



Wiidosem Dabasendizowin

Walking With Humility: Embracing the Teachings of the West

SEPTEMBER 2026

PROGRESS REPORT



The cover photo was taken inside of Shaabode'wan (Teaching Lodge) and Nanaandawe'ewin (Traditional Healing Program), staff and community members.

Miigwech (thank you) to all Elders, clients, staff, and volunteers who are featured in photographs throughout this report, and Willow Photography + Design.

This progress report shares our continued journey with the long term plan toward culturally safe, Indigenous-led healthcare. It honours the teachings guiding this work, recognizes progress made, acknowledges challenges that remain, and demonstrates accountability to Indigenous clients, families, communities, Elders, staff, and partners.

Table of Contents



N'DOO'OWE BINESI

A Prayer	3
Izhitoowin, Niigaan Inaabidaa, Niinzhwaaso Anishinaabe Onaakonigewinan	4
A Message from the Board of Directors	6
A Message from Leadership	7
Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin	8
Remembering Animikii Gaaboowii (Thunder Spirit)	12
PRIORITY 1: Advancing Our Journey to Provide Culturally Safe Care for Indigenous Peoples	15
Voices from the Cultural Team	17
PRIORITY 2: Advance Truth & Reconciliation	19
PRIORITY 3: Amplify Indigenous Cultural Safety Within the Region	22
PRIORITY 4: Nurture N'doo'owe Binesi	24
Where the Healing Moves: The Waabanung HART Hub	26
Looking Ahead	28

The opening prayer was offered by Brenda Mason, an employee of St. Joseph's Care Group for over 35 years now serving as Ogichidaa-Kwe and member of Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin.





A Prayer

Creator,

Kichi-Miigwech.

I am Imprint Hanging Standing Woman.

It is with gratitude in my heart that I stand before you with my tobacco.

We are grateful that you have blessed us with another new day and a new beginning. You have given us the opportunity to walk upon the sacredness of Mother Earth, and we are humbled by this gift.

We are grateful to our Ancestors for leaving us footprints of guidance to follow when we choose to do so.

We are grateful for the Medicine Wheel and the Four Directions, which continue to remind us of the teachings and guidance that have been carried forward through generations.

Today, we have looked to the Directions for guidance from our Ancestors as we gather to do the work we have agreed to undertake.

We have looked to the East, and we are grateful for the guidance that has been shown to us—for new beginnings, illumination, and understanding. For this, we say Miigwech.

We then turned to the South, seeking to know the sacredness of our hearts and to bring light to our minds so that we may see clearly. We continue to grow and remain open to the teachings of the South.

Today, we have walked to the West, seeking guidance and remaining open to the teachings that help us live our purpose. The West reminds us to reflect on our mental,

physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It calls us to ceremony, to dreaming, visioning, and contemplation so that we may receive the loving guidance that is available to us.

The Bear sits with the West. As we move toward the West, the Bear welcomes us with strength, courage, and compassion. The Bear's protective spirit is always present when called upon, and the wisdom she carries is ready to be shared.

As we continue to seek the guidance and teachings of the West, may we remain open to all that is offered. Creator, you have provided us with the gifts, knowledge, and teachings needed to do our work with and for all people. We carry these gifts in our hearts.

Miigwech.

Imprint Hanging Standing Woman, Brenda Mason

Ogichidaa-Kwe and member of Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin

Izhitoowin,
Niigaan Inaabidaa,
Niinzhwaaso Anishinaabe
Onaakonigewinan



IZHITOOWIN (PURPOSE)

Living the Spiritual Healing Traditions of Anishinaabe Culture

Rooted in Anishinaabe ways of being and guided by Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin, the N'doo'owe Binesi Team is dedicated to providing culturally safe care. Our purpose is to support the restoration of Minoyaawin (health) and Mino Biimaadiziwin (the good life), walking alongside individuals, families, and communities on their healing journeys.

NIIGAAN INAABIDAA (VISION)

Looking Ahead with Respect for All That Has Come Before

We envision a future where Anishinaabe people are healthier, empowered, and thriving—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. In a healthcare environment that respects and embraces Anishinaabe knowledge, we work to restore Anishinaabe health sovereignty and create lasting change for generations to come.

NIINZHWAAASO ANISHINAABE ONAAKONIGEWINAN (VALUES)

The Seven Sacred Teachings Guiding Our Work

DEBWEWIN (TRUTH)

We speak and act with honesty and integrity. We ensure that our clients are heard, understood, and supported in every step of their healing journey.

DABAADENDIZIWIN (HUMILITY)

We walk with humility, embracing a Two-Eyed Seeing approach that values both Traditional and Western approaches. We remain open to learning from others and from every experience.

ZOONGIDE'EWIN (BRAVERY)

We stand with courage in the face of adversity, including systemic racism and inequity. We advocate for change and walk beside those in need with strength and compassion.

NIBWAAKAAWIN (WISDOM)

Guided by the teachings of the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin, we apply Anishinaabe knowledge with thoughtfulness and care—for the benefit of our clients, staff, and community.

MANAAJI'IDIWIN (RESPECT)

We honour the inherent dignity, autonomy, and cultural identity of every individual. We respect all paths to healing and uphold the sacredness of each person's story.

GWAYAKWAADIZIWIN (HONESTY)

With trust and transparency in all relationships, communicating with clarity and sincerity—between clients, families, colleagues, and community partners.

ZAAGI'IDIWIN (LOVE)

Love grounds all that we do. We offer compassionate, kind-hearted care that supports healing and connection for every person we serve.



N'DOO'OWE BINESI



A Message From the Board of Directors

This past year, St. Joseph's Care Group's Board of Directors moved from stated commitment to accountability in practice. While progress is being made through Indigenous-led governance structures, partnerships, and system change, we acknowledge that care experiences are not yet consistent or equitable within SJCG and across the region.

Accountability requires more than intent; it requires disciplined follow-through, transparent decision-making, and a willingness to examine how power, responsibility, and influence are held within the system.

We continue to be guided by Indigenous leadership in the region, including Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin (Elders Council) and N'doo'owe Binesi, SJCG's Indigenous Health division. This year, our Chair of the Board Mission & Equity Sub-Committee served on Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin, and our Board Chair and Vice-Chair were honoured to attend a Council meeting: experiences that deepened our understanding of listening, relationship, and humility in governance.

We also recognize the contributions of Brenda Mason, SJCG's Ogichidaa-Kwe (Elder in Council), whose participation at Board meetings strengthens the connection between corporate Indigenous leadership and Board governance, advancing shared accountability.

The Board's Mission & Equity Sub-Committee provides oversight and recommendations related to Indigenous-specific racism, anti-racism, discrimination, and ethics. It supports implementation of *Wiidosem Dabasendizowin: Walking With Humility* and alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other accountability frameworks.

There is still work to do to ensure Indigenous languages, cultures, spirituality, and wholistic approaches to health are fully embedded as foundations of care. Walking with humility requires listening, honesty, patience, and the discipline to show up differently, so that we stay accountable to what we are taught.

We remain committed to advancing this work in partnership with Indigenous leaders, communities, staff, and Elders, ensuring that progress is not only stated, but clearly demonstrated.

Respectfully submitted,

SUSAN FRASER, Chair, Board of Directors
REGINA MANDAMIN, Chair, Board Mission
& Equity Sub-Committee

A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP



At the midway point of our 2024-2028 journey, we continue to walk in the direction of the West, a time for reflection, learning, and renewal. Guided by the teachings of Dabaadendiziwin (Humility), we move forward with gratitude for what has been achieved and awareness of the challenges ahead.

This past year brought important milestones across N'doo'owe Binesi and St. Joseph's Care Group. Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin welcomed its first youth members, strengthening intergenerational leadership, while the opening of the Shaabode'wan Teaching Lodge created a dedicated outdoor space for ceremony, learning, and connection.

Progress has continued across our strategic priorities. Enhancements to Voluntary Self-Identification are helping connect Indigenous clients more quickly to Indigenous Health Associates and culturally appropriate supports. Indigenous cultural safety continues to be woven into policy and governance, while Indigenous data sovereignty initiatives are advancing across the organization. Through the Waabanung HART Hub, the Cultural Outreach Team has connected more than 2,000 clients with ceremony and Traditional Healing since 2025.

At the heart of this work are Cultural Practitioners, Elders, staff, clients, families and community partners who continue to build relationships grounded in respect, trust, and accountability. Across care settings, the Nanaandawe'ewin (Traditional Healing) team brings teachings, ceremony, and connections – not as programs, but as relationships rooted in presence and trust.

At the same time, we recognize that this work unfolds within systems where racism and inequities persist. Progress and challenge exist side by side. This is not work that is quickly completed, but work that requires accountability, strong relationships, and the humility to listen and learn, especially when the path forward is difficult.

Miigwech to the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin Elders Council, staff, clients, families, and community partners, and our Board of Directors, whose guidance, commitment, and support continues to move this work forward in a good way.

Miigwech/Thank you,

PAUL FRANCIS JR., Vice President, N'doo'owe Binesi
JANINE BLACK, President & CEO, St. Joseph's Care Group



Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin

Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin (Elders Council) continues to guide Indigenous health transformation across St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG). The Council helps ensure that decisions, relationships, and actions remain grounded in Indigenous values, knowledge, and cultural protocols.

This year, the Council guided updates to the Honorarium Policy to better reflect reciprocity, respect, and cultural practices. The Council also revised its Terms of Reference, strengthening its role in providing cultural guidance and supporting Indigenous engagement across the organization.

At the January 2026 meeting, the Council welcomed the Coordinator of the Fort William First Nation St. Joseph's Indian Residential School Survivor Project. The presentation highlighted efforts to honour Survivors, preserve community history, and support healing. The meeting also welcomed SJCG's Board Chair and Vice Chair, creating an opportunity to strengthen relationships and support Indigenous-informed governance.

During Treaties Recognition Week, ceremonies took place across SJCG sites in partnership with N'doo'owe Binesi leadership and Ogichidaa-Kwe

Brenda Mason. These gatherings encouraged staff to reflect on treaty relationships and the responsibilities that support Indigenous rights in health care.

The Council also gifted the name Mino Ginawenjigewin (The Act of Caring for People) to the 500 Oliver Road site. The name reflects a place of healing, support, and culturally responsive care.

Across SJCG, Cultural Practitioners and staff continue to learn from Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural teachings. This work supports the integration of Indigenous perspectives into everyday care.

Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin remains committed to carrying this work forward through relationships, across generations, and grounded in culture and tradition.

The Journey of the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin





Elders and Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin Members



ERNIE KWANDIBENS (ELDER)

Ernie is a founding member of Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin (Elders Council) and has played a foundational role in caring for Piimi-Gabo, the N'doo'owe Binesi Grandmother Eagle Staff. A member of Whitesand First Nation, he is known as Miigwanuck Kewayuhn of the Maang/Loon Clan, with more than 40 years of service in ceremony, language, and healing.

"As Anishinaabe, your culture is carried within you; by awakening that connection, you open yourself to the guidance and strength of your ancestors."



CHARLOTTE KWANDIBENS (ELDER)

Charlotte is a founding member of the Elders Council and a member of Waswanipi Cree First Nation. Living in Thunder Bay and of the Makwa Clan, she is a respected Knowledge Keeper supporting ceremony, cultural teachings, and community healing across urban and First Nations communities.



BRENDA MASON (ELDER IN COUNCIL)

Brenda is a founding member of the Elders Council and is known as Imprint Hanging Standing Woman. She's Oji-Cree and belongs to the Red Sucker Fish Clan. As a fluent language speaker, she's a proud grandmother and calls Thunder Bay home. Brenda is the full-time Ogichidaa-Kwe (Elder in Council), and provides cultural leadership across N'doo'owe Binesi and SJCG.

"Creator, you have provided us with the gifts, knowledge, and teachings needed to do our work with and for all people. We carry these gifts in our hearts."



NELLY MESENEGEESHIK (ELDER)

Nelly joined the Elders Council in October 2024 and is a guiding presence within the Shaabode'wan Teaching Lodge. From Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek, she is known as Misquankodook of the Atik/Caribou Clan. An Elder, healer, and counsellor based in Treaty #3 territory, she supports youth through culturally grounded care.

“Always connect with your spirituality, as it will guide you in achieving your goals.”



AARON THERRIAULT (ELDER)

Aaron joined the Elders Council in 2024 and supported the N'doo'owe Binesi Traditional Drum. From Aroland First Nation and based in Thunder Bay, he was known as Animkii Gaaboowii of the Makwa Clan. A respected Drum Keeper, his work centred on the drum as a source of healing and connection. Aaron passed unexpectedly in March 2026; his contributions continue to guide and shape this work.



HELEN YOUNG BRIZARD (ELDER)

Helen is an Anishinaabe language speaker and leader advancing Indigenous supports across health, justice, and education. She is Kinew Miigwan Ikwe of the Kinew (Golden Eagle) Clan and a member of Lac Seul First Nation (Obishigokaang). Since joining the Elders Council in October 2024, she has supported the integration of Indigenous knowledge into care.

“The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.”



REGINA MANDAMIN (SJCG BOARD REPRESENTATIVE / ELDERS COUNCIL MEMBER)

Regina is an Anishinaabe Kwe leader from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory with extensive experience in governance, policy, and Indigenous health systems. As a member of the SJCG Board of Directors since 2023 and the Elders Council since 2024, she supports oversight and ensures services reflect community needs.

“Access to ceremony throughout a person's care journey is what makes this work unique and meaningful.”



LAYNE BRUYERE (YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE)

Layne is a youth from Couchiching First Nation (Bear Clan) with a passion for advocacy and powwow dancing. She brings insight into youth mental health, cultural identity, and self-determination, and is committed to strengthening Indigenous youth leadership.

“I've seen the challenges our community faces, and I want to be part of the solution.”



KIAYA NOWEGIJICK (YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE)

Kiaya is from Gull Bay First Nation and Webequie First Nation (Turtle Clan), with a strong commitment to community, culture, and youth leadership. She brings a thoughtful voice to conversations on healing, harm reduction, and cultural continuity.

“Indigenous youth need more resources, mentorship, and real opportunities to lead.”



“Aaron was a strong support to the Cultural Team, always grounded in the teachings and ready to help when needed. He played an important role in supporting the drum, particularly with Raining Thunderbird, ensuring it was carried in a good way. Through his presence, guidance, and commitment to culture, he strengthened both the team and the spirit of the work. His teachings continue to guide us today.”

— **REENA LARABEE,**
Manager, Nanaandawe’ewin
(Traditional Healing Program)



Remembering Animikii Gaaboowii (Thunder Spirit): A Legacy of Teaching and Connection

Aaron Therriault, Animikii Gaaboowii, was an Ojibway from Aroland First Nation and a member of the Bear Clan. He dedicated his life to serving his community, supporting his family, and carrying forward the teachings entrusted to him.

Through ceremony, song, language, and mentorship, Aaron helped others strengthen their connection to culture, spirit, and one another. His life was rooted in courage, compassion, responsibility, and service, leaving a lasting impact on individuals, organizations, and communities.

Aaron's presence within N'doo'owe Binesi and across the broader community was steady and meaningful. Whether through the drum, cultural teachings, ceremonies, or simply being present, he created spaces where people felt supported and cared for. His contributions to preserving

and sharing Anishinaabe language, ceremony, and teachings continue to shape this work today.

One of Aaron's lasting gifts was his commitment to ensuring that culture, teachings, and ceremony would continue for future generations. Among the final ceremonies he held for N'doo'owe Binesi was the retrieval of the Anishinaabe name Nanda Minoyaa for the Indigenous Health Team, a gift that continues to guide the organization's work.



In speaking about culture, healing, and community, Aaron often emphasized the importance of reconnecting with identity and one another:

“The tradition, the culture, the language, the food, ceremony—people are trying to gain back that life and fill that void. If I had a message for all people, we need to start listening from the heart, not just the mind. We need to connect our heart with our mind, and people need to start being with people.”

— **AARON THERRIAULT** (Animikii Gaaboowii)

Excerpt from the Indigenous Medicine Stories Podcast-
“N'doo'owe Binesi: Voices of Anishinaabe Healing”



Walking With Humility:

Embracing the Teachings of the West – Fall 2026 Progress Report

Building on the momentum of our 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, *Walking With Humility—Embracing the Teachings of the West* guides us through a period of reflection, learning, relationship building, and renewal. Rooted in the strength and introspection symbolized by Makwa (Bear), this stage of the journey calls us to look inward while remaining accountable to the communities we serve.

The following report highlights progress across our strategic priorities and the actions we’re taking to advance culturally responsive care, strengthen partnerships, and improve outcomes for Indigenous clients, families, and communities.



PRIORITY one

Advancing Our Journey to Provide Culturally Safe Care for Indigenous Peoples

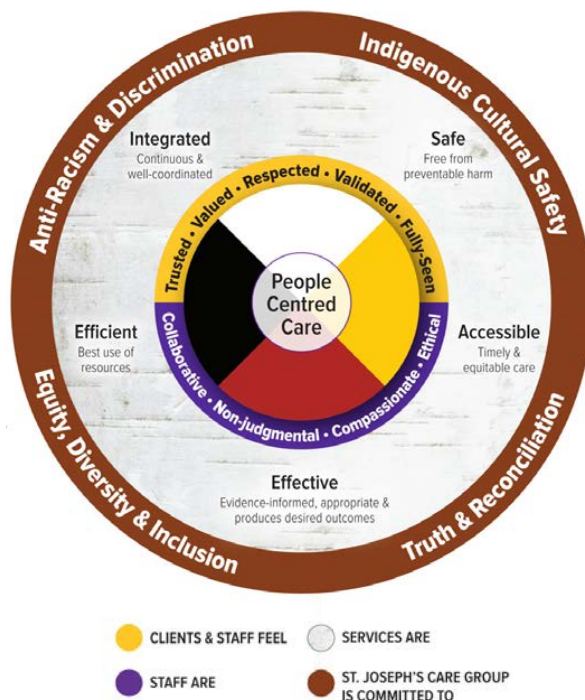
Objective

Enhance SJCG clinical practices to increase culturally appropriate care that is responsive to the needs of Indigenous clients, residents and families.

ACTION 1: DEVELOP AN INDIGENOUS CLIENT & FAMILY PARTNER COMMITTEE

This initiative began in ceremony on September 30, 2025, with the project team. An environmental scan and literature review included input from seven content experts and a review of five organizational reports and standards focused on gathering insights, promising practices, and lessons learned to inform the design of the committee. Two project team meetings established a shared vision and key principles to guide the development of the Indigenous Client & Family Partner Committee. To ensure alignment with SJCG's corporate Client & Family Partner Program, recruitment has been delayed and will proceed once the corporate framework has been finalized.

QUALITY AND SAFETY FRAMEWORK



ACTION 2: INTEGRATE TWO-EYED SEEING INTO THE ORGANIZATIONAL QUALITY PROGRAM

Implementation of the Two-Eyed Seeing Quality and Safety Framework continues to be guided by the voices of clients, staff, Elders, and Indigenous community members. The Framework brings together Indigenous and Western ways of knowing to support a more holistic and culturally responsive approach to quality and safety. This work was featured in the Ontario Hospital Association's Health System News, and was presented at the Canadian College of Health Leaders National Conference by Andrew Koscielniak, Director of Indigenous Health, and Sumeet Kumar, Corporate Director of Quality. Participant feedback highlighted the importance of relationship building, shared learning, and integrating diverse perspectives to advance quality improvement. The framework continues to support organizational learning and strengthen people-centred approaches to care.

PRIORITY 1

N'doo'owe Binesi Overview

2,783 Total Referrals

792 Unique Clients

265 Total Referrals To Traditional Healing

Cultural Practitioners

302 Total Referrals Cultural Practitioner

654 Group Sessions

1,913 Group Attendance

2,728 Individual Sessions With Cultural Practitioner

ACTION 3: CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT AND SUSTAIN VOLUNTARY SELF-IDENTIFICATION ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

Voluntary Self-Identification was successfully implemented across all SJCG clinical programs. Staff completed a mandatory learning module through the Learning Management System by March 31, 2025. A monitoring framework was developed, and initially implemented in Inpatient Rehabilitative Care Medically Complex unit reached 100% compliance by December 31, 2025. The monitoring framework has since been expanded to all remaining Inpatient Rehabilitative Care units and Inpatient Mental Health programs with completion set for 2026-2027. Indigenous Health also supported Meditech Expanse planning activities to help ensure Indigenous identity data collection requirements are reflected within future clinical workflows and reporting processes.

ACTION 4: EMBED N'DOO'OWE BINESI INTO CLINICAL SERVICES ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

A comprehensive environmental scan was completed on August 31, 2025, including consultations with seven regional, provincial, and national content experts, a review of 14 published articles and reports, and an assessment of 12 professional standards and codes of ethics. Findings informed the development of a Minimum Standards of Service tool to help clinical programs evaluate whether they are meeting the standards for embedding N'doo'owe Binesi in clinical services. Following a pilot at Hogarth Riverview Manor and revisions informed by clinical leaders and project team members, the final tool was completed on March 31, 2026, and launched across the organization in May 2026.

ACTION 5: INITIATE AN INDIGENOUS CLIENT JOURNEY MAPPING PROJECT TO SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT AND LEARNING

The Indigenous Client Journey Mapping project was initiated on January 15, 2026, with the project team. Indigenous Health staff, including people with lived experience, are guiding this work and ensuring Indigenous perspectives remain central throughout the process. A sub-working group was established to develop the project methodology and implementation plan, creating a strong foundation for future journey mapping activities that will support quality improvement, organizational learning, and enhancements to the client experience. The project team also benefited from knowledge sharing with the Indigenous Wellness Services team at Providence Health Care in Vancouver, British Columbia, whose experience and learnings from similar work undertaken since 2021 helped inform the project's approach. An Indigenous artist has been engaged to support the project and co-create a culturally meaningful visual representation of the client journey. Journey mapping activities are expected to commence once the methodology has been finalized and clients have been recruited to participate.



VOICES FROM THE CULTURAL TEAM

Cultural Practitioner: Nodin Moses

ROOTS AND BRANCHES

Nodin Moses has a way of explaining his work that makes you forget you're listening to a job description.

"We're like a tree," he says. "We inspire so much, and that tree gets bigger and bigger."

"We're like a tree," he says. "We inspire so much, and that tree gets bigger and bigger."

When he teaches a young person about smudging, tobacco, or culture, something begins. That young person

returns home changed in ways they may not yet have words for. A parent then notices, and a conversation often starts, as they recall a piece of themselves, a memory from their culture. "The roots spread sideways before going down," he explains.

This is the daily work of a Cultural Practitioner at SJCG. Nodin moves between long-term care, outpatient services, withdrawal management, and schools — wherever he is needed. He facilitates smudging ceremonies, shares teachings on identity and culture, and creates space for people to tell stories they may have carried for years.

"People come up to me and share their story because they feel safe around

me," he says. "I hope that inspires them to learn more about their culture, to live better, and to find peace and balance," he explains as he reflects quietly on the impact of that work. "It's pretty cool to see people that I worked with in the past doing better."

Nodin stepped into this role at just 24 years old. His father works alongside him on the same team, a detail that often surprises people: a father and son doing the same work, side by side. Nodin learned by watching his dad as a child, taking in the teachings as a teenager, and eventually carrying them forward in his own way. "Not many people can say they're a coworker with their dad," he says. "It's the tree again."



VOICES FROM THE CULTURAL TEAM

Cultural Practitioner: Esther Maud

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM

Esther Maud has witnessed it time and again, and it never loses its impact. Someone walks into the cultural space carrying the weight of their experiences guarded, uncertain, and often disconnected; then a smudge is lit, and something begins to shift.

"I can see their spirit almost reignite," she says. "They start talking about how it's been years since they smelled that, since they've had the chance to connect like that."

This space is an important part of Mino Ginawenjigewin (The Act of Caring for People), a place where culture is not an add-on, but part of how care is experienced. Through ceremony, presence, and relationships, Esther helps create an environment where people can reconnect with themselves in a meaningful way.

Her work is deeply personal. Esther has been sober for eight years, and she carries that lived experience with

humility into each interaction. When she sits with clients, she's walking alongside them with understanding shaped by her own journey. On a typical day, Esther moves through the centre offering smudge, preparing cedar tea, something she notes can be comforting and supportive during withdrawal management, and creating opportunities for connection through beading, dreamcatchers, and painting. Much of her time is spent simply sitting and listening. "Many individuals look forward to when I come in," she says. "Hearing how much it means to them is what keeps bringing me back."

Earlier this year, Esther participated in her first Dark Room ceremony, held in the same space that has become so central to her work. The room was filled with participants from Withdrawal Management and other SJCG sites across the city, each bringing their own story. After the ceremony, one individual approached her, someone she remembered from

earlier in the summer. He shared that he was now five months sober. Then he asked her a question she hears often: how long she had been sober herself. She told him eight years. He smiled and said he hoped, one day, he could say the same.

"Someone walks into the cultural space carrying the weight of their experiences guarded, uncertain, and often disconnected; then a smudge is lit, and something begins to shift."

PRIORITY *two*

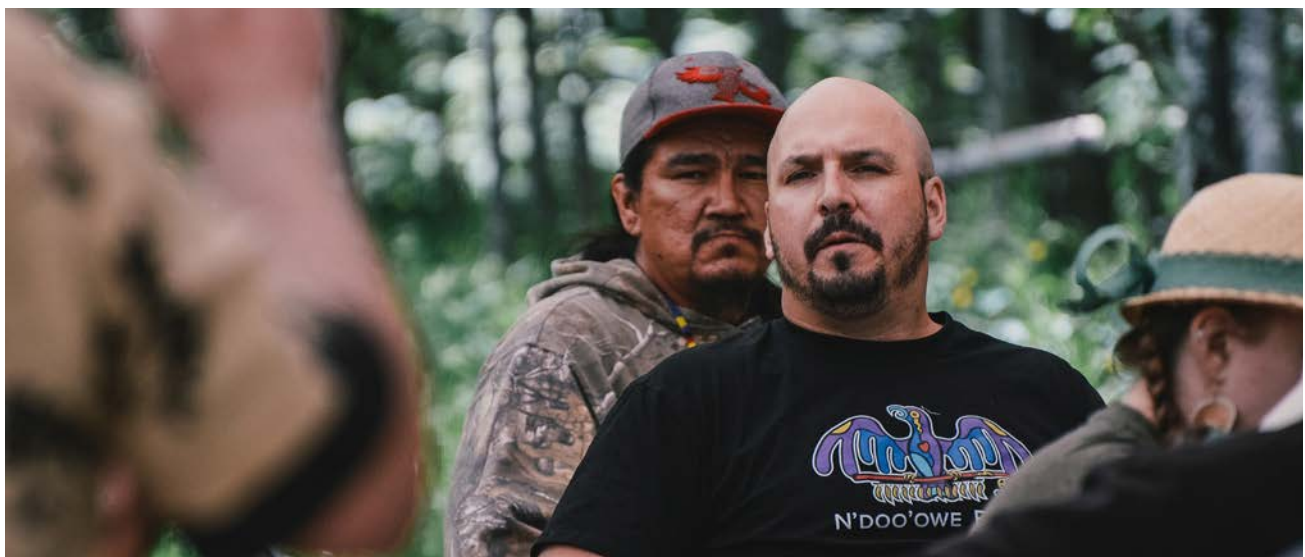
Advance Truth & Reconciliation

Objective

To foster an inclusive and culturally competent environment within SJCG that actively engages in truth seeking, acknowledging historical injustices, and promotes reconciliation through equitable care delivery, equitable employment and community partnerships.

ACTION 1: CONTINUE TO BUILD ON INDIGENOUS CULTURAL SAFETY EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR STAFF

Working group meetings were held in September and November 2025 to advance Indigenous cultural safety education and training. The focus was on enhancing existing learning content, with Repairing the Sacred Circle 1 (RSC1) entering content enhancement in February 2026. As of June 30th, 2026, 1460 out of 2531 staff completed RSC1. This was followed by Repairing the Sacred Circle 2 in June 2026 completed by 84%. A Traditional Healing module was also completed within the Learning Management System on March 31, 2026, expanding access to culturally grounded learning opportunities for staff.



PRIORITY 2



ACTION 2: EMBED INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES INTO ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

SJCG is developing a new organization-wide Policy and Procedure Framework that intentionally integrates Indigenous perspectives into its foundation. By March 31, 2026, cultural safety screening questions were developed for inclusion in the policy review process. These tools help ensure policies are assessed through both operational and cultural safety lenses. The new framework is expected to be in place by the end of 2026.



ACTION 3: STRENGTHEN OUR PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

On February 6, 2026, SJCG relaunched its Indigenous Health Committee under its gifted name Maamow Ginaakonigewin, reflecting a renewed commitment to unified, relationship based, decision making and advancing Indigenous Cultural Safety across the organization.

The committee builds on the work of the Aboriginal Health Working Group (2009) and the Indigenous Health Education Committee (2021). The committee works in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations to advance culturally safe, equitable care by addressing systemic racism and supporting the integration of Indigenous knowledge, values, and ways of knowing into policies, education, and care.

In support of this commitment, the SJCG Board of Directors also established a dedicated Board position from this committee for an Indigenous community member, strengthening Indigenous representation in governance and ensuring Indigenous voices help guide organizational decision-making.

ACTION 4: IMPLEMENT INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY PRINCIPLES

An internal environmental scan involving 93 managers and directors, identified 68 programs collecting Indigenous identity and related data outside the corporate Voluntary Self-Identification process. An external scan and literature review was completed on September 30, 2025, that engaged nine experts in Indigenous data governance and examined leading healthcare frameworks. In December 2025, SJCG participated in the inaugural National Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance Working Session hosted by Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH. A draft policy is currently under review, with pilot testing planned for December 2026 and implementation anticipated by March 2027.



Sacred Items & Sacred Spaces

For many Indigenous Peoples, culture, ceremony, language, and connection to community are essential to health and healing. Yet these approaches have not always been recognized within healthcare systems. Through N'doo'owe Binesi, SJCG continues to create space for Indigenous knowledge systems alongside clinical care.

Sacred items and spaces across SJCG support healing, learning, and connection for clients, families, staff, and community members. The Grandmother Eagle Staff, Sacred

Pipe, Sacred Fire, Sweat Lodge, Tipi, and other sacred items each carry important teachings and responsibilities.

The addition of the Grandfather Drum, Gimiwan Binesi (Raining Thunderbird), and Shaabode'wan (When You Come Through) Teaching Lodge, has expanded opportunities for ceremony, cultural teachings, and gathering, strengthening the role of Indigenous knowledge and healing within care environments.

THE GIFT OF GIMIWAN BINESI

In Summer 2024, N'doo'owe Binesi received the Grandfather Drum through ceremony. Guided by traditional teachings and the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin Elders Council, the Drum was gifted the name Gimiwan Binesi (Raining Thunderbird) by the late Elder Aaron Therriault.

SHAABODE'WAN (WHEN YOU COME THROUGH) TEACHING LODGE

In Spring 2025, N'doo'owe Binesi staff, youth, and Elders came together to build a Teaching Lodge on the sacred grounds. Later that year, Elder Nelly Mesenegeeshik gifted the name Shaabode'wan (When You Come Through)" reflecting teachings of transition, responsibility, and growth.

Today, the Drum and the Lodge welcomes all for ceremony, teachings, and gatherings. Together, they reflect SJCG's commitment to ensuring Indigenous knowledge, culture, and healing are recognized and respected as part of healthcare.



PRIORITY *three*

Amplify Indigenous Cultural Safety Within the Region

Objective

To promote understanding and respect for Indigenous cultures while fostering a safe and inclusive environment for Indigenous Peoples within the region.



ACTION 1: PARTNER AND DEVELOP COALITIONS WITH MAINSTREAM AND INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT CULTURAL SAFETY ACROSS THE REGION

In November 2025, twelve hospitals across Northwestern Ontario completed a Current State Analysis of Indigenous cultural safety education and training. Preliminary findings identified significant variation in training approaches, access, and accountability across the region. The Regional Director, Indigenous Partnerships, is working with regional partners to explore a minimum standard for cultural safety training. The project team is also looking for opportunities to leverage SJCG's experience through N'doo'owe Binesi and Repairing the Sacred Circle to support broader regional implementation, recognizing that additional funding and delivery capacity will be required.

ACTION 2: CO-DESIGN PROTOCOLS FOR REGIONAL PROGRAMS IN PARTNERSHIPS WITH FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES AND INDIGENOUS SERVICE PROVIDERS

The project team focused on strengthening organizational readiness for Indigenous engagement through foundational learning grounded in cultural safety, respect, reciprocity, and relationship building. Education sessions deepened understanding of cultural protocols and OCAP - Ownership, Control, Access and Possession principles, while a relationship-mapping exercise identified existing partnerships with Indigenous communities, successful practices, and areas requiring additional support. 27 staff have completed OCAP principles training this year. Findings from this work have informed the next phase of engagement, which will focus on building sustainable partnerships and co-designing a regional engagement framework and supporting toolkit.



Advancing Indigenous-Led Health Systems Across the Northwest

Sarah Swaroop explains that her very first year as Regional Director of Indigenous Partnerships was really all about listening. When she stepped into the role in 2025, she didn't come with a plan to hand to communities, but arrived with questions about what the healthcare system across Northwestern Ontario actually looks like, what Indigenous Peoples encounter when they try to access care, and their ongoing experiences. "I'm here for the people. Now the work is also about ensuring the system responds to what communities have been saying all along."

That work is carried out alongside the Northwest Regional Indigenous Steering Committee—Regional Specialized Services Network. This body sets and champions Indigenous health priorities across the region, tracks progress, and provides strategic direction to the people and organizations responsible for support.

One of Sarah's first major projects was a gap and needs analysis with twelve hospitals across the Northwest. This work mapped existing strengths, identified critical gaps, and highlighted barriers that limit culturally safe care. It also revealed opportunities for stronger collaboration and innovation across the region.

A clearer understanding also highlighted that while strong models exist, they're not consistently implemented. Larger

hospitals had more capacity to sustain Indigenous-informed approaches, while smaller sites, often in the communities

"Communities know what's best for their people. Our role is to ensure their leadership is supported and acted on."

with the greatest need, faced real constraints, creating uneven access to culturally safe care. The analysis provided direction where alignment is needed, where partnerships can be strengthened, and where system-level change must occur to provide equitable care, regardless of location.

Priority actions are now focused on regional alignment, building the connections between hospitals so that no site is left to figure this out in isolation. Sarah is advancing a shared learning model that gives all hospitals access to guidance, training, and Indigenous partnership expertise, while strengthening relationships with communities that make it meaningful.

"We are seeing more willingness to rethink how care is delivered and who should lead it. Communities know what's best for their people. Our role is to ensure their leadership is supported and acted on."

PRIORITY *four*

Nurture N'doo'owe Binesi

Objective

Strengthen the foundation and sustainability of N'doo'owe Binesi to optimize Indigenous health outcomes.



ACTION 1: DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO SECURE FUNDING AND ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF N'DOO'OWE BINESI

The project team held its first meeting in September 2025 and completed a project plan by October 2025. The team continues to monitor funding opportunities and document successful funding approaches and organizational investments that have supported Indigenous-specific initiatives.

SJCG invested approximately \$4.43 million in fiscal year 2026-27 to support the operations of N'doo'owe Binesi and has approximately \$2 million in capital funding toward the development of a permanent Sweat Lodge. A key challenge remains the absence of dedicated and sustainable funding envelopes for Indigenous Health core services, requiring reliance on project-based funding and organizational investments to maintain and expand services. This work will inform a long-term strategy to support the sustainability and growth of N'doo'owe Binesi.

ACTION 2: CLEARLY ARTICULATE N'DOO'OWE BINESI CORE SERVICES AND THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIVISION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION AND BROADER COMMUNITY

Completed.

ACTION 3: DEVELOP A STRATEGY TO ADDRESS STAFF RETENTION AND TURNOVER

To strengthen employee experience, N'doo'owe Binesi launched a staff experience initiative in September 2025. An updated Employee Experience Survey was distributed at the end of 2025, with staff achieving a 93% response rate. Survey findings informed the Employee Experience Action Plan, which was completed on March 31, 2026.

One initiative arising from the Employee Experience Action Plan was the N'doo'owe Binesi Staff Development Day, held at the School of Indigenous Learning (SOIL) on June 22, 2026. The day brought staff together for traditional teachings shared by Jeordi Pierre, Elder Marlene Pierre, and Elder Jim Mishquart, along with team building activities and a sharing circle that strengthened relationships, supported staff well-being, and reinforced shared values.



ACTION 4: INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF SERVICES FOR BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS

An internal review of N'doo'owe Binesi communications, completed on November 24, 2025, identified strengths, gaps, and opportunities to improve awareness of services. A working group with Communications & Government Relations was established in January 2026. In March 2026, N'doo'owe Binesi staff participated in sessions to define and articulate the division's services, priorities, and value to clients, partners, and the organization. Findings will be transitioned to an external creative agency to support the development of clear and consistent messaging that enhances understanding of N'doo'owe Binesi services among staff, community partners, and the public.

ACTION 5: SEEK AND DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO MEET EMERGING NEEDS

N'doo'owe Binesi and NorWest Community Health Centres participated in a Partnership Design Day on December 2, 2025, to explore opportunities for collaboration and identify shared priorities. Follow-up discussions occurred in February 2026, and planning remains active as both organizations continue to explore opportunities to address emerging community needs through partnership and service integration.

ACTION 6: CONTINUE TO EVALUATE THE VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF N'DOO'OWE BINESI

A working group was established in September 2025. Internal engagement with the Centre for Applied Health Research in October 2025, supported the development of evaluation criteria and draft evaluation questions, which were completed in December 2025. The full departmental evaluation is scheduled to begin in early 2027.



Where the Healing Moves *The Waabanning HART Hub*

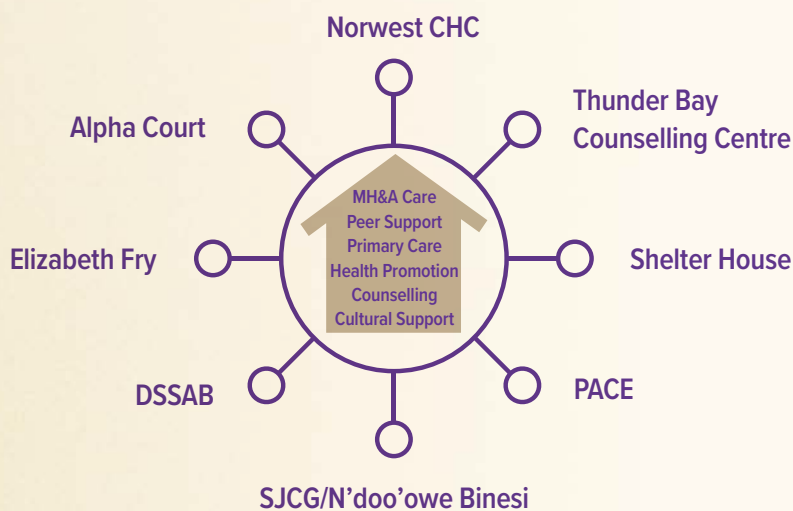
Not everyone who needs healing can walk through a clinic door. Some people aren't ready or simply don't trust what's behind it, while others are carrying so much trauma that walking in feels impossible.

The Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub was built on the understanding that healing has to move too. It launched in Ontario in 2025 as a three year demonstration project, bringing together local service delivery partners to offer a real continuum of support for people navigating addiction and homelessness recovery. There are 18 HART Hubs across the province. In Thunder Bay, NorWest Community Health Centres leads the Hub, and SJCG is one of its key partners, bringing on the Cultural Outreach Team.

Indigenous cultural programming plays a major role at the Thunder Bay location. Five full-time positions were embedded directly into the Hub, carrying ceremony and Traditional Healing into the spaces where people already are. Clients moving through the Hub can access Traditional Healing practices, system navigation, and peer support alongside the Hub's other services. Through community partners or self-referral, clients can access a range of services that meet them where they are on their journey.

N'doo'owe Binesi staff travel between

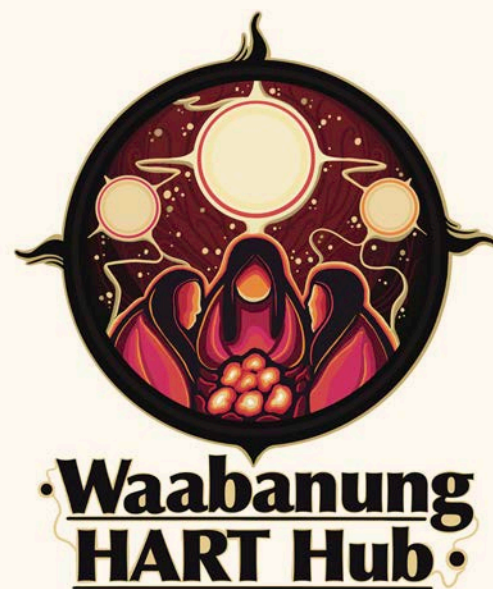
HUB AND SPOKE MODEL OF CARE



different physical sites every week to provide Traditional Healing practices like Sweat Lodge and drumming.

Since April 2025, the N'doo'owe Binesi Cultural Outreach team has held 66 events to support wholistic healing, reaching more than 2,000 clients.

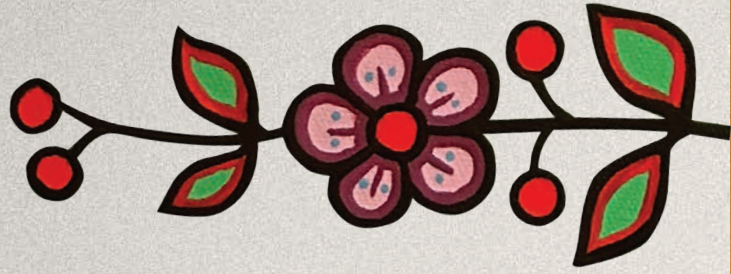
In 2025, a Sweat Lodge ceremony guided by Elder Nelly Mesenegeeshik, brought together leaders from the HART Hub partnership and members of the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin. During the special event, the Elder Nelly received guidance from Spirit to gift the HART Hub the name, Waabanung (Morning Star).



In 2026, that name took shape as a logo. The Waabanung HART Hub logo showcases four people in ceremony. Three are visible in the image; the fourth is the viewer, meant to draw people into the sacred space rather than watch it from outside.

The number four holds significance in Anishinaabe culture with the Four Sacred Directions, the Medicine Wheel, the Four Stages of Life, and the Four Aspects of Self (spiritual, mental, emotional, physical).

The larger circle at the centre represents Waabanung itself, the Morning Star, while the two smaller circles are Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon, standing for the balance that runs through Anishinaabe life.



Looking Ahead

The teachings of the West remind us to pause, reflect, and learn from the path behind us before taking the next steps forward.

This report highlights meaningful progress across the commitments outlined in *Wiidosem Dabasendizowin: Walking With Humility*. It also reminds us that reconciliation, relationship building, and system transformation require ongoing effort, accountability, and trust.

N'doo'owe Binesi, the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin Elders Council, staff, leaders, and community partners will continue this work together,

guided by ceremony, community, and the teachings that have carried Indigenous Peoples for generations.

As this journey continues, the commitment remains clear: to provide culturally safe care, strengthen Indigenous leadership, and create a health system where Indigenous Peoples feel respected, welcomed, and supported in every interaction.







VISIT US AT:

sjcg.net



St. Joseph's Care Group

35 Algoma St. N. Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5G7



St. JOSEPH'S CARE GROUP

N'DOO'OWE BINESI
INDIGENOUS HEALTH

EMAIL: NDooOweBinesi@tbh.net

PHONE: 807-346-5233