



*Wiidosem Dabasendizowin*

# *Walking With Humility: Embracing the Teachings of the West*

**SEPTEMBER 2025**

**PROGRESS REPORT**



*Miigwech / Thank you to all clients, staff, and Elders featured in photography throughout this Progress Report.*



**N'DOO'OWE BINESI**

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## A Prayer

*Creator,*

I stand before you in a humble way.

I ask for your forgiveness if I have done or said anything that was not in a good way.

*Creator,*

I am grateful for all you have provided—

For my eyes, to see the beauty before me.

For my ears, to hear the sounds of your creation.

For my voice, to share the knowledge you have given me throughout my life.

For my heart, to remember always the Seven Grandfather Teachings you have instilled in me since the

beginning of my time—

To lead by example, as you would have me do.

For my body, which reminds me to walk proudly in the race you chose for me.

To be Anishinaabe.

To continue learning the lessons you place before me—whether they bring joy or challenge—

For I know your lessons carry your teachings.

*Creator,*

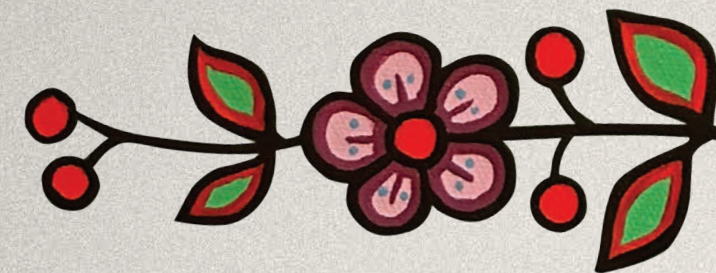
Thank you for walking beside me and watching over me.

**Gitchi Miigwech Ni Bimaadiziwin.**

Thank you for my life.

*Nelly Mesenegeeshik,*

*Misquankodook, Atik Doodem (Caribou Clan), Member of Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin*



## A Message From Leadership

In Anishinaabe teachings, the West is where the sun sets—a time for reflection, learning, and renewal. As we walk in this direction, we pause with gratitude, guided by the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin (Elders Council) and the teachings of Dabaadendiziwin (Humility).

We continue transforming care with Anishinaabe knowledge, ceremony, and spirit.

The growth of N’doo’owe Binesi, our Anishinaabe-led division, shows what is possible when we listen and lead together. Over the past year, key highlights include:

- Defining as a division “Who We Are” and rooting that in Anishinaabemowin to guide our future direction.
- Hosting the Gathering of Wisdom Keepers Niiwin, bringing together over 80 Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous healers to advance traditional healing in healthcare.
- Launching the N’doo’owe Binesi Employee Experience Project, with an 87% participation rate, to shape priorities around work distribution, communication, and cultural supports.
- Embedding Indigenous knowledge into innovative community-based supports, including the HART Hub model.

This Fall 2025 Progress Report also highlights the people behind the work, featuring members of our Indigenous Health team and introducing the new role of Regional Director of Indigenous Partnerships. Both are positions that strengthen relationships and carry our work forward.

We acknowledge the continued support of our Board of Directors, whose commitment to truth, reconciliation, and Indigenous cultural safety ensures this work is both expected and celebrated.

This Progress Report reflects our progress and our shared responsibility. We are proud of what has been accomplished, and clear that the journey is ongoing. Miigwech to all who walk with us—clients, Elders, families, staff, and community partners. The growth and diversity of the team strengthen relationships and carry our work forward.

### **MIIGWECH,**

Paul Francis Jr., Vice President, N’doo’owe Binesi  
Janine Black, President & CEO, St. Joseph’s Care Group





# Our Story: The Emergence Of N'doo'owe Binesi

N'doo'owe Binesi, "Healing Thunderbird," is an Anishinaabe-led division within St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG), created as part of the 2018 long-range strategic plan *Walking With Humility*. It reflects a commitment to Anishnaabe-led health services, cultural safety, and truth and reconciliation.

In 2020, the division received its name from Elder Ernie Kwandibens, capturing the spirit of healing, purpose, and compassion guiding the team's work. The Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin (Elders Council), officially named in 2021, provides cultural guidance and mentorship, ensuring the team's work remains rooted in Anishinaabe cultural knowledge.

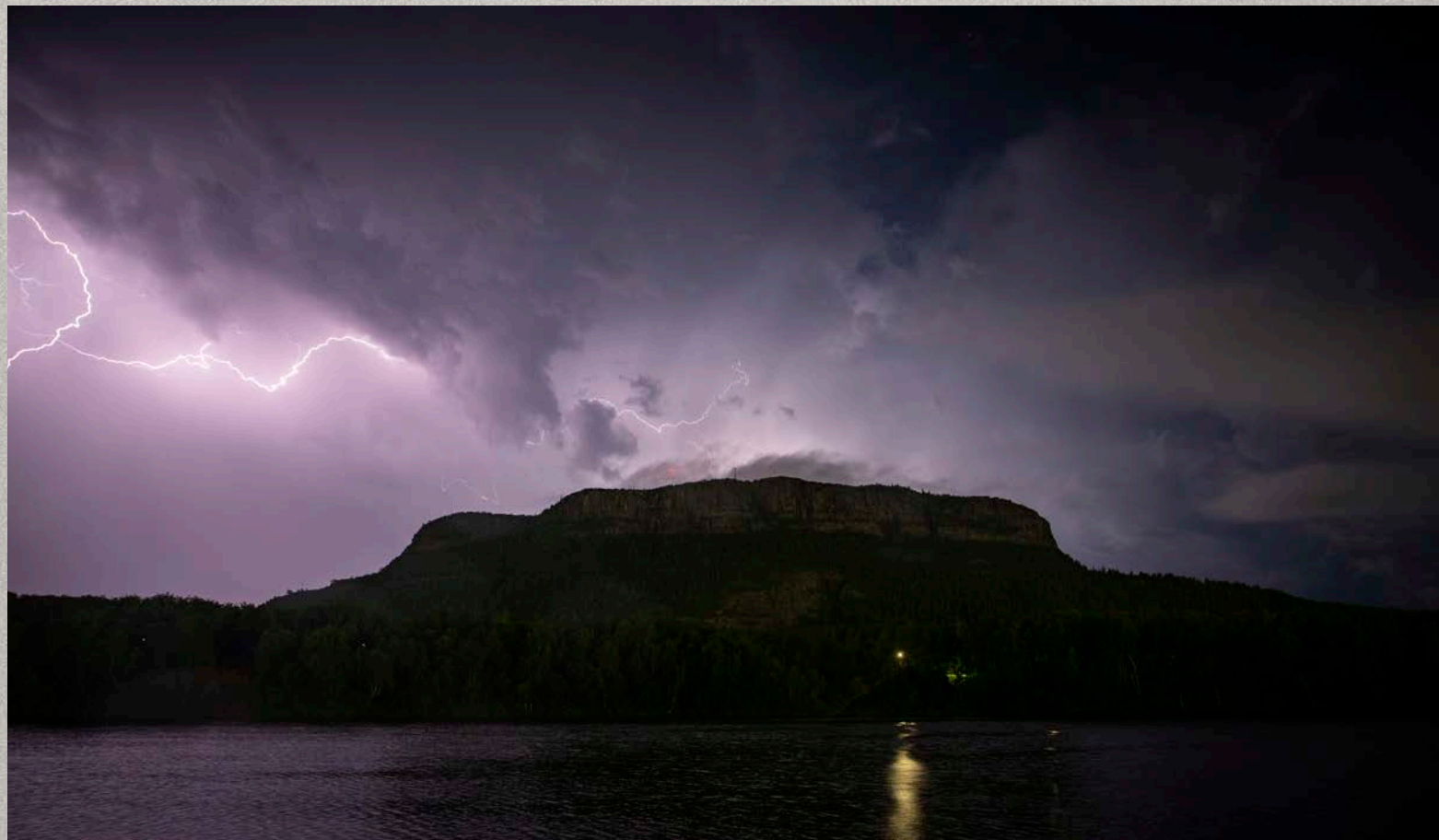
Significant milestones include the annual Sacred Fire—established in response to the discoveries of unmarked Residential School graves—and ceremonial gifts such

as Piimii-Gabow (Grandmother Eagle Staff) and Gimiwan Binesi (Grandfather Drum), which symbolize strength, wisdom, and spiritual rootedness.

Today, N'doo'owe Binesi has grown to more than 30 team members and is recognized as a leader in bridging traditional healing with Western healthcare. Beyond services, the division represents a journey of transformation, restoring balance, wellness, and healing for Indigenous Peoples and communities.



# Izhitoowin, Niigaan Inaabidaa, Niinzhwaaso Anishinaabe Onaakonigewinan



To clearly articulate N'doo'owe Binesi core services and the roles and responsibilities of the division within the organization and broader community, Purpose, Vision, and Values (PVV) statements were developed in Anishnaabemowin and finalized through focus groups, Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin sessions, and leadership review, providing clear direction and strengthening pride in our work.

These compliment and align with the Mission, Vision, and Values of SJCG.



## 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.

## NIINZHWAASO 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.





# Walking with Humility: Embracing the Teachings of the West – Fall 2025 Progress Report

On September 27, 2024, SJCG launched the third phase of our Walking with Humility journey—Embracing the Teachings of the West—culminating in a four-day Sacred Fire and Community Feast. Guided by the Medicine Wheel, this journey began in 2018 in the East, focusing on vision and beginnings, and turned South in 2022 to nurture growth and trust. The West, symbolized by Makwa (Bear), represents strength, courage, healing, and introspection.

Covering 2024–2028, this phase aligns with our SJCG Strategic Plan and sets out four priorities and seventeen actions. Beyond strategy, it reflects a commitment to healing relationships, advancing culturally safe care, and

supporting Indigenous clients, families, and communities with humility and respect. Initiatives such as the Indigenous Health Associate role demonstrate tangible impact, providing culturally grounded support across clinical and community settings. This Progress Report highlights progress and continued dedication to reconciliation and equity.

## 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

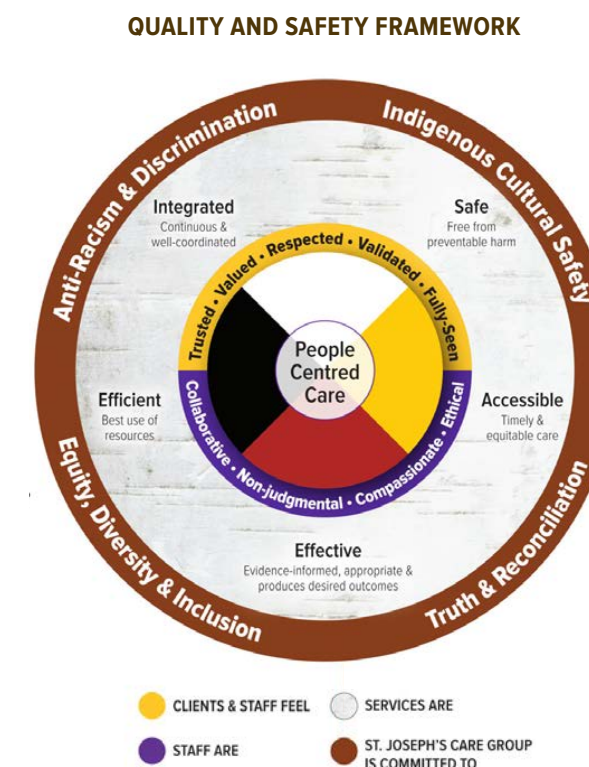
This year, work began on creating our first Indigenous Client & Family Partner Committee. The committee will ensure Indigenous voices help guide planning, evaluation, and decision-making, while strengthening trust with clients, families, and communities. Highlights include establishing a project team, conducting an environmental scan to learn from wise practices, and planning for a launch ceremony in Fall 2025.

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

SJCG is enhancing its Quality & Safety Framework to be grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing, bringing together Indigenous and Western knowledge to support wholistic, culturally safe care.

Guided by the Medicine Wheel and People-Centred Care, the framework ensures physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. It emphasizes respect, compassion, and collaboration while also aligning with Western standards of safe, accessible, effective, efficient, and integrated care.

Developed with the N'doo'owe Binesi team and through ongoing engagements with the Indigenous community partners, this framework reflects reconciliation in action and SJCG's commitment to safe, inclusive, and accountable healthcare. We are grateful for the wisdom and guidance shared by Indigenous organizations and partners in shaping this work.



PRIORITY 1



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

Voluntary Self-Identification is rooted in trust. When organizations ask for personal information, there must be confidence it will be treated with respect, kept confidential, and used only for the stated purpose.

In 2022, SJCG began planning the implementation of Voluntary Self-Identification for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples receiving care. Led by N’doo’owe Binesi and informed through consultation with Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin, Indigenous partners, and clients, the process focused on language, training, data use, and system integration.

By April 2025, Voluntary Self-Identification became part of daily practice across SJCG. This important step helps ensure care is responsive to the unique needs, values, and cultural identity of Indigenous clients. It also strengthens identity, belonging, and respect while supporting compliance within SJCG’s Quality Improvement Plan. Looking ahead, the rollout of Meditech Expanse will sustain this practice, embedding culturally safe care across the organization.

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

SJCG has launched a multi-year initiative to fully embed N’doo’owe Binesi into clinical services, ensuring Indigenous Health supports are available from the beginning of each care journey. Guided by extensive consultation and evidence, the project will develop a framework, evaluation tool, and implementation strategy to strengthen cultural safety across all programs. Work is underway with an environmental scan and partner engagement to identify wise practices and needs. By 2026, every clinical area will have applied the framework, with results informing recommendations to leadership on sustaining Indigenous Health as a core part of care.



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

Starting in January 2026, this project will engage Indigenous clients and families to map their care journey. The findings will support continuous improvement and strengthen culturally safe care.



VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE  
*Bridging Cultures, Building Trust*

When Jackie joined SJCG as an Indigenous Health Associate in 2024, she knew the role would be meaningful—but she didn’t expect how deeply it would touch clients and families.

Her work includes advocacy, discharge planning, navigation, and connecting people to cultural supports such as smudging, drumming, and Elders. “I’ve seen people reconnect to culture after years of disconnection,” she says. “For them, it’s healing in more ways than one.”

For Jackie, a proud member of Red Rock Indian Band, the role is also personal. “Helping people is my passion. This job lets me give back to my community in a way that matters.”

*“It’s about advocacy, connection, and making sure people feel safe in a system that hasn’t always been safe for Indigenous people.”*





**VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE**

*Walking With Clients: Allie's Journey as an Indigenous Health Associate*

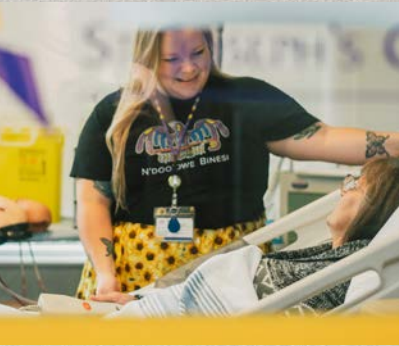
As an Indigenous Health Associate at St. Joseph's Hospital, Allie helps bridge Western medicine with Indigenous culture and community. "There was no guidebook when I started," she recalls. "I had to figure out how to connect people back to community and culture while balancing Western care."

Her approach focuses on creating a "circle of care," working with tribal

councils, health services, and families to support clients in meaningful ways. One client lost four relatives while admitted, and Allie helped ensure she could attend the funerals. Months later, the family still carried Allie's card. "That's success for me," she says.

Raised in Fort William First Nation, Allie draws strength from her traditions and history. "My patients know if I'm working, I'm a safe person to talk to."

*"100%—there's been a difference. Clients feel supported in new ways."*



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**

Indigenous cultural safety education remains a cornerstone at SJCG. Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin has committed to another four years of hosting the four-day Sacred Fire, with planning taking place annually. Training is central, with Repairing the Sacred Circle 1 required for all staff, Repairing the Sacred Circle 2 offered to the management team, and Wake the Giant included in new staff orientation.

In November 2024, SJCG unveiled a new Treaty Wall during Treaties Recognition Week, now displayed across all sites and later featured in Ontario Hospital Association Health System News. N'doo'owe Binesi also supported training within the new Quality Program, reinforcing the importance of Two-Eyed Seeing in health care.



PRIORITY 2



**ACTION 2: EMBED INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES INTO ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, INCLUDING POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Guided by the Indigenous Cultural Safety Lead, N’doo’owe Binesi advanced cultural safety across SJCG through new and updated policies. Highlights include the Indigenous Cultural Safety Policy, Anishinaabe Onaakonigewin (Ceremonial Policy), and protections for Indigenous intellectual property. The Smudging Policy was revised to affirm spiritual rights, and a Sweat Lodge Policy was created to support traditional healing. In addition, 38 corporate policies were reviewed through a cultural safety lens, embedding Indigenous perspectives and strengthening alignment with reconciliation and equity.



**ACTION 3: STRENGTHEN OUR PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

The Vice President of N’doo’owe Binesi, Indigenous Health, Wellness & Partnerships, continues to lead efforts to advance culturally safe care and Indigenous engagement across Northwestern Ontario. With support from a new Regional Director, Indigenous Partnerships, and guidance from the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin, N’doo’owe Binesi and SJCG maintain strong, collaborative relationships with local communities, including Fort William First Nation, fostering ongoing dialogue, cultural guidance, and participation in community events and regional initiatives.

**ACTION 4: IMPLEMENT INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY PRINCIPLES**

The project charter has been approved, and initial work is underway to implement Indigenous Data Sovereignty, ensuring ethical and culturally safe management of Indigenous Peoples’ data. Guided by the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin and a community advisory group, the initiative will establish policies and processes that uphold Indigenous rights, build trust, and support evidence-informed decision-making and culturally safe care.

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.

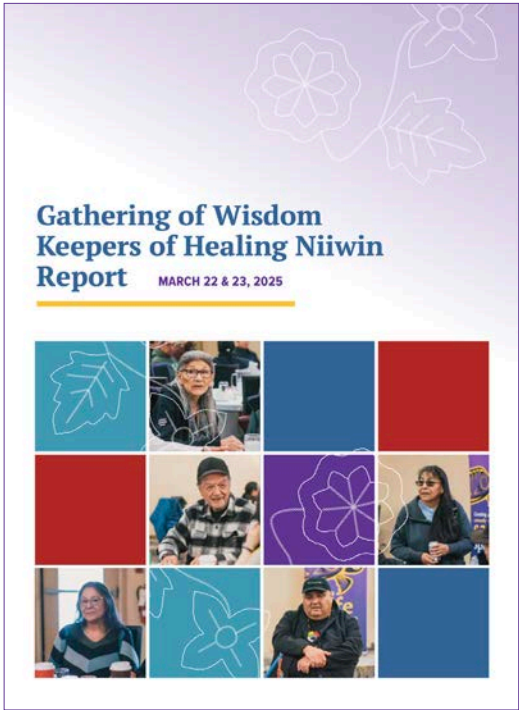
*Gathering of Wisdom Keepers of Healing Niiwin*

As part of a province wide series, N’doo’owe Binesi and the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin of SJCG had the opportunity to host the Gathering of Wisdom Keepers of Healing Niiwin on March 22nd to 23rd. The two day event brought together more than 80 Elders, Traditional Healers, Indigenous physicians, and Knowledge Keepers for a meaningful exchange of teachings, relationship-building, and dialogue on strengthening the role of Indigenous healing within Canada’s healthcare systems.

Throughout the gathering, participants emphasized that healing extends far beyond physical health. It is about returning to spirit, language, land, and identity. Traditional Healing was described as a lifelong calling, that is rooted in humility, spiritual discipline, and love. Many also highlighted the urgent need to pass teachings to future generations while honouring sacred protocols and protecting spiritual integrity.

As one participant shared:  
“Ultimately, Traditional Healing has the power to address today’s health issues not just by treating disease, but by restoring spirit, community, and cultural continuity.”

A comprehensive report summarizing the gathering’s findings is available [here](#).



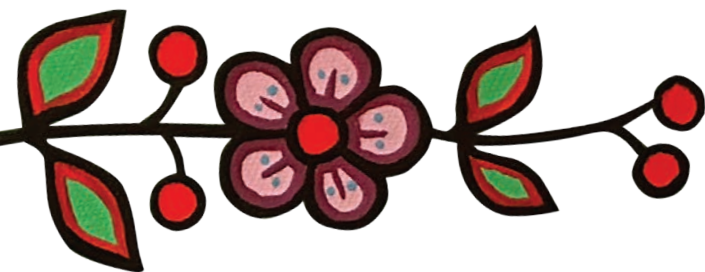
## PRIORITY 3

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

Building on the success of Repairing the Sacred Circle (RSC), SJCG will partner with regional organizations to deliver RSC 1 & 2 and establish a sustainable train-the-trainer model. The training is certified by the College of Family Physicians of Canada and accredited by the Continuing Education and Professional Development Office at NOSM University for up to 3 Mainpro+® Certified Activity credits. This ensures access to high-quality, accredited education for staff across the region. The project actively engages Elders, community partners, and staff to ensure the learning is culturally safe, practical, and effective. Through this initiative, SJCG is strengthening regional capacity, advancing reconciliation, and supporting equitable, culturally safe care for Indigenous Peoples.

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

This project is in its early stages and aims to develop culturally safe engagement protocols and a practical toolkit in partnership with Indigenous service providers and First Nations. It provides staff with the knowledge and tools to build respectful, informed, and lasting relationships, supporting trust, reciprocity, and Indigenous self-determination. By strengthening regional partnerships and ensuring services are responsive to local needs, this initiative advances SJCG's strategic priority to enhance regional specialized care and promote reconciliation across the health system.



## Building Bridges for Indigenous Health Care Across the Northwest

For Sarah, becoming the first Regional Director of Indigenous Partnerships is more than a role—it's a calling. "I'm here for the people," she says. "When Indigenous and Western systems walk together in a good way, the outcomes will be powerful."

*"They know what's best for their communities—we don't. My role is to listen."*

Her work spans the entire Northwest, strengthening collaboration and cultural safety across health services. One of her first tasks is a regional analysis of Indigenous health services to identify gaps and build capacity so all communities have access to culturally safe care.

A recent visit to Sioux Lookout included a productive dialogue with Kathy Loon, Vice President of Indigenous Services, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Meno-Ya-Win

Health Centre. These early conversations are helping shape a clear path forward that aligns local successes with broader regional goals.

Her personal experiences add depth to her perspective. Growing up in Fort Frances, Sarah wasn't aware of the inequities faced by those living in the region, "I was young, I didn't have any major health issues, so I didn't have to think about it." As an adult, she has more awareness about the realities that smaller communities face when it comes to health care. Working in education, mental health, and addictions, she saw firsthand the barriers Indigenous people face when services aren't available close to home. "People are often forced to leave their families and sometimes even go to places where they don't speak the language.

Her vision is clear: Indigenous Peoples leading their own health systems. "They know what's best for their communities—we don't. My role is to listen and ensure their voices shape the system."

# 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

Early work has begun to support capital infrastructure for outdoor sacred spaces. This is a long-term initiative in its early stages.

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

In February 2025, N'doo'owe Binesi worked with Humanistic Systems at Work, the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin, staff, management, and community partners to define “Who We Are.”

Purpose, Vision, and Values (PVV) statements in Anishnaabemowin were finalized through focus groups, Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin sessions, and leadership review, providing clear direction and strengthening pride in our work.



### ACTION 3: DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS STAFF RETENTION AND TURNOVER

An Employee Experience Project achieved an 87% staff participation rate, highlighting strengths in team relationships, leadership, and cultural activities, alongside challenges such as systemic barriers and work distribution.

Findings guide priorities in communication, professional development, and cultural supports to ensure staff feel valued and supported.

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

N'doo'owe Binesi team members continue to share knowledge and expertise with internal and external partners.

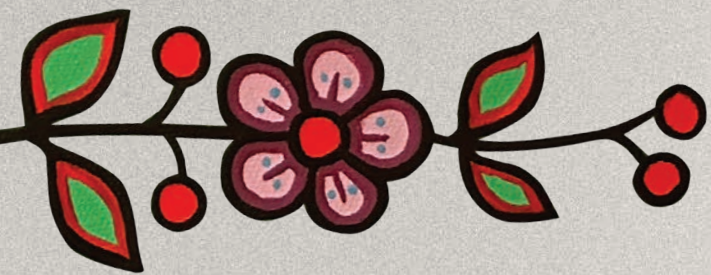
### ACTION 5: SEEK AND DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO MEET EMERGING NEEDS

Waabanang – A Sacred Beginning: Through the Thunder Bay HART Hub led by Nor West Community Health Centre, N'doo'owe Binesi contributes Indigenous health and cultural services via an Indigenous-led Cultural Outreach Team. Launched with a Sweat Lodge ceremony, the initiative’s name Waabanang, given by Elder Nelly Mesenegeeshik, symbolizes hope, guidance, and healing.

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

Ongoing evaluation ensures N'doo'owe Binesi components remain effective, culturally safe, and responsive to community needs

*Miigwech to the Ogichidaa Onaakonigewin  
and to all who walk with us in this work. Your  
guidance, effort, and spirit carry N'doo'owe Binesi  
forward. The journey of healing and reconciliation  
continues, and together we will keep walking in a  
good way for the years to come.*





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