



SHK DAY
IGNITING THE FIRE WITHIN

ANNUAL REPORT
2024-2025

**Courage
Confidence, &
Connection**

A campfire with several logs is burning brightly, casting a warm glow. The background is a dark, starry night sky with some faint clouds. The overall mood is serene and inspiring.

Igniting the Fire Within

MISSION STATEMENT:

Shkoday Abinojiiwak
Obimiwedoos is an Indigenous-
led organization that revitalizes
traditional knowledge and
culture to nurture Indigenous
children and communities to
embrace Mino Bimaadiziwin.

MAIN GOALS:

The Board of Directors chose three focal areas that would build on the last Strategic Plan where the goals included:

Providing programs and services that are based on the vision, culture and Anishinawbe ways of knowing and being;

Building a strong and healthy workplace and governance structure;

Working with community partners to better serve the community and meet organizational mandate; and

Building sustainability through evidence, research and advocacy.

The three focal areas for 2023-2028 are:

- 1 Shkoday will continue to revitalize its connection to culture and language.
- 2 Shkoday will continue to raise its community profile.
- 3 Shkoday will stabilize the human resource needs of the organization.



Gathering around the fire

MESSAGE from the PRESIDENT

Boozhoo/Aaniin, esteemed board members, distinguished guests, dedicated staff, and valued members of our Shkoday community.

It is my distinct honor and privilege to once again address you today as the President of the Shkoday Board and as years past, this past year has been a remarkable period of growth, challenges, and significant achievements.

As we move forward together in this exciting chapter of our journey, I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your commitment to the growth of our organization as well as the hard work, dedication, and unwavering commitment to our mission from our amazing team members.

The past months have brought both opportunities and challenges, and through it all, you have shown resilience, innovation, and a shared purpose that continues to inspire me. Chi-Miigwetch for your efforts, we have made tremendous progress that align with our Strategic Plan, by way of the services we offer, hitting performance targets, growing our reach in the community and establishing partnerships with local and other Indigenous Organizations that have continued to help fuel our growth and success.



As we look ahead, our focus remains clear: to build on this momentum and continue delivering excellence in everything we do. I am very excited to share that we are embarking on some incredibly inspirational projects that support our growth and ensure Shkoday is well positioned in our community for years to come. I am confident that, together, we will rise to the occasion and exceed expectations, which is not only important for us as a board, but also vitally important to securing a safe and healthy place for our children for years to come.

This organization is not just about what we do, it's about how we do it: with integrity, collaboration, and a deep respect for the people and communities we serve while ensuring to maintain our uniqueness as a Indigenous Organization committed to our children and our culture.

Chi-Miigwetch for being an essential part of our success. I am proud to lead such an exceptional group of people, and I look forward to all that we will achieve together.

Jason Thompson
President

Boozhoo, Sago, Wachay, Aaniin

MESSAGE from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we close out another fiscal year, I wish to take time to reflect upon our shared journey, acknowledging our progress which contributes to student's new adventures, experiences, and life-long learning. Shkoday has continued to "ignite the fire within" by educating and investing in Indigenous children, students, youth, and their families. It is more than our Vision; it is our way of life!

This has been a year of change and unification: change in our communities, change in our country on a national landscape and within Shkoday itself. On the other hand, some things remained the same such as our unwavering commitment to Indigenous education, through mentorship, role-modelling, cultural integration with teachings and knowledge exchange remaining the foundation of the work that we do from younger children to graduating students and their families.

At Shkoday our community-based programs begin with children aged 18 to 72 months in our Aboriginal Head Start and childcare programs. Our Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Registered Early Childhood Educators, and childcare staff promote healthy development of Indigenous pre-school children by teaching skills essential to daily living, social norms, and positive interactions, and assist in the development of coping and reasoning skills. We do this by focusing on six program components: Indigenous culture and language; education and school readiness; health promotion; nutrition; social supports; and parental involvement. This past year we formed a partnership with Children's Centre Thunder Bay to pilot a program where a Resource Consultant was available during the week while children were onsite. The Resource Consultant provided new learning opportunities, resources and skill building for children, parents, and our staff. On average this year we provided more than 80 children with the opportunity to attend and learn in the Aboriginal Head Start program.



Indigenous children and youth aged 7-13 years can continue their educational journey in Shkoday's Biwaase'aa program which utilizing the Medicine Wheel model to teach and increase life skills through in-school, afterschool, Little Eagles Mentorship and Food Security Programs. Located in eight schools in the City of Thunder Bay, Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs) share traditional knowledge, teachings, and positive peer mentorship to support students in the classroom and during after-school activities. The Biwaase'aa Program supported more than 880 students with 394 of them participating in the Little Eagles Mentorship program. This year in 8 schools we provided 15,699 meals to students. In the afternoons, the YOWs work with an After School Assistant to provide physical activities, tutoring and literacy support, cultural and traditional activities. We continue to see increased need for the after-school program as we strive to reach pre-covid staffing levels for these part-time positions. Although we were able to have 230 students registered in the After-School Program throughout the scholastic year, we continued to have wait list in all schools that Biwaase'aa was offered.

Our newest program Pathways Thunder Bay has shown growth during the past year. This program designed for high-school aged youth provides after-school tutoring support, mentoring, leadership, and cultural programming. Utilizing volunteer tutors three

days a week students can have assistance with their homework, socialize amongst their peers, and learn from tutors, peers and Shkoday staff. During the past year, Pathway students have taken on a governing role by creating rules of operation and engagement, creating lists of opportunities they would like to do on Fun Fridays such as bowling, movie night, board game nights, etc. and suggesting topics for the Traditional Teachers, Elders and other professionals to share their teachings/knowledge with them. Plans for the next year include learning about and hosting a powwow at a high school in the city, inviting more traditional teachers and Knowledge Keepers to share their traditional and cultural knowledge and planning an event to celebrate our graduating students.

I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to all who have shared this past year's journey with us. Our Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Traditional Teachers, our partners, funding bodies and individual donors, community members, Board of Directors, staff and volunteers, and every child, parent and youth who believes in the work that we do. Without YOU we would not be able to continue to "ignite the fire within."

Let's keep the fire burning brightly. Chii-meegwech.

Marilyn Junnila
Executive Director

The Spark Within

ABORIGINAL HEADSTART (AHS) & CHILD CARE PROGRAMS:



Thunder Bay Aboriginal Head (AHS) program is a federally funded early intervention program which addresses the needs of young Indigenous children living in urban centers and coming from Northern communities. It is a comprehensive program designed to meet the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs of children. Aboriginal Head Start is a school readiness program that encourages the parent/caregiver to be the natural advocate of the child and who sees the parent/caregiver as the primary teacher of their child(ren). The Aboriginal Head Start program operates on an alternate day schedule (*Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday*), to allow as many children to attend as possible.

Shkoday's childcare room operates four days per week with the same children each day. Funding for the childcare room is provided through the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (DSAAB) and through parents' contribution. Eligible parents/caregivers register their child for this program through DSAAB. The program operates utilizing the same curriculum and mandate as AHS.

PROGRAMMING MANDATES

- 🔥 Follow the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of each child.
- 🔥 Foster a desire in the child for lifelong learning.
- 🔥 Support parents and guardians as the prime teachers and caregivers of children.
- 🔥 Recognizes and supports extended families in teaching and caring for the children.
- 🔥 Ensure the community is involved in the planning, development, operation and evaluation of the program.

PILLARS/FOUNDATION:

Indigenous Culture and Language

Social Support

Health Promotion

Aboriginal Head Start Core Program Components

Parental Involvement

Education and School Readiness

Nutrition

EDUCATION/SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMMING:

Parents/caregivers attended an open house with representatives from the Catholic, Lakehead and Lac Des Milles Lac school board to learn more about the schools, enrollment process, school requirement, busing etc.

We have a full-time resource consultant on site who supports educators and families by providing resources as well as role modelling.

210
children are on the waiting list for AHS.

Tending the Flame

2024-2025 AHS NUMBERS



CULTURE AND LANGUAGE:

83

children, 10 parents and 9 staff participated in programming with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers 4-6 times per month.

11

staff participated in semi-monthly Ojibwe classes.

90

parents/caregivers and guests participated in 2 seasonal feasts.



NUTRITION:

11,013

meals provided.

83

children registered and participated in the Aboriginal Head Start program.

400

hampers and meals distributed to families at home.



HEALTH PROMOTION:

29

children received oral health assessments and fluoride varnish treatment with a focus on promoting early education about oral hygiene.

32

children and 5 parents visited and participated in dogsledding at Boreal journey.



EDUCATION/ SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMMING:

10

children were given ASQ screening throughout the year. The outcomes of this screening assist parents and our staff to concentrate on areas specific to an individual child on their developmental journey.

25

children received speech and language sessions throughout the year aimed at enhancing their communication and language development.



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:

10

parents actively took part in cooking classes with Thunder Bay Health Unit.

12

children and 9 parents joined activities during parents' night.

SPECIAL EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Orientation day

Fall Feast

Winter Feast

Christmas Celebration

Winter Carnival

Easter Celebration

Spring Feast

Graduation Day
Celebration



Lighting the Flame

THE BIWAASE'AA IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM:



Biwaase'aa goal is to increase life skills of Indigenous children, youth and their families through strategies of academic improvement, emotional development, cultural awareness and nutritional support. Biwaase'aa programming is based on the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and are designed to meet the needs of students through the following components: cultural, mental, physical, and emotional.

2024/25 NUMBERS:

884

In School
Unique
Students

1,360

In School
Literacy,
Numeracy &
Mentorship

4,098

In School
Cultural
Teaching

394

Little Eagles

230

After School
Registered

The Biwaase'aa staff build trust and establish a positive rapport with students which in turn increases student success and achievement through:



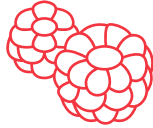
Mentoring and
role models



Literacy and
numeracy
support



Cultural and
traditional
knowledge
exchange



Food Security

Biwaase'aa partners with 8 elementary schools to provide a safe place for students ranging from 7-13 years of age to access academic, life skills, and cultural teachings.

- McKellar Park Public School
- Vance Chapman Public School
- Ogden Community Public School
- Our Lady of Charity Catholic School
- Sherbrooke Public School
- St. Ann School Catholic School
- St. James Public School
- St. Vincent Catholic School

6,351

After School
Attendance

15,699

Food
Security

1,585

Parental
Engagement

1,436

One to One
Interactions



In School: Youth Outreach Workers (YOW's) provide a judgment free zone within the Biwaase'aa room/space where everyone is welcome. Students utilize the room to smudge, ground themselves or receive extra help with homework. The YOW's check in with students and teachers daily to help make sure no one falls through the cracks. Teachers choose students for YOW's to work one on one who need extra support. YOW's also contribute to the classrooms by assisting wherever needed, sitting with students, modeling classroom skills. The YOW's have also shared teachings and activities which have included drumming, eagle feather, beading, traditional games, canoe teaching, and many more.

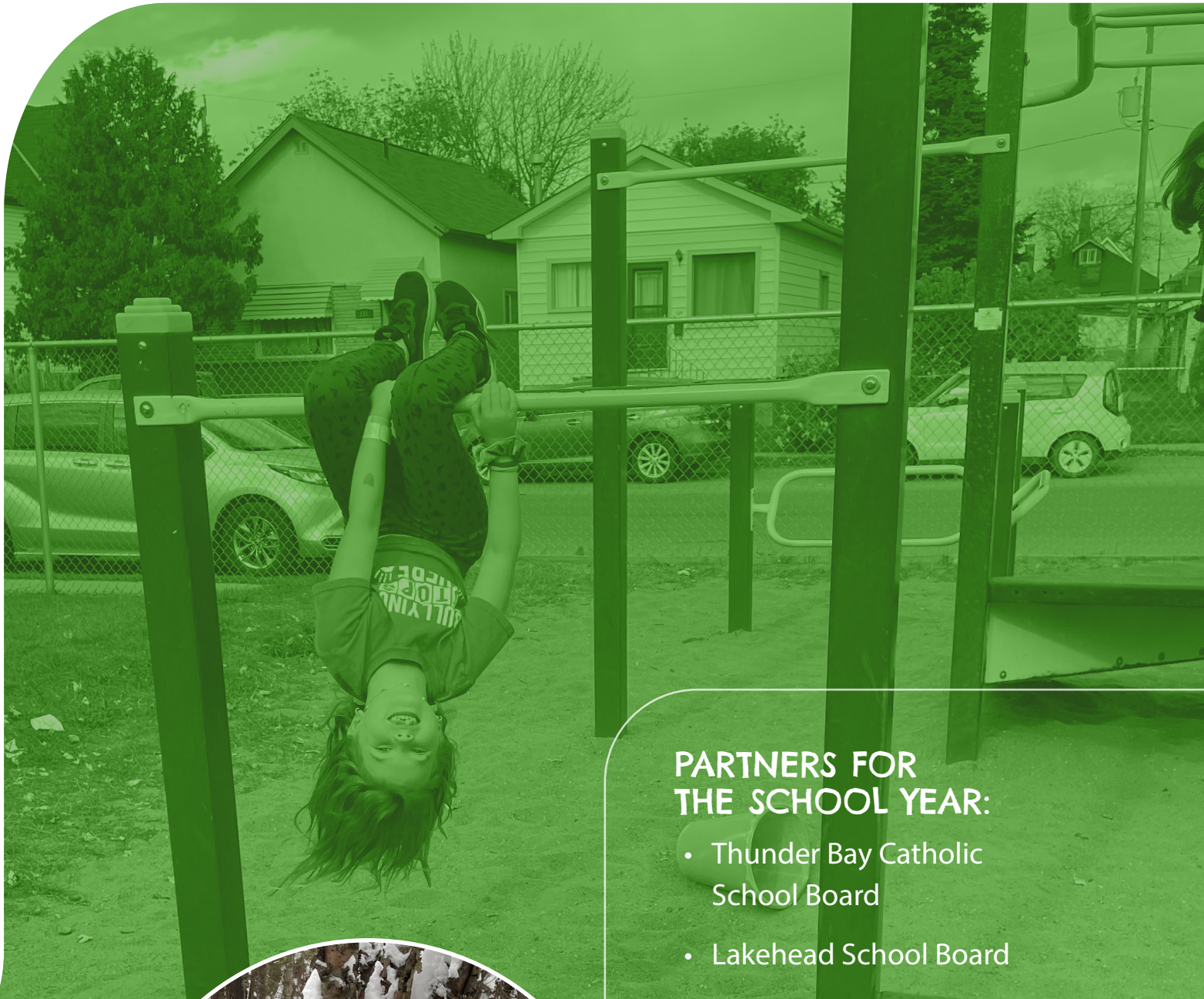
Little Eagles: is a program the YOW's administer where they work with a small group of students. Teachings are given prior to students working on their project. Projects consist of hand drums, medicine pillows, tote bags shadow boxes with the seven teachings inside.

Nutrition program: has seen an increase in vegetables being consumed. YOW's invite students to help prepare lunches, teach them about healthy meals and how to prepare them.



Powwow: We hosted powwows at Vance Chapman, Ogden, Sherbrooke and St Ann's. Our powwows are small and last around 2 hours. The Elder, MC, drum groups, dancers, Arena Director, students, guests and staff all participate. Students leave powwows with new knowledge such as dance styles, powwow protocols, regalia. Messages of appreciation were given from teachers and a Lakehead Board trustee.

In the **after-school programs**, although over 50% of the program consists of physical activity, YOW's and After School Assistants (ASA's) also focus on wellness and cultural teachings such as hand drums, songs, 7 Grandfather Teachings as well as bringing attention to the group when students are demonstrating one of the teachings. Teachers tell us how much their students miss the after-school program on scheduled PA days and when they see the ASA and YOW the next day, they are very excited!



PARTNERS FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR:

- Thunder Bay Catholic School Board
- Lakehead School Board
- Confederation College
(informal)



HAVE DONE TRAINING WITH:

- Children Center Thunder Bay
(informal)
- Indigenous Friendship Center
(informal)
- Nokiiwin Tribal Council
(informal)



Pathways to Education

Shkoday Pathway Program is one of 31 locations across Canada that supports youth to graduate from high school.

Shkoday's Pathway Program is an Indigenous-led program providing educational programming, mentoring, financial supports and advocacy to Indigenous youth. Our team is committed to addressing a holistic approach to the unique needs of each student they serve rooted in the Anishinabek culture.

The Pathways program has 4 main components:

1

After-school Tutoring: After-school tutoring is often unaffordable to families who access our services. A majority of the families either have an older computer which is shared among the family, or they may not have any technology to use. Students need to have the technology to complete their homework and assignments. Pathways Thunder Bay provides youth free access to Pathway tutors who are passionate about the subjects they teach which are demonstrated in their sessions with the youth. Grade 9 and 10 students enrolled in our program were able to obtain basic computer training along with receiving a brand-new laptop upon completion of their training.

2

Mentoring, Leadership and Cultural Programming (MLC): MLC occurs on a weekly basis after school which consist of mentoring from adult allies, leadership development from staff and community leaders and Indigenous cultural programming delivered by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. These programs focus on identity, purpose, pride and belonging to help our students succeed.

3

Financial Support and Advocacy:

Students receive incentives to attend programming throughout the week. These may include bus tickets, nutrition or other gift cards, recreational passes and other incentives suggested by students. Staff continue to advocate behind the scenes for students in a variety of ways, such as joining in public discussions

4

Scholarships:

Upon successful completion of the program (*minimum of two years*), students can earn a scholarship towards their post-secondary education or training.

2024/25 NUMBERS:

345+

Meals

659

Participation

11

School Visits/
Presentations

242

School Visits/
Attendance

51

Registered Youth

24

Guest
Presentations



Carrying the fire Forward



We wish to acknowledge the following organizations for their financial contributions that support Shkoday programs:

- Future Generations Foundation
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Tourism and Culture
- Pathways to Education Canada
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board
- United Way of Thunder Bay



A special thank you to everyone who have supported us this past year. Your financial donation or contribution of time to read to a child, provide traditional teachings, share your knowledge of crafts, help prepare meals or by knitting/crocheting children's hats, mitts etc., support the well-being of our children.

Chi-meegwech to each and every one of you!

- Donna Bohler
- First-Wesley United Church
- Gateway Casino & Entertainment, Staff contributions
- Miscellaneous Donations from community members
- Miscellaneous donations through Canada Helps and United Way Thunder Bay
- Superior Strategies, Orange Shirt Day



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