



# NATIVE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF TORONTO

**ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023**



*Photo credit: Mark Atanasoff*



CHILD CENTERED,  
FAMILY FOCUSED,  
COMMUNITY DRIVEN.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission Statement	01
Service Model	02
Board of Directors	03
Prayer	04
Message from the President	05
From Executive Director to Director of Governance and Strategy: A Transition Towards Indigenous Governance	07
Director of Governance and Strategy	09
Holistic Services	17
Child and Family Wellbeing	35
Finance and Administration	45
People and Culture	49
Thank you to our Funders	68



# MISSION STATEMENT

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto strives to provide a life of quality, wellbeing, caring and healing for our children and families in the Toronto Native community.

We do this by creating a service model that is culture based and respects the values of Native people, the extended family, and the right to self-determination.

# SERVICE MODEL

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) was founded in 1986. Our service model was developed through four days of ceremony by Aboriginal Elders, Knowledge Carriers and community leaders. It directs us to develop a holistic and sustainable multi-service organization to support the quality of life of Aboriginal children and their families in Toronto. The community that came together to create NCFST was responding to the impacts of residential schooling and a European model of child welfare on Aboriginal children and families. Our service model directs us to develop and deliver integrated services for healing, wellness, and family supports sufficient to provide Aboriginal children and their families with multiple pathways to a quality life. We do this by developing programs and services that are grounded in Aboriginal values, knowledge, best practice and worldview.

# 2022-2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mae Maracle, President

Bryan Winters, Vice-President

Richard Cummings, Secretary

Stephen Lindley, Treasurer

Leonard Benoit

Barbara Fallon

Jama Maxie

Kaitlind Peters

Ashley Quinn

# PRAYER FOR HEALING AND WELLNESS

*Greetings Creator,*

*Thank you for the Good Life that you have given to us. We thank you for the work that we do at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. We ask you on this day to watch over those that work together for the care and protection of our children and families. We ask you for the healing and wellness of our minds, bodies, and spirits as we work toward the healing and wellness of our Indigenous community. This is our prayer today.*

*All My Relations,*

*Thank you*

*Aanii Boozhoo Gizhe Manidoo,*

*Miigwech maanda gaamiizhang Mino Bimaadiziwan. Chi miigwech maampii eninkii'yang maaampii Binojiinh Gamik. Daabiwezenmigo maanda giizhgak wiikwanmang maampii enkijik miinwa ogimaajik wena wiigenaanmoyang miinwa wiikowanmang ninda binojii'ik miinwa indoodemik. Daabawezemigo wiinaandeyang miinwa minganeyang maanda enenmang, niyaw miinwa jiiibay megowa wiinaandegizad miinwa wiiminganeyad gaynawa maampii Anishinaabec endaaajik. Mii maanda ebiwezenmigo maanda giizhgak.*

*Kina Nindaawenmajik,*

*Miigwech*

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



*Mae Maracle*

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank all the staff at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) for continuing to provide excellent services to Indigenous children and families in the City of Toronto and Peel Region.

Through a commitment to processes of due diligence, the Board continues to guide and monitor changes and growth, ensuring the health, wellbeing, and sustainability of the Agency. The work of the Board was shown this year through our completion of a new Strategic Plan. We spent time with the senior staff of the Agency looking at improving and enhancing the strategic directions for the Agency. We are proud to say that this Strategic Plan involved significant consultation with community members, staff, and community partners. The Strategic Plan that emerged is reflective of the community we serve and will guide our work over the next five years in ways that continue to benefit Indigenous children, families, and communities.

The Board and senior staff have begun the process of changing our governance model. As an Agency we are working towards an Indigenous model of governance to lead the Agency and move away from the current colonial model of governance. To achieve this form of governance, we are working with Elders and community to ensure we are creating the best possible structure. We are excited by this initiative as it does not yet exist elsewhere in an urban setting; NCFST is, once again, finding ourselves at the forefront of innovation in our sector.

The Board participated in recent talks with various elected officials within the federal government to ensure that NCFST continues to be able to access funding from the Government of Canada to ensure the best possible outcomes for the Indigenous children and families in Toronto and Peel.

The Board supports the ongoing development of relationships between NCFST and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Developing these relations ensures that children and their families can be reunited with their home communities. Board members continue to support the work of the Agency through attendance at various events such as the annual Pow Wow, National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, Children's seasonal party, and the Indigenous Spirit Awards.





The Board is always looking for Indigenous members. As members of the Board, we serve on various committees. The work of these committees ensures the continued success of NCFST.

The Finance Committee requires knowledge of budgets and some financial expertise. It is not mandatory that a Board member have this knowledge, but some previous experience is a good thing.

The Governance Committee considers the issues of how the board operates through review of bylaws and is developing a Board training package. It is also working with the Agency as it develops this exciting new leadership model.

The Indigenous Spirit Fund continues to work towards the development of a stronger fundraising arm. Some fundraising experience would be an asset for this committee.

As Board members of this Agency, we ensure that NCFSTS continues to provide the support that enables the Indigenous families of the City of Toronto and Peel Region to be the strong and successful people they have every right to be.

# FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY: A TRANSITION TOWARDS INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

## **JEFFREY SCHIFFER**

In December of 2022, guided by the wisdom of Elders and cultural leaders within the community, the Board of Directors at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) made a momentous decision to transition the Agency towards a new model of Indigenous governance. Recognizing the importance of aligning with Indigenous worldview, the role of the Executive Director was reclassified as the Director of Governance and Strategy. I was invited to assume this transformative role and entrusted with leading the development of NCFST's new governance model. Additionally, I have embraced leadership responsibilities for portfolios that include Quality Assurance and Decolonization, Funds Development and Strategic Partnerships, and the Indigenous Spirit Fund.

In January of 2023, a ceremony was conducted to birth an Interim Leadership Council, comprising all the Directors at NCFST. This Interim Leadership Council, in collaboration with the Board of Directors and an Elders Advisory Circle, embraces a consensus-based decision-making process, deeply rooted in Indigenous values and teachings. This sacred approach guides our collective leadership as we co-create the permanent governance model that will shape the Agency's future. During the last quarter of the fiscal year, significant strides were taken to initiate the development of NCFST's new governance model. A comprehensive work plan, created and approved by the Board of Directors and the Elders Advisory Circle, has been established to guide us on this transformative journey. Spanning from January 1st, 2022, to March 31st, 2024, this work plan reflects our commitment to purposeful, intentional progress. The outcomes of this endeavour will be shared in the next Annual Report, ensuring transparency and accountability.



We express our deep gratitude for the unwavering support we have received from our community, partner organizations, and First Nations as we embark on this change. We are especially grateful for the ongoing discussions with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, as we collectively transition to a new system of Indigenous governance within their Treaty territory. Our deepest appreciation is extended to Elder/Knowledge Carrier Diane Longboat for generously hosting the Interim Leadership Council at the Lodge in Six Nations, where we were blessed to ground our process in ceremony and receive invaluable teachings on Haudenosaunee governance and the Great Law of Peace. Additionally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief Reg Niganobe for bringing a delegation down to NCFST, enriching our understanding with teachings on the Anishinaabe Clan System. Lastly, we hold profound gratitude for all the community members and staff who have actively participated in talking circles, interviews, surveys, and other engagement methods. Their invaluable contributions ensure that the governance model we are developing is co-created with and reflective of the community we are deeply honored to serve.

# GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY

## **JEFFREY SCHIFFER, DIRECTOR**

It has been another exciting year of transition and change at NCFST. With COVID-19 largely under control, we have seen a welcomed return to in-person services, ceremony, community events and an increasing presence of staff, community and partners at our various sites and locations. This shift has supported our continued work to strengthen relationships with community, partner organizations, Indigenous governments, and all levels of Canadian government. It has been particularly heartening to witness the growth and development of our community councils, who continue to provide important direction to the Agency as we design and deliver programs and services with community for community. I am also especially grateful to our culture team, a group of Elders, Knowledge Carriers and cultural resource workers who continue to guide the Agency and strengthen our relationships.

NCFST is currently undergoing its most significant period of change since the Agency took on a mandate as a legislated Children's Aid Society in 2004. While that previous change embedded our Agency further in colonial legislation, policy and practice standards, this next phase of growth is re-grounding NCFST in community, culture, and innovation. In December of 2022, our Board of Directors and executive team made the consensus-based decision to transition the Agency away from a colonial form of governance, led by an Executive Director, towards a new model of Indigenous governance in the form of a Leadership Council. This decision was made with the support and guidance of many Elders, Knowledge Carriers and other supports from the communities we serve. I would like to especially thank Diane Longboat, Hilton King, Alita Sauve and Kevin Fujita for their support and guidance in this process.





## QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DECOLONIZATION (QAD)

NCFST is committed to understanding who we serve, what communities they are connected to, and how we can best create a climate of safety, health, wellbeing, and prosperity for Indigenous children and families. Our Quality Assurance and Decolonization team performs important functions related to compliance with current legislation, policy and practice standards, program evaluation related to service outcomes, community engagement, and research related to continuous improvement and systems transformation.

### **Child and Family Wellbeing Services Reform: NCFST's First Community Report Back**

On September 30th, 2022, NCFST provided our first community report back on changes and progress the Agency is making with respect to the transformation of Indigenous child and family services. The event took place at our Mount Dennis Indigenous Child and Family Center, and was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, Mayor John Tory, and Jama Maxie (a previous youth in care, who is now a board member). The recording of the event is available on our website.

This was our first community report back on the commitments we made on Canada's First National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

Along with great messages from community members, we announced the continuation of our community advisory, the creation of a new table of Indigenous services providers who will focus on service integration and coordination with a focus of preventing entry of children into child welfare, and a process to bring the voices of community into the work the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) is doing to decolonize current tools and assessments, and the inclusion of community voices into the upcoming Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) legislative review.

We received great engagement from community and partners during the Q&A and after the event. This event was a fantastic way to publicize and launch our ongoing work to further decolonize child welfare services within our service geography through co-development with community, partner organizations and Indigenous governing bodies. .



### Policy Development

QAD will be holding policy development responsibilities as part of the holistic healing accreditation process and will engage Executive leadership in articulating and approving policy priorities for NCFST. Priorities will meet several tests, ensuring priorities meet community concern, protect privacy and are adherent to Indigenous data sovereignty, promote greater self-determination and facilitate further connection with the Nations we serve. The development, storage and application of policy priorities informed by our 2023/2028 Strategic Plan singularly ensures our collective actions are implemented, aligned, and coordinated.

### Program Evaluations

Since NCFST's launch over 30 years ago a single priority has been woven into all that we do and that is delivering culturally safe programs that help in the way they are supposed to help. Although QAD has the capacity to conduct many different techniques to gauge service effectiveness, two approaches have emerged as being specifically helpful to meet our obligations to community members: evaluations that focus on outcomes and that measure the presence of traditional Indigenous values. Pre-post outcome evaluations, in-depth interviews and the analysis of engagement rates are some key ways that we measure effectiveness. The techniques prescribed by the practice of Principles-Based evaluation (developed by Michael Quinn Patton) investigate the Indigenous values ascribed to a program (by design or promotion) to confirm if those principles exist and are experienced, the way they are intended, by the service user. These principles may include a guarantee of 'culturally safe,' 'harm reducing,' respectful of individual pace, trauma-informed, and finally an adherence to the Seven Grandfather teachings of the Anishinaabe valued by the community we serve. During this year QAD has completed three such evaluations: a principles-focused evaluation for the Bekaadendang Team; an outcomes-based assessment of Scarborough's Senior's programming; and finally, a three-phase assessment of Indigenous Tools for Living (ITFL) training for Agency staff.

## Supporting Service Integration

Service integration is a key aspect of how Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Agencies are transforming practice uniquely to fit the needs of the families we serve. Embracing families with services that address child safety as an expression of the wellbeing of family, community and the state of settler/colonial relations acknowledges that child safety exists only within the context of family community and systemic healing. Indeed, Child safety requires the wellbeing of parents, grandparents, communities, land, traditions and values. Two phases of this work (for QAD) have been identified: the first is supporting the work of identifying the baseline effectiveness of prevention work for reducing the length and recurrence of child protection involvement. This work is underway by colleagues from the University of Toronto Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (OCANDS) analysts and will conclude by August 2023.

The second, following the OCANDS data results, is conducting a chronic/urgent analysis (first introduced by Trocme, Kyte, Sinha & Fallon in 2014) to help us deepen the analysis of the ANCFSAO file work referred to above. Investigating files that require acute (urgent) versus long-term (chronic) interventions will help us understand more fully the resources and services needed by those identified as ‘at risk’ by the provincial system of child protection. Drawing from phase one we will have a sense of the impact of our services in terms of the length of involvement and this phase will move that analysis further to ensure not only the length but the type of service delivery is appropriate. For example, this analysis will help us to evaluate our use of ‘out of home’ caregiving services more strategically as some situations are not suitable for long terms separation and will not serve to address the family’s needs. The urgent/chronic taxonomy is an up-and-coming project for 2023/2024 and will accelerate once the ANCFSAO work comparing the length and depth of interventions for families in healing services consecutively with those who are not.

## Feedback and Complaints

We continue to develop policy and procedures for our newly revised Community Resolution process (formerly complaints process). Through discussions with our community advisory in 2022 it became clear that community members were dissatisfied with the existing process and requested revisions to allow for greater transparency and neutrality. To this end, QAD has developed relationships with Aboriginal Legal Services Toronto (ALST) as well as the treaty-holding First Nation for the GTA, Mississaugas of the Credit, to act as mediators and outside adjudicators when community members feel an unfairness has occurred during service delivery.

## Research

For the year 2022 the NCFST Research Subcommittee heard proposals from 22 university affiliated research groups. Of the total proposals, four (4) projects have been accepted for partnership and co- development. Each proposal is heard and vetted by the research subcommittee, made up of representatives from Child and Family Wellbeing, Holistic Services, Funding, and Youth Services.





## Placement Students

As a busy and active department, we value the participation of those involved in Indigenous thought leadership. Since our beginning, four (4) years ago, QAD has supported four (4) graduate students (in partnership with Humber College, University of Toronto, York University and Trent University) and one MITACS Accelerate intern who was also a graduate-level student from Trent. Currently, we are supporting a student from Grassy Narrows First Nation, currently attending Sheridan College, who is helping us with our community engagement projects. He brings an informed perspective to our work and by way of his motivation to learn pushes us to explain our actions in a way that helps clarify our own objectives. Students bring an informed and sometimes provocative perspective to our work as well as providing us access to cutting-edge processes and research. These benefits provide us more than enough motivation to continue to welcome students into our team. We would like to say “Chi Miigwetch” to all our past, present and future students/interns and are so grateful for your invaluable contributions!

## FUNDS DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

In 2022-23 the Funds Development team continued to achieve incredible success for NCFST staff and the community members that we serve.

Working in close collaboration with Finance and Service teams, the Funds Development team continued to support NCFST with effective fund development, grant stewardship, reporting, and government and stakeholder relations work, which saw us raise over 20 million dollars in new or renewed funding and helped to manage over 20 million dollars in existing funding, contributing to an over five (5) million dollar increase in revenue over the previous fiscal year.

Over the course of the fiscal year representatives from NCFST regularly met with and hosted public servants and elected officials from municipal, provincial, federal, and Indigenous governments. We continued to foster strategic relationships to ensure sustainable service delivery for Indigenous community members in Toronto and Peel regions. We look forward to furthering our partnerships with all levels of government- specifically with respect to the Province of Ontario's legislative review of the Children, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA), and the continued development of Indigenous laws under The Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families.



Photo credit: Catherine Belshaw

## INDIGENOUS SPIRIT FUND

The Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF), the philanthropic arm of NCFST, had another memorable year as it continued to focus on its developmental growth and broadening its impact and commitment to building sustainable philanthropic relationships and strategic partnerships.

One of the year's highlights was the third Annual Honouring the Indigenous Spirit Awards celebrating the achievements of outstanding Indigenous youth in Toronto and the GTA. During the celebratory dinner, five (5) awards were handed out to youth whose endeavours have contributed to breaking down personal and systemic barriers to achieving their full potential. A packaged awards video, consisting of in-depth interviews with the award winners and cultural demonstrations, was screened at the dinner and released via various media outlets. The Oshkaabewis Award, given to an individual who has been a supporter, advocate, and champion of the cause, was presented to Ms. Sharifa Khan, Founder and CEO of Balmoral Multicultural Marketing, with whom ISF collaborated on successful fundraising initiatives and events in partnership with the Chinese community. We wish to thank the following sponsors for making this annual event possible: The Estate of Ms. Helen Allen Stacey, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, Capital One, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, Toronto Foundation, and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. Miigwetch!



Another notable event was the joint effort with Children's Aid Foundation of Canada to host a special private event for NCFST families featuring the world-renowned children's group, The Wiggles. During their Canadian tour, the Wiggles made a visit to the NCFST head office and spent an afternoon entertaining children and adults alike.

This past year brought many opportunities for fundraising and awareness-raising events held in collaboration with the Chinese Cultural Center, Humaniti, Kipling Realty, Kiwanis Club of Casa Loma, and Rotary Club of Toronto, as well as community-driven peer-to-peer campaigns. In October, ISF was honoured to be one of five charities showcased at the Canada Running Series' Toronto Waterfront Marathon Expo. ISF was also invited to be a part of various speaking engagements including a panel discussion at the Association for Fundraising Professionals Congress moderated by Valerie McMurtry, President & CEO, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada.

As part of our corporate outreach strategy, we are recruiting new members to the ISF Committee. Comprised of senior executives, philanthropists, and community leaders, the Committee supports ISF initiatives by advancing strategic alliances and increasing the footprint of outreach, supporting fundraising campaigns, and providing guidance and insights to further develop the strategic vision of the ISF.

We are also thrilled to be collaborating with the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada on the production of its annual gala – The Teddy Bear Affair, to be held in November 2023. This exclusive, black-tie event brings together philanthropists and leaders from across the country in support of families, children, and youth whose lives have been involved in the child welfare system.

As we look to this new year, we are excited by the work ahead as we continue to nurture existing relationships and partnerships and forge new ones with the aim to raise funds to support vital programs and services at NCFST.

# HOLISTIC SERVICES

## **MELISSA HAMONIC, DIRECTOR**

This past year marked a significant transition for Holistic Services as we emerged from the challenges of the pandemic and resumed full operations at our Community Hubs and across our programs. In line with our commitment to providing culturally grounded services to Indigenous community members in and around Toronto, we are proud to have co-created a new Agency-wide Strategic Plan through extensive community engagement. This plan strengthens our vision and guides our efforts going forward.

Additionally, we are thrilled to welcome a diverse group of new leaders from within our organization. Their presence has infused our programming with renewed energy and creativity, while honoring the important work of those who came before them. It is with great honor that I share some of the truly impactful initiatives that have emerged from the lessons we learned throughout the pandemic.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all the dedicated members of the Holistic Services team and administrative staff. Your unwavering commitment to providing support to our community across all quadrants of the medicine wheel is truly commendable. It is an honour and a privilege to walk this journey alongside each and every one of you. Your dedication, passion, and hard work make a significant difference in the lives of those we serve. Your compassion and expertise bring comfort, healing, and strength to individuals and families in need. Thank you for embodying the values of our Agency and for going above and beyond to make a positive impact. Your contributions are deeply valued and greatly appreciated. Together, we are creating a brighter future for our community.





# ABORIGINAL CHILD AND FAMILY CENTERS

## Scarborough Child and Family Life Center (SCFLC)

### About the Center

SCFLC offers childcare, Waabanong Aboriginal Head Start, EarlyON, youth and Elder services, and a variety of community programs grounded in culture that provide supports across all four (4) directions. Throughout the previous year, SCFLC has been deeply involved in community engagement, creating an atmosphere of comfort and a sense of belonging. They have organized a range of events and activities that cater to all age groups and interests. Some examples of these initiatives include Back-to-school BBQs, Family trips, Orange Shirt Day community giveaways, and weekly youth empowerment groups. These activities not only provide enjoyable experiences but also create opportunities for learning, connection, and empowerment.

### Meet the Site Supervisor

Wâciye!! My name is Valerie Kerr, I'm a proud Cree Woman with Irish and Scottish descents. My Indigenous roots can be traced back to the Norway House Cree nation, and I was fortunate to be born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. For the past 12 years, I have had the privilege of working with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families in Toronto as part of my career with Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. In 2022, I embarked on a new chapter as the Supervisor of Family and Community Programs at the Scarborough Child and Family Life Center, which is known as The House of Giizhiik (Sunshine). This transition has allowed me to continue my dedicated work in empowering families and fostering community connections in Scarborough. I firmly believe that through collaborative efforts and culturally rooted programs, we can make a profound and positive impact on the lives of individuals and families in our community.

## Food Sovereignty

The challenge of food sovereignty persists within our community, extending far beyond the scope of the pandemic. In response, we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing food assistance through our valued partnership with Second Harvest. Through this collaboration, we are able to offer weekly provisions of fresh produce and dairy products, which community members eagerly collect from our site.

Looking ahead to the upcoming year, we are actively engaged in collaborative efforts to establish sustainable food cultivation initiatives. Our vision encompasses the creation of community gardens and the facilitation of workshops focused on cultivating and harvesting food in diverse settings, whether it be on a large scale or within limited spaces.

By working together, we aspire to empower our community with the knowledge and resources needed to achieve self-sufficiency and promote food security for all. Our dedication to fostering sustainable food practices serves as a testament to our unwavering commitment to the wellbeing and resilience of our community.



## Partnerships

In the past year, our physical literacy program has offered diverse initiatives to promote overall wellness. Our partnership with the Toronto Pan Am Sports center has played a crucial role in creating engaging programming tailored to participants' interests. Activities such as open gym sessions, kickboxing, spin classes, and rock climbing have been implemented. To expand access, we collaborated with the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club during the winter and spring sessions.

Additionally, we formed a partnership with Project Canoe to provide a land-based program for youth aged 13 to 29. This program offered immersive experiences such as hikes in the Rouge Forest and the opportunity to acquire firekeeping skills. These outdoor activities fostered a deeper connection to nature and provided valuable learning opportunities for participants.

Through these collaborative efforts, we have been able to enhance physical and mental wellbeing, empower youth, and encourage a lifelong commitment to healthy living.

## Malvern Child and Family Center (MCFC)

### About the Center

MCFC offers a diverse range of community programs, an EarlyON location, youth services, and a vibrantly active seniors program. This site is privileged to have an exceptional staff who are deeply rooted in the community, prioritize Indigenous perspectives, and possess a genuine commitment to serving our community. With their community-minded approach, focus on Indigenous values, and unwavering dedication, our staff create a welcoming and supportive environment for all. This team focuses on inclusivity and strive to provide meaningful services that meet the diverse needs of our community, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment for all individuals and families we serve.

### Seniors Programming

Seniors Programming has become a tremendous success, drawing a strong and engaged community of seniors and their caregivers who actively participate in various programming and services. Offering an impressive range of four to five programs every week, the seniors enjoy a diverse selection that includes traditional arts and crafts, healing and wellness activities, and physical wellbeing sessions. The popularity of these programs is evident as they consistently attract a full attendance. A notable addition to the lineup is the newly introduced Writing Club, where participants gather for weeks to share their stories, poems, thoughts, and words. This collective sharing fosters healing, wellness, and creativity among the seniors, proving that age poses no limitations. As expressed by one grateful participant, the experience feels rejuvenating and inspiring, with a heartfelt sentiment of "It's like I've been re-energized. Chi-Miigwetch."

### Meet the Site Supervisor

Hello, my name is Michelle Meawasige and I have been proudly serving the Indigenous community in Toronto for the last 26 years through my work at NCFST. I've had the privilege of taking on different roles during my journey, starting as a RECE in the Waabanong Aboriginal Head Start Program and transitioning to the position of Family Community Coordinator. Later on, I had the opportunity to work with youth transitioning from care before taking on a supervisory role. Serving the Toronto Indigenous community as a provider and community member has been an honor, and I'm grateful for all the lives I've been involved in. For me, working with the community is where my spirit is most alive. Five (5) years ago, I embraced the role of supervisor at the Malvern location, and I knew deep inside that it was where I was meant to be.







*Photo credit: Samantha Fawns-Thistle*

## Partnerships

Over the past few years, the Toronto Zoo has established an active partnership with NCFST. This collaboration has allowed families from MACFC and other programs to visit the Toronto Zoo on a weekly basis, regardless of the season, to partake in On the Land Programming. For National Indigenous Peoples Day, on June 21st, 2022, the team worked together to activate the Medicine Garden where they conducted a sacred fire ceremony, engaged in traditional storytelling, shared valuable teachings, and set up informative and interactive tables. Additionally, the Fire Keeper program was invited to the Zoo to collect birch bark from fallen trees, which would be used as fire starters and for crafting purposes.

Furthermore, MACFC has fostered a strong partnership with Parks Canada. They were granted access to a garden plot at Bob Hunter Memorial Park, where youth were actively involved in planting, caring for, and harvesting a Three Sisters Garden. During the harvest, the team and community members shared traditional teachings with other community gardeners and Parks Canada staff. As a new initiative, the team has started a garden this year specifically for growing traditional medicines to be utilized in programming and by the community. The program's objective is to educate youth on planting, tending to, and nurturing our sacred medicines while respecting the Seven (7) Grandfather Teachings and the interconnectedness of "All My Relations". This partnership, which began as a pilot project, is set to continue for many years to come, promoting cultural preservation and community engagement.

## Mount Dennis Child and Family Center (MDCFC)

### About the Center

MDCFC offers programs and services to support community members of various age groups. These include the Kiiwednong Aboriginal Head Start program, which focuses on early childhood education for Indigenous children. Families with young children can also benefit from the EarlyON programs, offering resources, guidance, and community connections. MDCFC places a strong emphasis on engaging youth through dedicated programs that promote personal growth, skill development, and community involvement. Additionally, the organization recognizes and values the importance of senior support, offering services that prioritize the physical, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of Elders. With its comprehensive programming and services, MDCFC aims to cater to the holistic needs of the community, fostering a strong and inclusive environment for all individuals.

### Meet the Site Supervisor

Aannii! My name is Julianna (Julie) Meawasige, I'm Anishinaabe, was born and raised in Toronto, and I am registered with Serpent River First Nation. I have dedicated the past 18 years of my career to serving First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families in the city through my work at NCFST. I have taken on various roles throughout my journey, and since May 2022, I have had the privilege of serving as the Supervisor for the MDCFC, also known as the Mount Dennis Hub. The Mount Dennis Team has experienced a great deal of joy and excitement while planning programs and ceremonies for community. Our hope is that community members see the Hub as a space where they can create meaningful memories with their families and fellow community members. We eagerly look forward to the year ahead and the opportunity to collaborate with our community.



## Community Engagement

Over the past 12 months, we have hosted a range of exciting events for families at the Mount Dennis Hub. One memorable occasion was our graduation ceremony held last June, where we celebrated the achievements of children and youth as they completed the school year or reached important milestones in their education. We were thrilled to witness the strong and vibrant community of Mount Dennis come together to volunteer their time and support at our center. To express our gratitude, we organized a Volunteer Appreciation Lunch in September, recognizing the invaluable contributions of our volunteers.

During Halloween, our staff transformed the office space into a thrilling haunted house, creating a memorable and spooky experience for everyone. In December, we held our inaugural Winter Concert, where children from the school-aged program showcased their talent through a beautifully choreographed dance performance. We also expressed our appreciation for the families with the "12 days of Giveaway" event, where we sang and shared gifts.

Throughout the year, we have been committed to expanding our cultural programming. Sewing classes for ribbon skirts/shirts and regalia have been ongoing, allowing families to learn and preserve important traditions. We have also facilitated significant ceremonies such as Drum Birthing, Naming, Full Moon, and Ancestor's Feast. Looking ahead, we are excited to introduce more ceremonies in the center and are in the process of building our first community sweat lodge.

The past year has been filled with meaningful and enriching experiences for our community, and we are dedicated to continuing this momentum in the future.



## Partnerships

The Ojibiikaan Indigenous Cultural Network has been an invaluable partner to our EarlyON program, sharing their expertise in cultural foods and on-the-land teachings. Their contribution has enriched our programming and provided valuable cultural knowledge to our staff and participants.

Our collaboration with Start2Finish, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting children's education and overall wellbeing. Their program has provided children and youth with access to free books by and for Indigenous peoples through a book vending machine. This initiative has been enthusiastically embraced by our community, allowing families to bring home books that reflect their cultural identity and promote literacy.

Additionally, we have partnered with "Their Opportunity", an organization that aims to empower children through the power of sport. Through their skate drive program, community members have received skates and equipment to enjoy during the colder months. This partnership has allowed Indigenous children and youth to experience the joy of skating and engage in physical activity.

## 30 College Child and Family Center (CCFC)

### About the Center

30 College Child and Family Centre (CCFC) is more than just an administrative and meeting space; it is a vibrant community hub that offers a range of essential services. In addition to providing administrative support and hosting meetings, 30 College is dedicated to offering family supports as well as early childhood programming through its EarlyON initiatives. Community members can engage in cultural activities, workshops, and events that celebrate Indigenous traditions and promote cultural revitalization. Furthermore, families with young children can benefit from the EarlyON programs, which provide valuable resources and opportunities for early learning and development.

### On The Land Programming

During the pandemic, we adapted our EarlyON programming by shifting exclusively to outdoor land-based activities. As families returned to our EarlyON space, we recognized the profound impact of connecting with the land. Our weekly 'Little Wanderers' program, situated on our rooftop, focuses on fostering a connection with the land through play, exploration, and traditional teachings, promoting holistic wellbeing. As Indigenous people residing in urban environments, it is crucial that we find ways to connect with the land in our city. Our rooftop program provides a unique opportunity for families to engage with the land and the environment in this urban context.

To enhance our reception services, we have introduced a Peacekeeper on-site. This individual warmly welcomes and engages with community members and staff while they wait for appointments, pick up medicines from the culture team, or simply come in for a coffee and a chat. The Peacekeeper also plays a vital role in creating a culturally connected and safe space for everyone.

### Partnerships

In collaboration with Inner City Health Associates, the Odel'Min Clinic provides a valuable service for the community by hosting a weekly medical clinic. This clinic is open to all community members, offering an accessible avenue to receive healthcare services and health referrals. In 2022, the Odel'Min Clinic made a significant impact by providing 935 visits to community members seeking medical assistance and support. This demonstrates the clinic's commitment to addressing the healthcare needs of the community and ensuring that individuals can receive essential medical care in a convenient and welcoming setting.



## Native Youth Resource Center (NYRC)

### About the Hub

NYRC is a dynamic drop-in youth space that provides a welcoming environment for Indigenous youth under the age of 25. It goes beyond a traditional drop-in center by offering a wide range of services and support. Throughout the day, youth can enjoy nutritious meals and snacks while engaging in various cultural programming and recreational activities. NYRC provided support and advocacy in education, housing, and health and wellness, all grounded in Indigenous principles and the principles of harm reduction. By integrating these components, NYRC strives to create a holistic and empowering space where youth can access the resources they need while connecting with their community and identity.

### Cultural Programming

Maamawi, meaning "Together," is a monthly youth cultural event organized by NYRC, taking place on the last Friday of every month, with a focus of sharing cultural knowledge, teachings, bundle building, and fostering interconnectedness. Each Maamawi event features drumming and jingle dress dancing on Bloor St., right in front of our NYRC location. This street performance is not only a means of raising community awareness but also an opportunity for youth to showcase their pride in their culture through traditional drumming and dancing.

NYRC recently hosted a significant event focused on regalia and traditional tattooing for Indigenous youth. Traditional tattooing plays a vital role in cultural revitalization for the Indigenous community. This well-attended event provided an exceptional opportunity for youth to connect with their cultures through this impactful and unique practice. Thirteen (13) youth received traditional hand-poked clan markings or machine-based traditional imagery from certified artists Sagatay Kwandibenz and Crystal Kimewon.

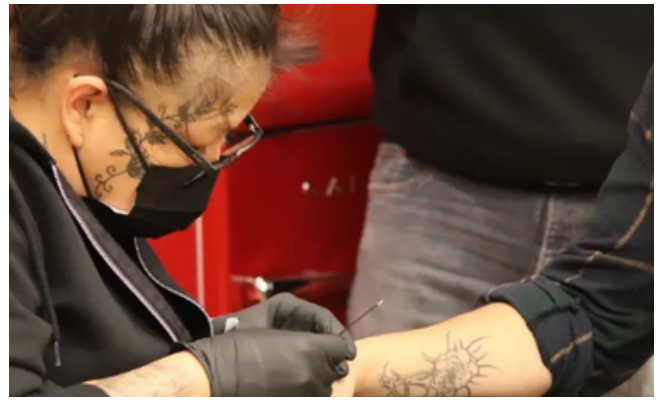
### Meet the Site Supervisors

#### Justin Moore

I am a Mohawk of Kanesatake, a reservation situated on the shores of the Lake of Two Mountains in southwestern Quebec. Kanesatake is widely recognized for its Indigenous resistance during the Oka crisis in 1990. Currently, I hold the position of Supervisor of Youth Engagement at NCFST. Over the past 15 years, I have dedicated my career to serving children and youth in various sectors, including live-care, youth justice, education, and community-based services. As a Sundancer on my ceremonial journey, I deeply enjoy participating in ceremony alongside youth and believe this is a crucial component in cultural revitalization that supports the healing journey of all.

#### Andrea Hayward

My spirit name is Tall Standing Cedar Woman. I am Haudenosaunee, Mohawk, turtle clan with ancestry from Six Nations on my paternal side, and of mixed European ancestry on my maternal side. For the past seven (7) years, I have been a part of NCFST, where I currently serve as the Supervisor of Youth Training and Employment. I have held various frontline positions, providing support to Indigenous youth, families, and children. In my current role, which I have held for two years, my primary focus is to empower and assist youth and community members in accessing inclusive education opportunities and enriching life and employment skills programs. My dedication lies in creating accessible pathways for personal growth and development within the community.



## Partnerships

In partnership with Centennial College, we have collaborated to offer the Early Childhood Education program to 25 Indigenous individuals already employed in the childcare sector. This part-time program spans over 24 months and provides free education and support for learners to obtain their Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) certification while continuing to work. By participating in this program, individuals can enhance their skills and expand their opportunities in the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) field.

Additionally, Street Youth Legal Services has been a valuable resource for NYRC youth, offering monthly sessions for free legal advice and programming. Through their expertise and guidance, youth receive support in navigating the legal system and gaining knowledge that empowers them in various legal matters. This ongoing collaboration plays a crucial role in ensuring the wellbeing and rights of our youth are upheld.



Photo credit: Tyran Hunt



# CAMPS

## About the Camp

The Camp is a year-round community space that offers camp experiences for children and families, providing culturally focused and land-based activities in alignment with the teachings of the territory and the seasons.

During the 2022-2023 season, we had the privilege of providing cultural and on-the-land experiences to 447 community members. These experiences aimed to foster a deeper connection with Indigenous culture and the Land. In addition to serving the community, we also hosted NCFST team development camps at The Camp. These camps offered our staff valuable opportunities to come together, strengthen their connections, and engage in meaningful ceremonies on the land. Through these activities, we aimed to promote a sense of unity and growth within our team, ensuring that our staff members are well-equipped to support the community they serve.

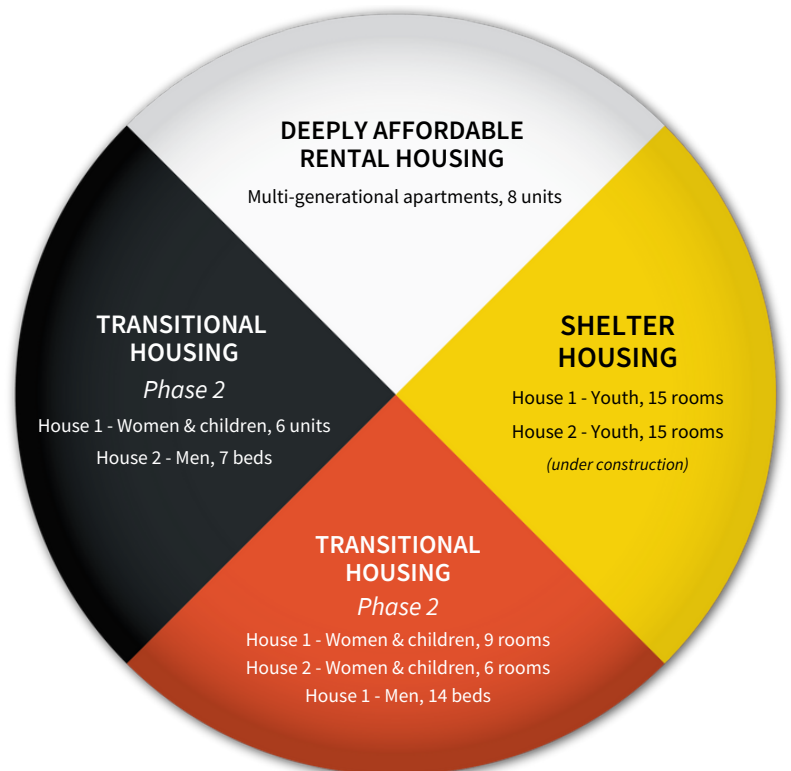
## Partnerships

The Gwekwaadziwin Miikan Youth Mental Health and Addictions Program is a residential land-based treatment program for Indigenous youth and young adults. We have partnered with them to provide survival training and cultural teachings to our staff, enhancing their skills and knowledge. This partnership has been invaluable, allowing us to learn and grow together. We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate and the insights gained from this partnership. Together, we are committed to promoting cultural awareness and wellbeing among Indigenous youth.

# HOUSING

Our housing circle follows the four directions, starting with Shelter Housing in the Eastern doorway. Community members can choose the quadrant that aligns with their housing and wellbeing journey.

During the pandemic, we operated a successful 14 bed emergency shelter for Indigenous youth aged 16 to 29 as part of Toronto's Covid-19 response. Recognizing the ongoing need for culturally appropriate housing, we acquired two centrally located houses with a total capacity of thirty (30) youth shelter beds. We smoothly transitioned the youth from the temporary shelter to the new location and are awaiting the completion of renovations for the second home to accommodate 15 more youth. The houses provide round-the-clock support staff, cultural programming, case management, and community connections to promote youth wellbeing.



# CLINICAL PROGRAMS

In response to the ongoing mental health challenges stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic, our clinical programs have expanded their services to provide enhanced support to Indigenous community members. While continuing to offer individual counseling and case management, we have also introduced culturally focused support circles to meet the diverse needs of our community. These include Women's Empowerment, Here to Help (a family violence group for adults and children), Partner Assault Response (support for individuals who have perpetrated violence), Grief and Loss, Healthy Relationships, Youth Harm Reduction, The Gentle Deer (healthy coping skills for all genders), and more. Our aim is to ensure that we address the unique mental health concerns of our community members while providing culturally relevant and empowering support in these challenging times.



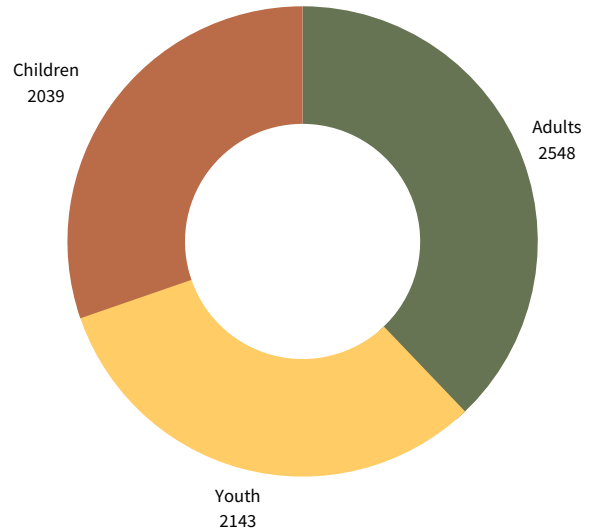
## Family Supports

Family Supports is a program that offers culturally guided education and comprehensive early intervention support to caregivers and their children, spanning from pre- to post-natal stages until the age of six (6). Our approach is rooted in embracing a service model that prioritizes strengthening parenting skills and nurturing relationships through a cultural lens. We recognize the significance of incorporating cultural perspectives and practices in empowering caregivers to provide the best possible care for their children. By providing wrap-around supports, we aim to create a nurturing and inclusive environment that fosters the wellbeing and development of both caregivers and their children. Our commitment lies in ensuring that families receive the necessary tools, resources, and culturally relevant guidance to thrive in their parenting journey.

## Cultural Connection

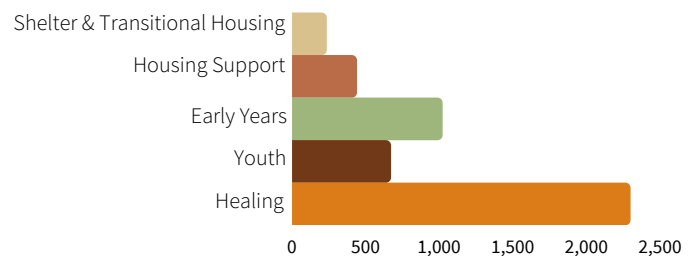
The Family Supports Team organizes a monthly moon event where families are warmly invited to partake in teachings, engaging family activities, a feast, and a giveaway. The 'Full Moon' event has been met with great enthusiasm, with an average attendance of at least 20 community members at each event. Notably, the 'Freezing Moon' event saw a significant increase in participation, with 60 community members joining in for the celebration. These events provide an opportunity for families to come together, learn, have fun, and share in the spirit of community. The growing attendance reflects the growing interest and appreciation for these monthly gatherings, highlighting their positive impact on community engagement and cultural connection.

## HOLISTIC SERVICES PARTICIPANTS



Total people accessing Holistic Services: 6730

## UNIQUE PARTICIPANTS BY PROGRAM



A SHORT BY SEAN STILLER

# Ni gii e daa

our journey home



## ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In collaboration with the community and a video production crew, the Bekaadendang program has created a powerful short film titled "Ni gii e daa" (Neh-gee-a-dah), which means "Our Journey Home". This film aims to honor all community members who have accessed the program's services and those who have encountered trafficking. It showcases the inspiring stories of two Indigenous women who experienced exploitation as young girls but found healing and strength through their culture. Their journeys serve as a testament to the non-linear path of exploitation, awareness, healing, and hope that many Indigenous community members have endured.

The film highlights the importance of paying attention, listening, and learning from the stories of survivors. By doing so, we have the potential to address the root causes of violence and create safe spaces for healing within Indigenous communities. While each story is unique, there are common elements that deserve our attention and understanding. This film serves as a powerful tool in promoting violence prevention and fostering healing for those affected by exploitation.

*Video Link - <https://youtu.be/T5oINg5MGRA>*



## MDEWGAAN LODGE

The lasting effects of colonization, racism, sexism, and intergenerational trauma persistently affect the wellbeing of Indigenous women and their children. The violence inflicted by the residential school system and the sixties scoop deliberately tore apart families and communities, aiming to disconnect Indigenous peoples from their loved ones, cultures, and spiritual traditions. Women and children continue to bear the consequences of these ruptures in their daily lives.

To address these challenges, Mdewgaan Lodge was established as a residential Healing Lodge specifically designed to support mothers impacted by colonization, including substance use. The Lodge warmly welcomes expectant mothers, mothers with young children, and those working towards family reunification. In 2022, the Lodge supported 17 women and 13 children program participants, offering a safe and supportive environment for healing and growth.

### **Partnerships**

In the previous year, we established a valuable partnership with Michael Garron Hospital's substance detox program, prioritizing the cultural wellbeing and prompt access to detox services for Indigenous community members. This collaboration has been instrumental in facilitating a safe and seamless transition for both mothers and their children from the detox program to our Healing Lodge. We extend our heartfelt appreciation for the collaborative efforts and dedication demonstrated in ensuring the wellbeing and support of our community members throughout this process. Together, we have fostered an environment that promotes cultural safety and nurtures the healing journey of individuals and their families.

# CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING

## **JENNIFER TURNER, DIRECTOR**

Over the past year, Child and Family Wellbeing (CFWB) has experienced a period of transformation. I had the privilege of transitioning from a Manager to a Director of Child and Family Wellbeing midway through the year. As the pandemic gradually recedes, life is slowly returning to a semblance of normalcy. Many First Nation communities are exercising their right to self-determination by assuming jurisdiction over children and family services for their members. It is expected that more communities will adopt the An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families.

At NCFST, our goal is to keep families together whenever possible, and our collaboration with Holistic Services plays a crucial role in providing comprehensive support to families in crisis or facing challenging circumstances. However, there are instances where family preservation is not always feasible, and alternative caregivers may be required for children and youth. Collaboration with Holistic Services and First Nation communities is essential in working towards reunification or repatriation of children and youth to their extended family and First Nation community.

Our Family Finding program exemplifies our collaborative efforts to prevent children and youth from entering foster care and instead placing them with their extended families or members of their community.

Through this report, you will witness the unwavering commitment of our dedicated staff as they continue to serve the Indigenous community in Toronto and Peel. They prioritize the wellbeing of children and youth while finding innovative solutions guided by our original Service Model.



*Photo credit: Angela Giovanelli*

# A REPATRIATION STORY

Bentley, a young boy, was placed under the care of Native Child and Family Services due to some family struggles. The Child and Family Wellbeing Worker and the Family Finding Worker worked with his parents and Bands to locate a family member in British Columbia who was willing to take care of him. Bentley is now living with his auntie in Tsilhqot'in Nation (Tl'etinqox Government). Angela Giovanelli, Chief's Advisor for Social Services, Tl'etinqox Government Office, shared Bentley's welcoming ceremony into the community.

*"The day of the ceremony we received our first snowfall of the year so the roads were quite bad with about 12 inches of snow accumulating quickly. We had approximately 60 to 70 people attend throughout the event.*

*Bentley was welcomed by our chief and council, Women's council, cultural mentor, youth cultural ambassador, elders, family, community members, and representatives from our local MCFD office.*

*We shared a meal first and members of our leadership, social department, and Bentley's aunt Martina shared our experience and journey.*

*We then gathered for the ceremony and made a line on each side while Bentley walked down an aisle with Martina and was smudged by our cultural mentor. Bentley then stood on a Platform of cedar bows which symbolized going from his life in foster care to a new life starting with family.*

*Women on council and women's council then blanketed him, Martina, and her granddaughter Jacey with a handmade star blanket and sang songs welcoming him. Bentley did absolutely amazing!!!! He was so calm and accepting and completely fearless.*

*After the blanketing ceremony, the community gathered in a circle and Bentley walked around, shook everyone's hand, and was welcomed by everyone present with words of encouragement and acceptance. This was followed by gifting, Tsilhqot'in songs, and cake.*

*Bentley definitely felt the love of family and community. He had so much confidence and even got up to stand beside Martina while she gave her speech."*



*Photo credit: Angela Giovanelli*



# MADISON'S STORY

Madison, who has been in Extended Society Care with a non-Indigenous Agency since the age of three (3), was transferred to NCFST a few months before her 16th birthday. This transfer occurred because the Agency discovered Madison's family connection to Eskasoni First Nation in Nova Scotia.

Before joining NCFST, Madison attended school in specialized classrooms due to concerns about her ability to socialize and learn in a different environment. However, since transitioning to NCFST, Madison has thrived in a community school, making friends, and excelling academically. Her math skills have been exceptional, earning her a remarkable grade of 97.

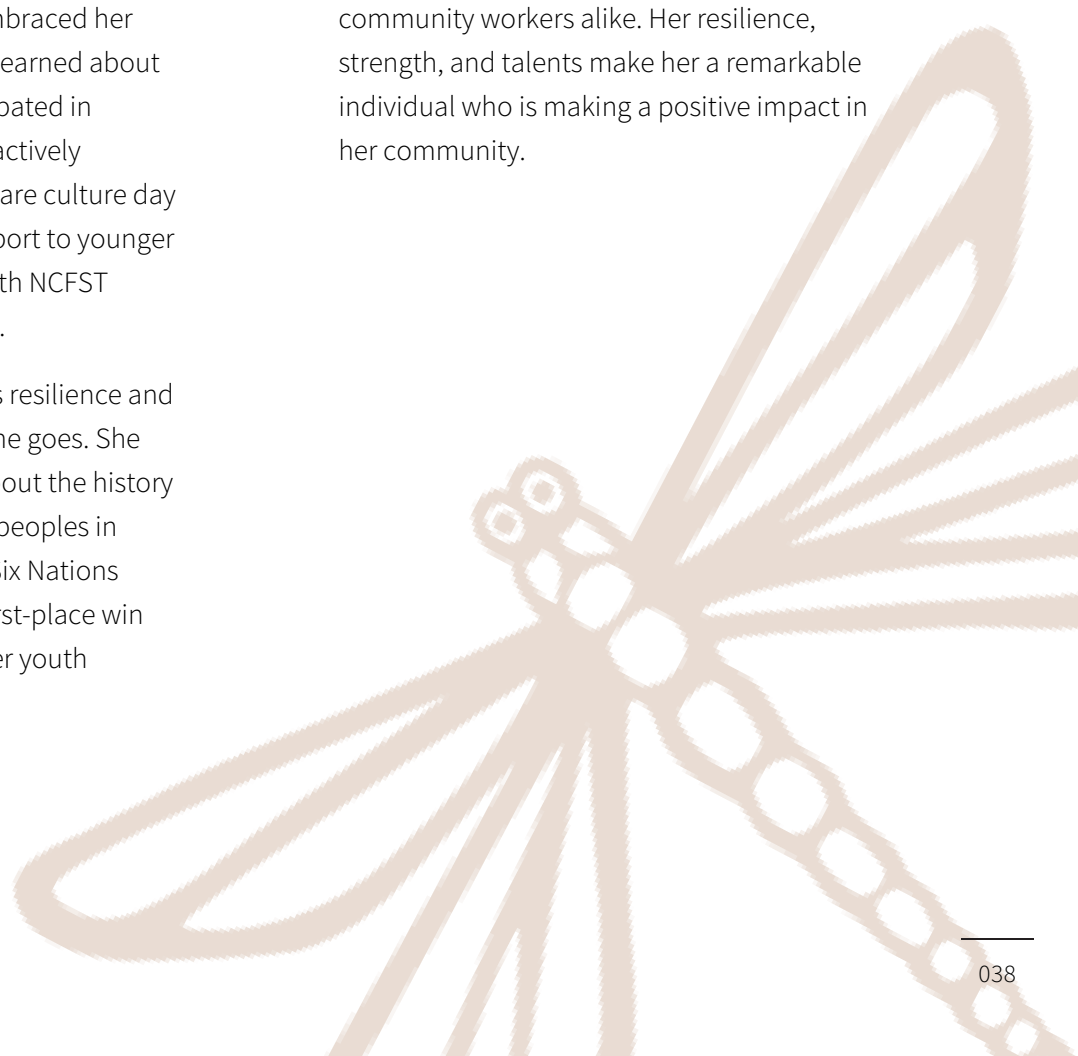
Upon joining NCFST, Madison embraced her Indigenous identity. She eagerly learned about traditional medicines and participated in smudging ceremonies. Madison actively participates in NCFST's child-in-care culture day events, providing invaluable support to younger children and eagerly engaging with NCFST Knowledge Carriers for teachings.

Madison's passion for Indigenous resilience and knowledge is evident wherever she goes. She educates her peers and adults about the history and contributions of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Her involvement in the Six Nations Youth Conference resulted in a first-place win for the presentation she and other youth prepared on climate change.

Madison is continuing to build and rebuild connections with family. She maintains contact with her siblings and recently reunited with her biological mother after 12 years. This summer, she is exploring opportunities to spend time with her grandparents, further strengthening her connections.

As a promising young leader, Madison uses her talents as a photographer and artist to express her creativity. She crafts jewelry and other crafts, showcasing her artistic abilities. Despite the challenges she has faced, Madison is breaking cycles in her own way and embodies the teaching of Bravery in all aspects of her life.

Madison's journey of cultural reconnection, advocacy, and education inspires her peers and community workers alike. Her resilience, strength, and talents make her a remarkable individual who is making a positive impact in her community.





## Family Finding

Throughout the 2022-2023 year, the Family Finding Team has been organizing Cultural Gatherings led by NCFST's Knowledge Carrier, Kevin Fujita. These gatherings aim to bring together Kin Caregivers, providing them with an opportunity to share their experiences, discuss challenges, and establish connections with fellow caregivers.

Additionally, the team has been collaborating with members of the Child and Family Wellbeing department to explore respite options for supporting kin out of care placements. The goal is to address the specific needs of Kin Caregivers and the children they care for.

To ensure preparedness, the team is developing a babysitter policy that will enable caregivers to have backup plans and approved caregivers in place as required. These plans are discussed during the assessment process for Kin Caregivers, allowing for formalization before the child is placed in their care.

## SUCCESS STORIES

### **Words of Ashley (Family Finder) on Kin Caregiver Lorraine:**

*"Lorraine has provided Kinship to her nephew K.B. for many years, and when I met Lorraine, I knew she would be the perfect person to care for her great nephew W.B."*

*Lorraine and her family have provided a wonderful home to W, and the most rewarding part of this story is that brothers K and W are together. K is an incredible role model to his little brother. Lorraine and her family have been an absolute pleasure to work with, and they are a wonderful example of what providing kinship care means!"*

### **Words of Lorraine regarding the placement of W.B. into their home:**

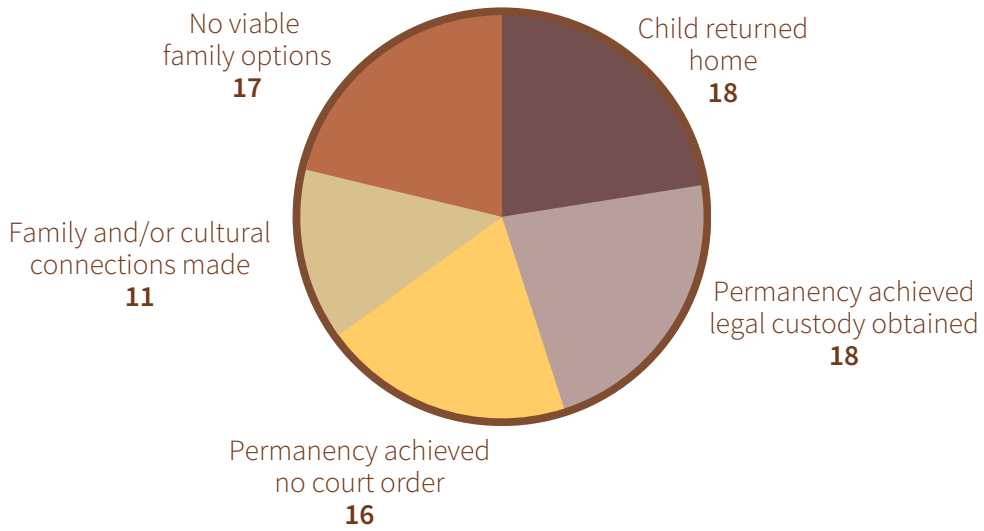
*"I am caring for my great nephew W.B and we feel so lucky to be able to have him and care for him through this program. We have been caring for his older brother K.B for 14 years. He is absolutely a blessing and I believe W.B will have the same outcome as his brother, as K.B is an amazing example of a big brother and a wonderful role model- they are forever. Grateful to keep family together. Miigwech."*

COMMUNITY MEMBERS SERVED	
Families	112
Children	164
New Referrals	69

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS	
Kin families supported with a per diem	85

### FAMILY FINDING 2022 OUTCOMES

Total Number of Cases - 80

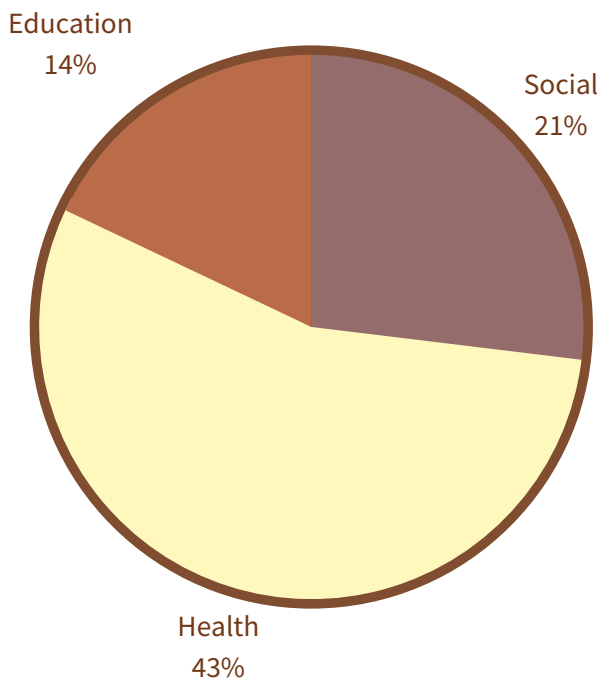


PLACEMENT TRANSITIONS	
Placed in NCFST care transitioned to a Kin out-of-care placement	28 Children
Placed in NCFST care returned to parent(s)	9 Children
Placed with a Kin out-of-care returned to parent(s)	10 Children

## Jordan's Principle

From August 2021 to March 31, 2023, NCFST has made significant progress in implementing the Jordan's Principle program. During this period, we have successfully processed and approved a total of 74 applications, amounting to over \$500,000 in funding. Our approval rate stands at an exceptional 100%.

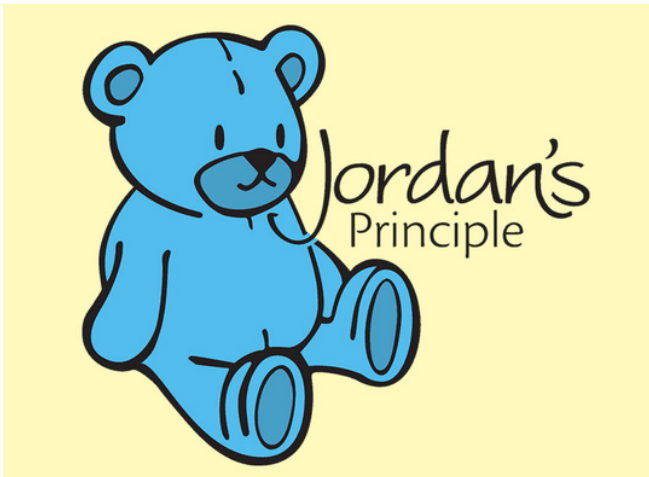
The Jordan's Principle program has played a pivotal role in providing vital support and services to children and their families, focusing on the pillars of social (21%), health (43%), and education (14%). These applications represent a total of 78 registered status children and youth, all under the age of 17, as well as four family applications, comprising 14 children.



Within the approved applications, we were granted support for three group submissions: Respite (Individual and Family), Respite March Break Camp, and Tutoring. These respite services have been of utmost importance, providing short-term childcare to parents and caregivers. By offering temporary relief, culturally based teachings, and promoting family stability, we have effectively reduced the risk of disruptions in out-of-home placements. Our services have been vital in both planned and emergency situations, ensuring that families receive the necessary assistance during times of crisis. These supports are available to Customary Care, Kinship, and adoptive families, as well as birth families in need of support. By preventing the removal of children from their homes, we empower families and equip them with coping strategies to achieve positive outcomes.

As our NCFST Jordan's Principle Program continues to expand, we recognize the paramount importance of community engagement and outreach. By actively involving our community members, we ensure that the services and supports we offer are accessible and meet their specific needs.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to the dedicated workers and community members of NCFST whose unwavering support has been instrumental in the success of Jordan's Principle. Their commitment and collaboration have made a significant difference in the lives of Indigenous children and families we serve.



## A NOTE FROM JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE FUNDING RECIPIENT TO NCFST JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE NAVIGATOR

"Dear Pamela Tabobondung-Washington, Jordan's Principle Navigator

*When I received your call today, I couldn't believe it when you told me Cataleya got approved for funding through Jordan's Principle. I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the miracles you make possible helping the kids you serve. My daughter will receive the life-changing treatment she so desperately needs because of your dedication and professionalism you demonstrated is truly commendable.*

*It's phenomenal that you were able to have funding approved in less than 1 business day for our family. You have worked diligently to deliver unremarkably fast results for our family, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your great work! This is the best Christmas Present ever.*

*We truly appreciate all your time spent helping to navigate us through this journey and carrying us through the most difficult steps of the application process, we appreciated all of your guidance and support! Thank you so very much to you for your kindness, dedication, and compassion, you will never know the real difference you made in our lives through securing the funding!*

*It has been our pleasure to know and have you touch our lives this year! As the year ends, I'm extending my warmest and most sincere wishes for the Holiday Season to you. I hope the New Year will bring you happiness, health, and success. We can all look forward to a bright 2023!*

*Yours Truly, Cindy & Cataleya"*

## EDUCATION LIAISON PROGRAM

The Education Liaison Program at NCFST is dedicated to enhancing educational outcomes for Indigenous children and youth in care, regardless of their status. The program focuses on promoting equitable access to educational resources and support services. It offers individualized support, advocacy, workshops, and information to children and youth, while also establishing connections with key stakeholders.

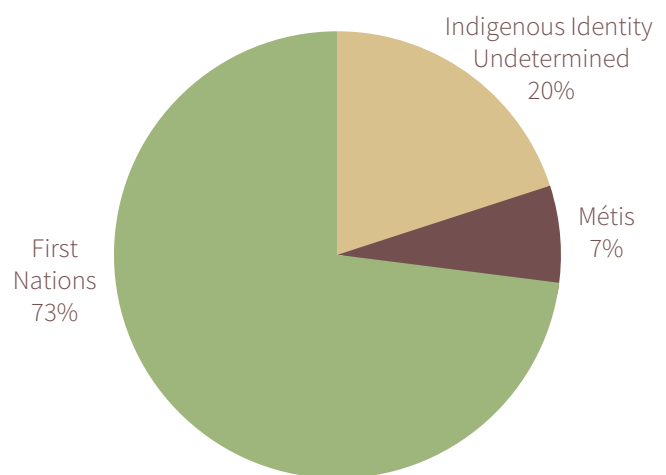
To ensure educational success and access to the right resources and support, the program collaborates with Indigenous Education Leads, Transportation and Stability Supports, and other relevant resources. By utilizing these resources and implementing a comprehensive approach, the program strives to empower Indigenous children and youth in their educational journeys and improve their overall wellbeing.

### 2022-2023 Program Review

Component: Provincial Initiatives: Education Liaison

SERVICE DELIVERY DETAILS		
Referral Types	No. of Cases	%
New Referral	12	27%
Previous FY	29	66%
Reopening	4	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2022-2023 EDUCATION LIAISON CASELOAD



GENDER	No. of CYIC	%
Female	23	56%
Male	18	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

SCHOOL LEVEL	No. of CYIC	%
Elementary (grades 1-5)	2	5%
Elementary (grades 1-5)	1	2%
High School (grades 1-5)	25	61%
Post-Secondary Studies	8	20%
Unknown	5	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

## SUCCESS STORIES WITH THE EDUCATION LIAISON PROGRAM

The Education Liaison program has been instrumental in providing essential support to children and youth at various stages in their educational journey. Through strong partnerships with stakeholders, the program has achieved remarkable success stories. Here are a few examples of our work with children and youth in care, which have resulted in positive educational outcomes for each individual.



### **JR's Story:**

*Facing the risk of losing credits, JR, a high school student, received necessary accommodations and modifications to ensure credit acquisition. With the Education Liaison's advocacy and additional supports, JR successfully obtained two credits out of the initial four they were at risk of losing.*

### **MT's Story:**

*MT, another high school student, benefited from the Education Liaison's expertise in curriculum and student learning. Through this connection, MT received tailored tutoring that addressed specific areas of growth, bridging knowledge gaps and fostering active engagement in education and learning.*

### **BW's Story:**

*With the support of the Education Liaison, BW was able to apply to post-secondary programs and relevant bursaries, paving the way for their academic advancement. They applied to the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies Program at Toronto Metropolitan University with the Education Liaison's assistance. Additionally, BW received support in applying for scholarships, including the Children's Aid Foundation Scholarship.*

# FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

## **VERONIKA BENCZE, DIRECTOR**

This section is a testament to the remarkable achievements made by the Administration, Facilities, Finance and IT teams throughout the 2022/2023 fiscal year. These teams have successfully completed several projects that have significantly enhanced our operations and infrastructure.

A major milestone was achieved as the team successfully scanned and digitized all paper-based case files dating back to NCFST's mandate in 2004. This has revolutionized our record-keeping system, making it faster and easier for our Child and Family Wellbeing and Legal teams to access crucial information while eliminating storage costs. Furthermore, property condition assessments were conducted for our owned properties, providing us with a clear roadmap for capital and repair expenditures over the next decade.

The Facilities team has been instrumental in ensuring the efficiency and safety of our physical spaces. Notable accomplishments include the completion of leasehold improvements for our new office space in Peel Region, addressing electrical and structural issues at various locations and the successful winterization of cabins at our camp, enabling the hosting of numerous winter camps.

Finance Team implemented a new cloud-based accounting system, seamlessly transitioning from an outdated system. This dynamic and versatile system provides enhanced financial reporting capabilities, meeting the diverse needs of internal and external stakeholders. The transition was executed smoothly without any disruptions, ensuring the continuity of reporting and payment.

The Information Technology team has consistently demonstrated their prowess in resolving challenges and driving innovation. The implementation of a cloud-based telephony system has revolutionized our communication infrastructure, improving reliability, and reducing costs. The upcoming launch of our cloud intranet promises significant advancements in streamlined workflows and secure storage, empowering our teams to collaborate more effectively. Additionally, the team's dedication to data quality initiatives and the integration of programs like Ready Set Go and the Quality Standards Framework reflects their commitment to improving child and family wellbeing.

These achievements in Facilities, Administration, Finance, and Information Technology have propelled NCFST to new heights, fostering operational excellence, collaboration, and improved outcomes. We extend our deepest gratitude to the dedicated teams who have contributed their expertise and unwavering commitment throughout the year.



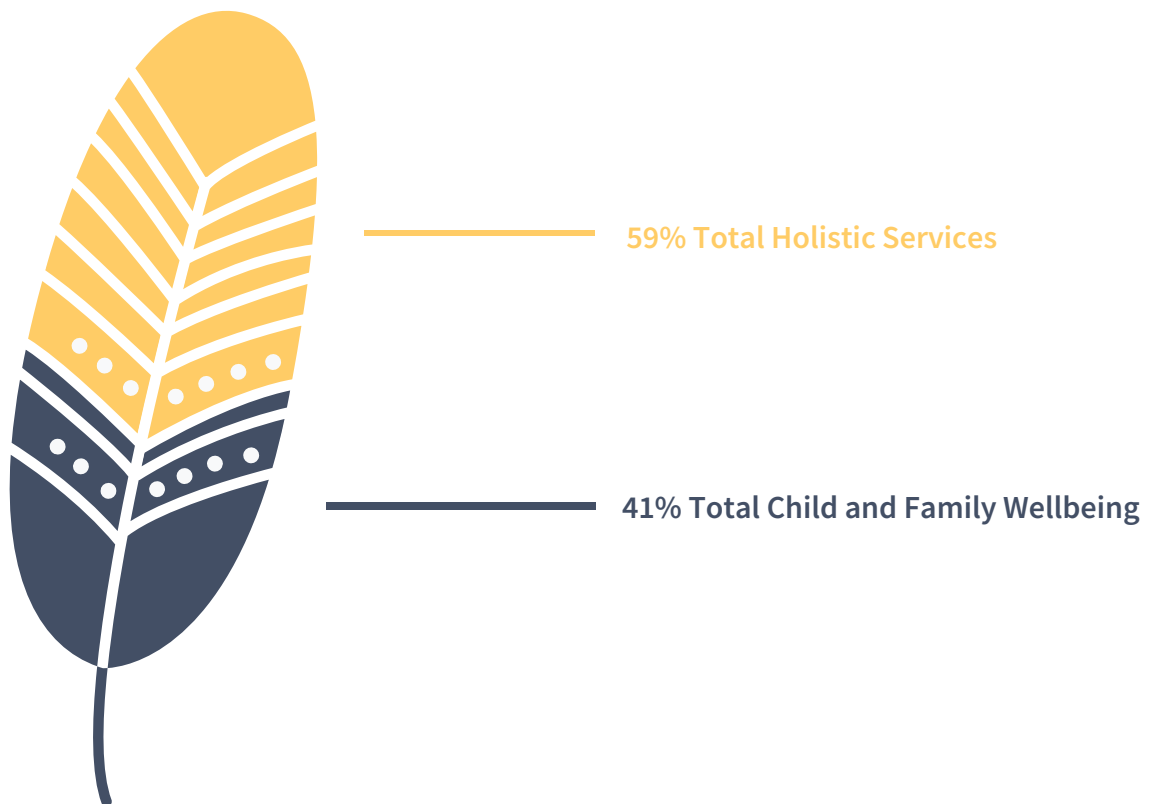


## FINANCE

Funding for fiscal 2022-23 increased by 6% compared to the prior year mainly due to the increased level of funding received from the Ministry of Health, Public Health Agency of Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, and Miziwe Biik Development Corporation.

Total funding for fiscal 2022-2023 was \$58,756,076 that includes Child and Family Wellbeing funding of \$23,861,804 and Holistic Services funding of \$34,894,272. The comparative total in fiscal year of 2021-2022 was \$55,216,858 that included Child Welfare funding of \$22,503,301 and Prevention funding of \$32,713,557.

### BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING





## FUNDING 2022-2023

	Total Funding
<b>Total Child and Family Wellbeing</b>	<b>\$23,861,804</b>
<b>Holistic Services</b>	
Children's Mental Health and Family Wellbeing	7,321,569
Organizational Enhancement	5,497,882
Transitional Housing	3,120,111
Scarborough Enhancement JT, Mt. Dennis & Malvern	2,975,831
Youth	2,166,481
Headstart	2,157,236
Tikinagan	2,007,586
Day Care	1,455,632
Volunteer Drive	1,305,130
Kin Finding	1,176,931
Scarborough Programs	923,552
Prevention	869,815
Indigenous Culture	754,519
Social Recreation	745,316
Jordan's Principle	189,380
Adminstration	2,227,300
<b>Total Holistic Services</b>	<b>\$34,894,272</b>
<b>Total Child and Family Wellbeing and Holistic Services</b>	<b>\$58,756,076</b>

# OVERVIEW

## **CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING**

Child Welfare revenue recognized has increased by \$1,358,503 in 2022-2023. Program costs increased by \$1,862,081 compared with 2021-2022 mainly due to boarding costs and supports for aged out youth.

## **HOLISTIC SERVICES**

Prevention funding increased in this fiscal year by over \$2.1 million. Funding from Indigenous Services Canada provided supports for Tikinagan, Kin Finding, culture, infrastructure, and the volunteer drive program, The City of Toronto funded increased needs for shelter and hoteling. Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) increased supports for Headstart programs.

## **CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND FAMILY WELLBEING**

Total Children's Mental Health and Family Well-Being funding increased \$249,191 over the prior year due to increased fiscal funding from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Total program costs increased \$249,191 compared with the prior year due to increased staff costs and program related costs.

## **TRANSITIONAL HOUSING**

Total Transitional Housing funding for the fiscal year 2022-2023 increased by \$827,481 with most related to providing housing assistance supports with the balance related to repairs required at homes, resulting in program costs increasing by \$816,578.

## **SCARBOROUGH ENHANCEMENT, MOUNT DENNIS AND MALVERN**

Funding recognized decreased by \$131,378 for fiscal year 2022-2023 as Safe restart funds related to re-opening in 2021-2022 after COVID was one-time funding. Expenses increased by \$38,225 for program related costs.

## **YOUTH**

Total youth funding utilized decreased by \$154,869 with program costs decreasing at the same rate.

## **HEAD START**

Total Head Start funding for fiscal year of 2022-2023 increased by 63% and direct program costs increased in the same portion.

## **DAYCARE**

The daycares received increased funding of \$191,777 related to increased enrolment and resulting in program expenses being higher by \$191,777.

## **SCARBOROUGH PROGRAMS**

Scarborough programs funding increased by \$211,697 for enhancing learning development and capacity building, seniors, and on the land programming. Total program costs also increased by \$213,047.

## **PREVENTION**

Funding recognized decreased by \$68,939, mainly due to EarlyON sites, where restart funding related to re-opening after COVID in 2021-2022 was one-time funding and therefore programming costs decreased by \$70,973 also.

## **CULTURE**

Total funding increased for Culture due to Canada Heritage supports for language and culture programming.

## **SOCIAL RECREATION**

Total Social Recreation funding increased by \$52,364 and program costs increased by \$40,053 in support of our camp programs.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Total administration funding decreased by \$745,826, mainly due to COVID funding that ended in 2021-2022. Total program costs for the fiscal year 2021-2022 decreased \$139,168 mainly due to COVID related programming.

# PEOPLE AND CULTURE

## **RON HODGSON, DIRECTOR**

In response to the evolving needs of our organization, the People and Culture portfolio expanded this year to include Special Projects in addition to Human Resources, Culture, Events, Volunteers, and Communication/Public Relations (PR).

During this time, we remained grounded in our values and worked towards building new relationships and strengthening existing ones, as we transitioned into a hybrid working environment. We continue to explore ways to provide culturally focused services and supports while balancing our wellness needs.

Throughout the previous year, a significant portion of our efforts were dedicated to preparing for collective bargaining with our Union counterparts. We are delighted to share that in late March, we reached a tentative agreement, marking a positive outcome. This agreement strikes a fair balance, taking into account the funding uncertainties prevalent in the child welfare and Indigenous child and family wellbeing sectors. We remain committed to upholding fairness and ensuring the wellbeing of our employees.

Recognizing the crucial importance of strong leadership within our organization, we collaborated with the Service Leadership Circle and our Knowledge Carriers in the creation of a new performance feedback process that includes five (5) development sessions rooted in our Indigenous ways of living. Our ongoing focus remains on building teams that are dedicated to delivering exceptional services to both our employees and the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities we support. This commitment enables us to consistently review, enhance, and refine our policies, processes, and practices in ways that are grounded in Indigenous Culture. We are actively engaged in developing goals and projects that align with our Strategic Plan, with a particular emphasis on clear communication and branding efforts. Additionally, we prioritize initiatives centered around recruitment, training, development, and succession planning specifically tailored to meet the needs of our Indigenous community and employees. By aligning our actions with our strategic objectives, we strive for continuous improvement and greater inclusivity within our organization.



## OUR STAFFING STRUCTURE

During the fiscal year 2022/2023, the staffing complement at NCFST experienced further growth, increasing by approximately 8.4% from 356 employees in the previous year to 387 employees by the end of the year. This expansion was made possible through focused recruitment and staff planning efforts, particularly in areas related to Culture and Holistic Services.

In terms of self-identification, 47% of NCFST employees self-identify as Indigenous, while 49% of the leadership team also self-identifies as Indigenous. Although there was a slight decrease in the overall percentage of staff and leadership self-identifying as Indigenous, NCFST remains committed to prioritizing the recruitment of Indigenous and affiliated employees.

To further strengthen these efforts, NCFST brought on a Recruitment Consultant this past year. This dedicated consultant will collaborate with hiring committees to develop processes and strategies that ensure the Agency's success in recruiting and retaining Indigenous talent. These initiatives align with NCFST's Strategic Plan and underscore the organization's ongoing commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects and serves the needs of the Indigenous community.

**387**

**total number of employees**

Overall

**47%**

**self-identified as Indigenous**

Overall

**49%**

**of management staff self-identified as Indigenous**

## EMPLOYEE SNAPSHOT

Having a diverse and well-balanced workforce is of utmost importance for NCFST. It enables the organization to gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs and experiences of the community it serves. By embracing diversity, NCFST can strategically plan and tailor its programs and services to effectively meet the unique needs of the Indigenous community while also addressing intersectional nuances within it.

A diverse workforce brings together individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. This diversity enhances the organization's ability to think creatively, problem-solve, and make informed decisions. It fosters an environment of inclusivity and openness, where diverse ideas and perspectives are valued and respected. This, in turn, positively impacts employee morale and organizational culture, creating a welcoming and supportive workplace for all.

### EMPLOYEES BY CATEGORY

Category	Number by Category
Administration	24
Director	6
Manager	17
Professional/Front-Line	296
Supervisor	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>

### GENERATIONS AT WORK

Generations	Percentage in the Workforce
Gen Z	16%
Gen Y/Millennials	43%
Gen X	30%
Baby Boomers	11%

### GENDER OF EMPLOYEE

Gender	Percentage in the Workforce
Female	83%
Male	16%
Non-Binary	1%

### EMPLOYEES BY PORTFOLIO

Portfolio	Percentage by Portfolio
Child & Family Wellbeing	32.6%
Executive	0.8%
Finance & Administration	13.4%
Fund Development / Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF)	1%
Holistic Service	45.7%
People & Culture/ Communications & Public Relations	3.1%
Quality Assurance (QA) and Decolonization (D)	3.4%

### NEW HIRES BY QUARTER

2022-2023 (Fiscal)	Number by Quarter
April 01, 2022 – June 30, 2022	21
July 01, 2022 – September 30, 2022	32
October 01, 2022 – December 31, 2022	20
January 01, 2023 – March 31, 2023	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>83*</b>

\*The Agency received 1,562 applications through our applicant tracking system (ATS) in fiscal 2022-2023.

## PEACEFUL RELATIONS CIRCLE

The Agency has placed significant emphasis on its work regarding Peaceful Relations, and over the past year, we have engaged in various activities to establish a formal process that incorporates Ceremony, Teachings, and Traditional Knowledge gifted to us by our Ancestors. At the beginning of the year, we recognized the need for internal healing before delving into the heart of the work ahead. As a group, we gathered in the Lodge at our 30 College location, where members of the Peaceful Relations Circle participated in a Brushing Off and Grounding Ceremony led by Knowledge Carrier, Alita Sauvé. The positive impact of this Ceremony was widely felt and has allowed us to continue the healing process with the aim of better supporting our employees and the Indigenous Community. Subsequently, we received a Haudenosaunee Wampum Teaching that guided the development of our Terms of Consensus, which represents the commitment of all Circle members to the important work we are undertaking on behalf of the Agency.

We maintain a regular monthly gathering, alternating between in-person and virtual formats to ensure maximum attendance. The Circle has commenced its work of identifying significant dates and occasions throughout the year that require increased awareness. Examples include Black History Month, Transgender Day of Visibility, Pride Month, National Indigenous Peoples Day, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights Day, among others.

NCFST remains dedicated to addressing violence, harassment, and discrimination within the workplace. Our primary focus continues to be comprehending the essence of Peaceful Relations within the Indigenous community and work environment. The Peaceful Relations Circle plays a pivotal role in driving positive change within our Agency. Its objectives encompass the development of a restorative process that fosters open communication among all employees. Through this endeavor, we aim to collectively identify systemic issues and provide recommendations to dismantle inequities, fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding.





## CULTURE

### Internal Supports

In early 2022, NCFST welcomed Knowledge Carrier, Alita Sauv , to join our People & Culture Team. Alita's primary role is to provide internal support through culturally grounded consultations for our leadership team and employees. Additionally, she facilitated Agency-wide ceremonies and contributed to program development in various areas. Her impactful presence extended beyond our organization as she forged relationships within Toronto and across Canada with other Indigenous Knowledge Carriers/Elders who generously shared their knowledge, ultimately enhancing our service to the community.

Alita played a vital role in providing comprehensive support to all employees, addressing their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. Through our virtual booking system, she conducted 113 one-to-one consultation sessions. The positive feedback received from employees underscores their joy in having Alita as part of the NCFST team once again.

In 2023, Alita initiated the "Wisdom Wednesday" livestreams on Facebook, where she shared valuable cultural knowledge around topics such as medicinal practices, Tipi Teachings, Seven (7) Grandfather Teachings, Indigenous parenting, Ceremonial Protocols, 13 Moon Teachings, and more. These sessions have garnered significant interest, with over 3,000 individuals either joining the livestream or accessing the recordings at a later date.

Alita's contributions have been invaluable in promoting cultural understanding, supporting employee wellbeing, and fostering community engagement.





## Indigenous Culture Program

Designed to enhance the wellbeing and Cultural connectedness of Indigenous children, youth, and families residing in the City of Toronto and Peel Region. The program recognizes and values the profound significance of cultural knowledge, traditions, ceremonies, and practices in fostering positive self-identity, promoting healing, and fortifying community relationships. Through the provision of a diverse range of culturally grounded activities, the program endeavors to establish a nurturing and inclusive environment where participants can embrace and celebrate their Indigenous identity.

Within the program, our respected Knowledge Carriers, also known as Elders, play a pivotal role by offering guidance to both employees and the broader First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities. They actively participate in the Service Leadership Circle, Community Engagement Circles, and provide invaluable one-on-one traditional counselling and consultation meetings. Throughout the year, our team's efforts have been focused on organizing community gatherings, facilitating traditional teachings, providing individualized cultural support, and promoting language reclamation. Our objective is to strengthen the connection to Indigenous identity among employees, children in care, families, and the community as a whole.



The team extends its support across various life stages, encompassing significant milestones such as Birth Ceremonies, seeking out of Spirit Names, Rites of Passage, and Culture Nights tailored for all age groups. Moreover, when a Spirit is called home, we hold it as a profound honor to collaborate with the family in sponsoring Sacred Fires. These fires serve as sources of comfort for those left behind and guide the departing Spirit on their final journey.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to nurturing and preserving Indigenous identity, and our Indigenous Culture Program serves as a conduit for promoting healing, fostering pride, and strengthening the bonds within our Indigenous community.



The Culture and Events Team at NCFST plays a crucial role in fostering the affirmation of Indigenous identity, building relationships, and connecting individuals with their cultural teachings and ceremonial experiences. This dedicated team works collaboratively with both internal and external partners to provide meaningful and enriching opportunities for children, youth, families, and employees.

Knowledge Carrier, Kevin Fuijta, has been working in NCFST community spaces for over 20 years. As a Pipe Carrier and Grandfather, one of Kevin's gifts is the ability to find an individual's Spirit Name. Over the course of this last year Kevin has gifted over 100 names, with a waitlist of many others on the journey to understanding their purpose in creation. Kevin offers names to all who come with tobacco and good intentions. We are grateful for this valuable gift that he carries and shares with community.

### Words from NCFST Team Assistant, Mairead Boyd

*"My partner and I offered Kevin tobacco for our Spirit Names, Kevin accepted and when our names were ready, we had a ceremony with our family present to receive our names. Before gifting me my name, Kevin explained the importance of a Spirit Name and the responsibilities that come with it. I learned that a Spirit Name represents your role in community. The name gifted to me was "Watching Grandmother Fox". When Kevin received my name, he saw a scene with many animals. In particular, he saw a grandmother fox, quietly watching over. She would protect and speak, but only when needed. I felt empowered when I received this name and heard the story. I am very grateful to Kevin for this name, and the countless other things he has taught me.*

*~ Chi Miigwetch Kevin!"*





## CULTURAL GATHERINGS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

In 2022, as the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on in-person events gradually eased, we witnessed a significant surge in demand for in-person cultural gatherings. Our team successfully organized and delivered several notable events that underscored the significance of coming together as a community. We were delighted to observe that many of these events and gatherings were held in collaboration with other Indigenous organizations. These partnerships allowed us to create powerful experiences that were deeply rooted in ceremony and guided by the wisdom of our Knowledge Carriers and Elders.

The resurgence of in-person gatherings provided a much-needed opportunity for people to reconnect, celebrate their Indigenous heritage, and strengthen community bonds. These events were designed to showcase the richness and diversity of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and practices. They served as platforms for sharing stories, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and fostering a sense of belonging among participants.

By partnering with other Indigenous organizations, we were able to amplify the impact of these events and broaden their reach within the community. The involvement of Elders ensured that the gatherings were grounded in cultural wisdom, ensuring authenticity and respect for traditional protocols.

We are proud of the team's achievements in delivering these gatherings, which not only met the growing demand for in-person cultural experiences but also reaffirmed the importance of community connections and the revitalization of Indigenous ways of being.

Gatherings and Special Events	Dates
Community Culture Nights at 30 College	Weekly on Mondays
Decolonizing Child Welfare Webinar Series	April, June & August 2022
Spring Culture Camp “Peaceful Relations” with Knowledge Carrier/Medicine Man, Harry Snowboy	May 09-14, 2022
Annual General Meeting	June 23, 2022
1st Annual Report Back to Community	September 30, 2022
25th Annual Community Pow Wow	October 01, 2022
Fall Culture Camp “Language and the Land”	October 24-29, 2022
Indigenous Child and Family Well Being Conference	November 07-10, 2022
Staff Holiday Party	December 09, 2022
Years of Service Recognition	December 15, 2022
"Honouring the Language" Round Dance	February 03, 2023
Indigenous Health and Wellness Strategy Conference	March 06-10, 2023



Photo credit: Mark Atanasoff

## 25TH Annual Community Pow Wow

In celebration of this significant milestone, our team sought ways to express gratitude to the community for their unwavering support throughout the years. Thanks to the generous contribution from the Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF), we were able to offer the community 1,500 Indian tacos, as well as barbecued hamburgers and hot dogs. Additionally, Life Labs Inc. generously donated funds for the purchase of reusable feast kits, which were gifted to community members. The event was made possible through the collaboration of over a 100 external volunteers, who joined our employees in various capacities such as food preparation, set-up, clean-up, organizing children's activities, scavenger hunts, and on-the-land games.

Recognizing that our work is always centered around the wellbeing of children and youth, we took pride in showcasing outstanding young individuals as our head dancers and flag carriers. These remarkable youth represent our future leaders, and we embrace them with great pride. Moreover, we were pleased to welcome new dancers into the circle, and we extend our appreciation to Knowledge Carriers/Elders, Marie Gaudet and Jimmy Dick, for leading the group of tiny tots in their first dance. The creation of regalia was a collaborative effort supported by the Culture Team throughout the summer of 2022.

This event not only served as an occasion to express our gratitude to the community but also provided an opportunity for joyful celebration, cultural expression, and the transfer of knowledge to younger generations. It was a tribute to the spirit of collaboration, the generosity of our partners, and the dedication of our employees and volunteers in creating a memorable experience for all.





Photo credit: Mark Atanosoff

## Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Conference

Co-hosted by the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) and NCFST, the Fourth (4th) Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Conference took place from November 07-10, 2023 at the Blue Mountain Village Conference Centre after a two-year delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally planned for 400 participants, the team quickly recognized the sector's strong desire for an in-person conference, leading us to increase our capacity and ultimately sell out the Blue Mountain venue.

The conference was thoughtfully curated to provide training, education, and a meaningful experience for Indigenous social service workers and sector partners. We brought together a diverse range of keynote speakers, workshops, and opportunities for ceremony, all aimed at promoting learning and growth. NCFST's On-the-Lands workers, Thomas Smallwood and Amy Moore, led hikes twice daily, sharing their knowledge and experiences of doing land-based work within an urban setting. These hikes provided a chance for over 200 individuals to explore the hills and forests of the Blue Mountain trails, engage in guided meditation, and find solace in nature after intensive classroom learning sessions.

We express our deep gratitude to the keynote speakers, the Youth Panel, and our cherished Elders, Knowledge Carriers, Water Bearers, and Firekeepers who contributed immensely to the conference. Their presence and participation enriched the event, offering daily sunrise ceremonies, a drum circle, a full moon ceremony, and heartfelt prayers throughout the conference. These ceremonial moments served as powerful reminders of our connection to the land, our Ancestors, and spirit as we do our work.

The conference was a resounding success, with participants benefitting from the collective wisdom, knowledge sharing, and cultural experiences. By bringing together professionals and community members dedicated to Indigenous child and family wellbeing, we fostered a sense of unity, collaboration, and shared purpose. The event reaffirmed our commitment to creating positive change within our communities and ensuring the wellbeing of Indigenous children and families across the province and Turtle Island.

## CONFERENCE STATISTICS

# 619

Registered Participants



# 107

Agencies/Organizations Represented



# 7

First Nations



# 10

Hours of Ceremony



# 33

Workshops





## Words from Micheal Miller, Executive Director of ANCFSAO

*“I would like to take this time to say CHII MIIGWETCH to the organizing committee made up of NCFST and ANCFSAO staff for putting on a successful conference. The conference gave all those in attendance the opportunity to learn from one another and share their stories. My personal highlight was the Youth Panel with lived experience and those currently in care who had the courage to share their story with those supporting them and how the sector needs to change to better support youth leaving care and create better outcomes for them. Chii Miigwetch to the Cultural staff supporting the event and grounding us over the course of our time together.”*





## HONOURING THE LANGUAGE ROUND DANCE

In collaboration with the Native Canadian Center of Toronto (NCCT), on February 03, 2023, we collaboratively organized the "Honouring the Language" Round Dance on the coldest night of the year. Despite the frigid weather, the gathering drew hundreds of community members.

The atmosphere was vibrant as the space filled with Drummers, Singers, Dancers, Vendors, and community members, all joining together to pay tribute to the Ancestors and emphasize the importance of preserving Indigenous Languages. The Round Dance served as a powerful symbol of Cultural resilience, and the collective commitment to revitalizing Indigenous languages.

During the event, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) had the privilege of presenting the community with 300 storybooks that centered around Indigenous language and Cultural teachings. This gift aimed to promote language learning, Cultural understanding, and sharing of Indigenous knowledge.

The event provided an opportunity for community members to come together, strengthen their cultural bonds, and reflect on the importance of language as a cornerstone of identity, connection, and cultural continuity.



# COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

During the past fiscal year, our Communications and Public Relations Team devoted itself to improving brand recognition, increasing online community engagement, and expanding the digital marketing skills within our internal team as well as our content creators throughout the Agency.

Our small team shoulders a wide range of responsibilities that include program and event promotion, social media management, media outreach, public relations, Agency branding, graphic and web design, photography, and consulting on video production. Equipped with a diverse set of digital skills, remarkable flexibility, and resourcefulness, our team is prepared to tackle challenges while also remaining committed to continuous learning and development.

As the ambassadors of our organization, we are dedicated to consistent messaging and ensuring the Agency's communication is in line with and respects the Indigenous worldview. We approach our work with dedication to quality and strive to provide effective digital support.

Our primary objectives revolve around amplifying Agency messaging, elevating brand recognition, fostering increased online engagement, and delivering communication support to our internal teams.

## Audience 2022-2023

Platform	Age	Gender	Age	Gender
Facebook	25-34	Women 16.3% Men 3.0%	35-44	Women 22.3% Men 4.1%
Instagram	25-34	Women 29.9% Men 5.7%	35-44	Women 27.6% Men 5.5%

**2,014**

 FOLLOWERS ON FACEBOOK

16.2%

**2,767**

 FOLLOWERS ON TWITTER

2.8%

**3,873**

 FOLLOWERS ON LINKEDIN

55.9%

**3,290**

 FOLLOWERS ON INSTAGRAM

24.6%

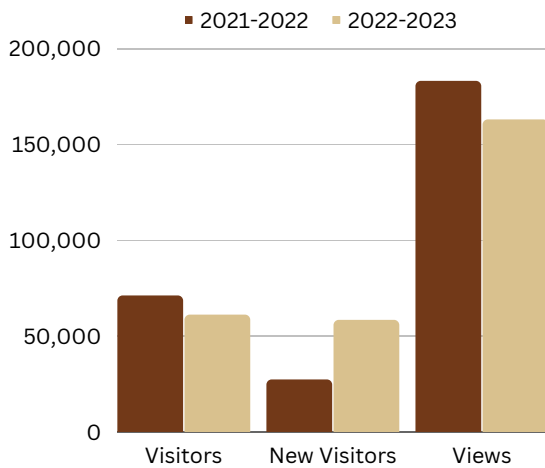
**3,453**

DIRECT MESSAGES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

As we look to the next fiscal, our efforts to collaborate remain steadfast as we continue to develop a new intranet for the Agency. Our collective goal is to effectively keep staff informed while facilitating access to critical information, enabling us all to work more efficiently across the Agency.

We strive to create an intranet that caters to the specific needs of our staff and offers an intuitive user experience. By doing so, we will facilitate enhanced collaboration across departments and make information-sharing more accessible, further strengthening our commitment to provide communication support.

### WEBSITE STATS



# SPECIAL PROJECTS

Siobhan McCarthy, in her role as Strategic Advisor, Special Projects, has been actively involved in various initiatives in collaboration with the People and Culture team at NCFST. One significant accomplishment has been the development of an immersive in-person orientation process for new employees.

This revamped orientation process now includes a 1.5 hour cultural presentation, an Information Technology presentation, and an opportunity for the Union to connect with new Bargaining Unit employees. This comprehensive orientation aims to address the challenges that emerged from the hybrid work model and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many to work remotely. By providing new employees with an in-person orientation experience on their first day, including a tour of our 30 College location, a visit to the culture room, rooftop garden, and the longhouse, the organization aims to foster a sense of connection and familiarity from the very beginning. This process will continue to evolve and expand in the upcoming year.

Another significant endeavor undertaken by the organization is the pursuit of Accreditation. All programs at NCFST have participated in self-audits to assess their readiness for the Accreditation review scheduled for October 2024. This process involves extensive work on creating consistent and standardized documentation of all community-based services being recorded in the Caseworks system. The goal is to ensure that comprehensive records are available for funding purposes and to provide necessary reporting to funders.

Siobhan is actively collaborating with the Quality Assurance and Decolonization (QAD) team to develop consistent policy documents for the numerous programs and services delivered across the organization's 19 locations. This effort aims to ensure that policies align with NCFST's values, decolonization principles, and best practices.

Through these initiatives, Siobhan and the People and Culture team are actively working towards enhancing the organization's operations, supporting new employees, fostering cultural awareness, and ensuring accountability through standardized documentation and policy development.





# TO OUR FUNDERS

Miigwetch – Nia:wen – Marsee – Kinana'skomitin – Nakurmiik – Thank You!

- Aboriginal Head Start
- Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle Funding
- Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation
- Bell Let's Talk
- Canada Community Revitalization Fund
- Canada Council for the Arts
- Canadian Heritage
- Catherine Donnelly Foundation
- Centennial College of Applied Arts & Technology
- Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
- City of Toronto
- Drop-in Network
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Family Services of Peel
- Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
- Health Canada
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Indigo Love of Reading Foundation
- Kinark Child and Family Services
- LifeLabs
- Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
- Ministry for Women and Gender Equality
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of the Attorney General
- Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training
- Miziwe Biik Development Corporation
- MLSE Foundation
- Mondelēz Canada Inc.
- Nike Foundation
- Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association
- Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Rate-My-Agent.com
- Rexall Care Network
- Scotiabank
- Sick Kids
- Status of Women Canada - Ministry for Women and Gender Equality
- TD Canada Trust
- TD Wealth Private Trust
- Textile Museum of Canada
- Thomas Foster Trust
- Timothy Eaton Memorial Church
- Tippet Foundation
- Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Fund
- Toronto Arts Council and Ontario Arts Council
- Toronto Star
- United Way Greater Toronto & York Region
- Walmart Canada Corp
- Waltons Trust
- Waninawakang Aboriginal Head Start



# **NCFST**

30 College Street,  
Toronto, ON M5G 1K2  
416.969.8510  
info@nativechild.org

[www.nativechild.org](http://www.nativechild.org)