWA's She is Wise Framework is a collective relational space where Indigenous women's specific knowledges and practices are gathered and shared to inform ONWA's programs, services, research, methodologies, and evaluation practices. These are the wise practices that Indigenous women have been using to create safe spaces for themselves and their families, communities, and nations for generations. An important aspect of this concept is relationship-building, rooted in healing and grounded in healthy, safe Indigenous lifeways of knowing, being, and achieving our roles and leadership responsibilities as Indigenous women. The collective space—created by ONWA through programs, gatherings, and summits—is where Indigenous women share their life journeys that has laid the foundational knowledge that has informed the She is Wise Framework. This knowledge is shared in ceremony, storytelling, story sharing, feasts, gatherings, and other traditional engagements.



Conclusion

Indigenous women have a right to a Centre of Excellence that is designed and developed by them. This place needs to exist not only because it recognizes their crucial role in society but also because it honours their beauty and uniqueness, while most importantly, meeting their needs. ONWA's Strategic Plan is one small action of the larger systemic change that needs to happen for it to be safe to be an Indigenous woman. Our plan gives guidance and Vision to the entire organization. It is our vision that gives us purpose as an organization.

Our plan is designed to focus the organization as a whole to ensure all staff are all moving in the same direction, at the right pace, towards the same overarching goals. This is how we begin our work but not the end point. The work we do is complex and can be overwhelming, but our plan being developed by listening to Indigenous women will give us guidance and ground us in our teachings, so that we may continue the work that needs to be done.

Our teachers and knowledge holders have taught us that without purpose our work may not have meaning, and therefore ONWA believes that the Strategic Plan is critical, because it is a tool that will allow us to progress towards addressing the numerous issues that Indigenous women continue to face. Having a strong strategic plan will support the continued growth of ONWA as a centre for excellence for, most importantly, Indigenous women and their families.

We believe we have captured, the several truly strategic issues that ONWA needs to address over the next ten years. We are committed and will focus significant energy and an entire team to work collectively together to accomplish these goals, as this is what Indigenous women, and their families deserve.



ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Empowering Indigenous Women Throughout Ontario

A Voice for Indigenous Women's Issues



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