



STEPPING STONES

Aboriginal Head Start
Biwaase'aa
Pathways

Annual Report
2023-2024

Shkoday (Ishkode) Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoos

2023-2027 Strategic Plan

Shkoday (Ishkode) Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoos gii-waabandamang 2023-2027 chi-naadamaagewin. Mino-bimaadiziwin debwewin, zaagi'idiwin, dabaadendiziwin, aakode'ewin, manaji'idiwin, nibwaakaawin, debwewin - shkode. Waabandamaang gii-aya'aa Shkoday Ishkode: 'Ishkode wiindamaagewin zaagidewin'. Chi-ayaa noongom gii-aya'aa: Anishinaabemowin miinawaa bimaadiziwin-aya'aa ji-mino-pimatisiwin Anishinaabeg. Ishkode debwewin, ji-gikinoo'amaadiiwigamig miinawaa ji-aya'aa noongom bimaadiziwin.

Shkoday's Strategic plan for 2023-2027 has been announced. It includes commitments to the good life (Mino-bimaadiziwin) and the Seven Grandfather Teachings of Love (debwewin), Truth (zaagi'idiwin), Humility (dabaadendiziwin), Bravery (aakode'ewin), Respect (manaji'idiwin), Wisdom (nibwaakaawin), and Honesty (debwewin). Shkoday's vision has been declared as 'Igniting the Fire' (of Knowledge and Love). The current mission is to revitalize Anishinaabe language and life practices to promote the good life among the Anishinaabe. Shkoday's commitment is towards education, operationalization, and promoting a balanced life.



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:

Building on the last Strategic Plan - whose 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; building sustainability through evidence, research, and advocacy - the Board of Directors chose three focal areas for the next 4 years.

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.

SHKODAY ABINOJIIWAK OBIMIWEḐOON...

FIRE

CHILDREN

SPIRIT



is the legal name of the organization that was started in 1996 and incorporated in 1997. This name was a gift to the new Aboriginal Headstart program in Thunder Bay, and later became the name of the entire organization.

When the name was given we were told that the name was interpreted as Shkoday (*ishkode - fire*) Abinojiiwak (*children*) ObimiweḐoon (*spirit*) which would honor the important work that the organization was about to embark on. The goal of the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program in Thunder Bay is to nurture the social, physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development of Indigenous children, while supporting and honouring their parents and guardians as their primary teachers. Seasonal teachings with cultural curriculum enhance traditional knowledge acquisition, language, land-based teachings, play, story telling, drumming and singing, which are embedded into the foundation of a child's strong cultural identity and sense of belonging.

Throughout the next 25+ years Shkoday continued to grow, while maintaining their cultural foundation supporting children, youth and their families in a strong cultural identity and sense of belonging. The continuum of education and support expanded to Biwaase'aa for ages 7-13, and then the Pathways program for Grades 9-12. When Elder Agnes Hardy (*ban*) gave the name Biwaase'aa she indicated that it speaks to that early part of the day, when the sun is just rising above the horizon, when there is that feeling of hope in people's hearts as the dawn rises on a new day and way of knowing and being.

Aboriginal Head Start



The goal of this program is to develop school readiness skills in each child in the following areas: physical well-being and appropriate motor development, emotional health and a positive approach to new experiences, social knowledge and competence, and language and cognitive skills.

Biwaase'aa



This program is located in various schools and is designed to increase the life skills of Indigenous children, youth and their families through an in-school, after-school, Little Eagles Mentorship, as well as to offer Food Security Programs.

Pathways to Education

Pathways is an after-school tutoring, mentoring and cultural development program that works alongside youth and their caregivers to provide academic, financial, social and one-to-one supports to address barriers related to education. The main goal of this program is to increase graduation rates of high-school Indigenous youth.

Message from the President

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

It is my distinct honor and privilege to address you today as the President of the Shkoday Board of Directors. This past year has been a remarkable period of growth, challenges, and significant achievements. I am proud to present this report on the state of our organization and our strategic direction for the future.

The Board and Staff of Shkoday have been very hard at work to continue to develop and deliver the exceptional programming you have come to enjoy and expect. In stating that, I wish to showcase some of our achievements from this past year:

- We met with a legacy donor for our Pathways Thunder Bay program;
- We met with the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport regarding our After-school Program to advocate for increased financial investment in the program, longer hours for the workers, and a reduction in reporting and simplified administrative processes;
- We met with Honorable Ya'ara Saks, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and Marcus Powlowski, Member of Parliament for Thunder Bay, to discuss concerns relating to service providers providing care and support for mental health issues relating to youth, children and their families;
- We completed community member, participant and staff surveys which steered the direction of our next three-year Strategic Plan. Prior to implementation we feasted the Strategic Plan in a traditional manner. The plan includes stabilization of human resources, raising our community profile and continuing to revitalize the connection to culture and language.



This has been a snapshot highlighting some of the important work we have been doing, and I have to personally applaud the dedication of our staff and fellow board members in helping Shkoday achieve our goals. It is truly my pleasure to be serving my third term as President of the Shkoday Board. The hard work of our team does not go unnoticed by our board, and we thank all of our team for their amazing work. I would like to give a special Chi-miigwetch to Marilyn our Executive Director for her hard work and dedication to our organization. Without her commitment to our organization we would not achieve the success we have enjoyed.

We are also blessed with an amazing Board of Directors that works tirelessly to ensure the success of Shkoday and all its programming. Our board brings with them dedication to the organization that is unwavering and for that, as the Board President, I am truly grateful for the support and passion that is brought forth.

In closing, I am truly optimistic for what the future holds for our organization and for our Indigenous People in general. I believe we are in an era of reconciliation and that, for me, holds great hope for all of us as Indigenous People.

Chi-miigwetch (Thank-You)
Jason Thompson

Message from the Executive Director



As I reflect on the last year, I'm proud to acknowledge the growth and success of Shkoday because of our close collaboration with Elders, partners, the Board of Directors, staff, and community members.

I am pleased to say that we were able to increase our Elder and Traditional Knowledge Keeper involvement in all our programs. Community Elders and Knowledge Keepers visited the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program regularly, telling stories, drumming, and teaching the children Ojibwe songs. Through a partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group, and more specifically, the N'doo'owe Binesi Indigenous Health Team, we were able to provide additional support in the areas of mental health, cultural inclusion, and ceremonies in the AHS, Biwaase'aa and Pathways Programs. It is always so rewarding to learn from our Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Chii-meegwech.

I am so grateful for the leadership, expertise and knowledge of our Board of Directors whose eye for efficient governance has allowed us to develop and create a new Mission Statement "that revitalizes traditional knowledge and culture to nurture Indigenous children and communities to embrace Mino Bimaadiziwin". Using the last Strategic Plan as a stepping stone, we are further expanding three pillars by raising our community profile, stabilizing the human resource needs of Shkoday, and continuing to revitalize our connection to culture and language. Our Board of Directors have also reviewed our bylaws and policies so that we are meeting our legal obligations while enhancing workplace safety, staff compensation and benefits. Chii-meegwech!

During the past year Board and Staff met with the Federal Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Ya'ara Saks, to discuss issues surrounding Mental Health in children, youth, and their families. We spoke about how mental health issues affect even the youngest of our program participants who are exhibiting signs of anxiety, abandonment issues, trauma, lack of social interaction skills, etc., and how these issues have increased during the aftermath of the pandemic. We spoke of how we incorporate Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in our work and how we train our staff to address these issues and build trust with our children and youth as a means of Traditional healing. We also met with the Minister of Tourism, Recreation and Sport to advocate for increased funding and change to the limited number of hours we can offer to part-time after-school workers. I am happy to report that we had limited success as both the Provincial and Federal Ministers made media announcements addressing some of these issues.

Shkoday, similar to other organizations globally, was challenged with filling staff vacancies. Our dedicated staff faced this head on by continuing to provide exceptional services. I am so proud of our staff who continue to "Ignite the Fire"

within the children, youth, and families. They have worked through a year of staff-shortages, while meeting the children's increasing needs, by creating goals, being patient, providing a supportive ear and carving out those extra minutes to joke, laugh, teach, and play with them. Our staff are resource people, aunties and uncles, confidants, mentors, motivators, tutors, and someone that the children and youth rely on. This team pulled together to provide more services this year than last in each of our Programs, and also provided an additional 900 meals and 300 care hampers this year compared to last. Exceptional work of these dedicated staff!

Through a year of challenge and growth, the Board of Directors and Staff remain steadfast in living out our Mission and Value Statements. We believe that Aboriginal Head Start is the foundation stone for our children while Biwaase'aa and then Pathways are the next stepping stones to further advancement and achievement on this road to Mino Bimaadiziwin.

With much gratitude and respect,
Chii-meegwech,

Marilyn Junnila
Executive Director



Aboriginal Headstart (AHS) AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS:

The Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program is a federally funded early intervention program which addresses the needs of young Indigenous children living in urban centres and in Northern communities. It is a comprehensive program designed to meet the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs of the child. 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 and the primary teacher of their child(ren). The Aboriginal Head Start program operates on an alternate day schedule, to allow as many children to attend as possible. Children who attend on Mondays also attend on Wednesdays. Another group of children attend on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

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 (DSSAB) and through parental contributions. Eligible parents/caregivers register their child for this program through the DSSAB. The program operates utilizing the same curriculum and mandate as AHS.



Program Mandate:

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

Pillars/Foundation:

- Culture and language
- Education
- Health Promotion
- Nutrition
- Social support programs
- Parental involvement

Education/School Readiness Programming:

- 20 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.
- Parents attended an open house with representatives from both the Catholic and Lakehead School Board to learn more about the various schools, enrollment process, school requirements, busing, etc.



Aboriginal Head Start Year in Review:

2023 2024



Culture and Language:

91

children, 25 parents and 13 staff participated in programming with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers 4-6 times per month.

12

staff participated in semi-monthly Ojibwe classes.

120

parents and guests participated in 3 seasonal feasts.



Nutrition:

16,016

meals provided.

100

children registered and participated in the Aboriginal Head Start program.

592

hampers and meals distributed to families at home.



Health Promotion:

37

parents and children visited and participated in dogsledding at Boreal Journey.

91

children and 25 adults experienced many bush walks to learn about the animals, tracks, tree, leaves and other living beings in the woods.



Parental Involvement:

8

parents participated in 4 Financial Literacy workshops.

11

parents with their children shared their knowledge and skills amongst each other 2 times per month, while their children learned socialization skills.



Education/ School Readiness Programming:

20

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.

30

parents learned about various traditional teachings, financial literacy, hand on food preparation and menu planning, traditional indigenous crafts, child rearing practices and had opportunities to learn about school enrollment processes, busing, and primary school requirements.





Pathways to Education

Shkoday's Pathways Program is one of 31 locations across Canada that supports and encourages youth to graduate from high school.

Shkoday's Pathway Program provides educational programming to Indigenous youth that are rooted in the Anishnabek culture. Our holistic approach builds self-awareness, confidence and overall well-being.

**2023/2024
NUMBERS:**

256
meals

124
mentoring/cultural/leadership

1,528
student engagement

33
registered youth

199
tutor program attendance

The Pathways program has four main components:

1

After-school Tutoring:

After-school tutoring is often unaffordable to families who access our services, and so is the technology needed to complete homework and assignments. Pathways-Thunder Bay provides youth free access to Pathway tutors who are passionate about the subjects they teach and bring this enthusiasm into their sessions with them. Tutoring sessions are regularly scheduled throughout the week and/or weekends.

2

Mentoring, Leadership and Cultural Programming (MLC):

Mentorship from adult allies, leadership development from staff and community leaders and Indigenous cultural programming delivered by Elders and Knowledge Keepers takes place weekly after school and/or on weekends. These sessions focus on identity, purpose, build pride and belonging to assist our students to rise up and succeed.

3

Financial Support and Advocacy:

Student incentives for attending tutoring sessions are ongoing throughout the year. These may include food vouchers, bus tickets, coffee cards, recreational passes and other incentives suggested by the students.

4

Scholarships:

Upon successful completion of the Pathways Program, students also earn a scholarship towards their post-secondary education or training. Scholarships are only awarded to youth who begin the Pathways Program in Grade 9 and continue through Grade 12 graduation.





The Biwaase'aa In-School Program:

The Biwaase'aa In-School Program provides the consistent presence of Indigenous Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs) in various schools throughout Thunder Bay. The YOWs help foster trust, rapport, and security within Indigenous students. This makes for a more comforting and familiar academic environment which increases student success and achievement. This is done through YOW role modelling/mentorship, literacy and numeracy support, cultural teachings and presentations, pow wows and feasts, parent/caregiver engagement, cultural outreach services, and attendance at community events. Similar to last year, this year we occasionally had to modify how we delivered the In-School Program due to insufficient staffing. In addition to flexing physical time between schools, our YOWs created and used teaching videos to supplement in-person teachings when necessary to ensure all our schools had some kind of programming throughout the school year, regardless of whether that school had a permanently assigned YOW.



In-School Programs:

1,483
unique students engaged/registered

2,223
literacy, numeracy & mentorship

10,605
cultural teachings

Food Security Program:

Providing students with healthy food improves their ability to learn, engage in physical activity, and develop positive habits that aid their growth and development.

Traditional teachings related to food, hunting and gathering, and harvesting are usually shared with Biwaase'aa participants and their families at our feasts hosted at school multiple times each year (*fall, winter and spring*).

18,702  Food Security Program



Little Eagles Mentorship Program:

The Biwaase'aa Little Eagles Mentorship program (LEMP) is a seven-week program incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings; Respect, Love, Wisdom, Bravery, Honesty, Humility and Truth. Through traditional teachings, stories, sharing circles and interactions with community leaders and elders, children learn about the importance of cultural identity, values, beliefs and tradition. Children in this program experience improved self-esteem and confidence. They learn life skills that help them deal with racism, bullying and peer pressure. This added support and mentorship helps improve academic performance for those children who have been deemed to require extra attention.

Little Eagles Program participants are referred by principals and teachers who identify students they feel would benefit from participation in the program. Little Eagles sessions include topics such as hand drum making, drum stick making, ribbon skirt making, beaded earrings, beaded lanyards, drum teachings, moccasin making, rattle making, loom beading, cultural crafts, birch bark baskets and regalia. Traditional games such as lacrosse, "run and scream," and the "map game" are also featured in the Little Eagles Program. These games enhance the student's strength, balance, reflexes, hand-eye coordination, accuracy, lung capacity, strategy, intuition and patience, which are skills that the Indigenous hunters and fishermen relied on to feed their communities. Perhaps the most important feature of the Little Eagles Program is the direct mentorship and guidance the participants receive from Biwaase'aa Indigenous YOWs during programming. One of the most important features of LEMP is the opportunity to build relationships with students while strengthening cultural identity. LEMP provides a time and space for students to feel safe, learn and craft.



Little Eagles
Program Attendance

620



After-School Program:

Immersed in Indigenous culture and traditions, the Biwaase'aa After-School Program provides opportunities to youth that they may not otherwise be able to access. All programming/activities encompass four components:

PHYSICAL

to develop healthier and more active youth;

CULTURAL

fostering identity and pride in the culture and who we are as Indigenous people;

MENTAL

increasing school attachment and engagement and fostering a knowledge of well-being;

EMOTIONAL

improving leadership, life-skills, cultivating relationships and increasing social well-being.

The Biwaase'aa After-School Program was offered in-person in many of the schools which Biwaase'aa operates. Unfortunately, however, given the low number of After School Assistants (ASA's), we had to double up YOWs at select locations to ensure proper staff to student ratios. Decisions on which schools that we offered the program was based on the community needs, and the other services available at that school or in the neighbourhood.

195

after-school program - unique students engaged/registered

5,027

after-school program attendance

578

structured activities or Friday fun days attendance

65

one-to-one interventions with students





Parental Engagement:

Parental engagement generally occurs following our After-School Program and as a part of our structured activities. We were still somewhat limited in offering structured activities due to not having a full staff compliment. Engagement also reflects in-school and ASP communication (*in-person, phone calls*). This is important to relationship and trust building with families. Families will reach out to YOWs for school support and advice. Engagement also reflects our feasts and other parental engagement events planned by YOWs (*bannock and teas, baking nights, craft nights*).

2,892

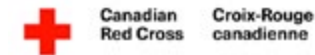


Parent Interactions Engagement

CHI-MIIGWETCH

Funders:

- Bell Let's Talk
- Canadian Red Cross
- Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board
- Ministry of Education
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Ministry of Tourism and Culture
- Nokiiwin Tribal Council - Career Training Program
- Pathways to Education Canada
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Shania Kids Can
- United Way of Thunder Bay



Donations Received:

- Mishko Bimaadziwin Family Support Services
- Donna Bohler
- Miscellaneous Donations through United Way and Canada Helps





SHKODAY

IGNITING THE FIRE WITHIN

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