



NATIVE CHILD  
AND FAMILY SERVICES  
OF TORONTO

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024








CHILD CENTERED,  
FAMILY FOCUSED,  
COMMUNITY DRIVEN.





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# 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.



# 2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mae Maracle, President

Bryan Winters, Vice-President

Richard Cummings, Secretary

Stephen Lindley, Treasurer

Kaitlind Peters, Executive Member

Aliesha Arndt

Yvonne Bomberly

Jessica McKenna

Jama Maxie

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 binoojii'ik miinwa indoodemik. Daabawezemigo wiinaandeyang miinwa mingaanyang maanda enenmang, niyaw miinwa jiiibay megowa wiinaandegizad miinwa wiimingaanyad gaynawa maampii Anishinaabec endaaajik. Mii maanda ebiwezenmigo maanda giizhgak.*

*Kina Nindaawenmajik,*

*Miigwech*





# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Board of Directors would like to acknowledge and thank the staff community at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST). Staff commitment to our mission and vision, along with providing service grounded in Indigenous worldviews and ways of being is the engine of NCFST. For this, the Board is deeply grateful.

The Board wholeheartedly supports the ongoing relationship building between NCFST and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. By fostering these connections, we ensure that children and their families receive culturally connected support that honours the sovereignty of their home communities. As an organization serving the needs of many diverse Indigenous Nations with members living in the Toronto region, the Board continues to work with the Interim Leadership Council to build and bolster relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. We have developed practice protocols with various First Nations and continue to establish pathways with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. These protocols ensure transparency and wraparound support for community members that honour the sovereignty of their nationhood.

Over the past year, the Board worked with the ILC and the Elders Advisory Council, in consultation with community, to implement a shared leadership model grounded in the traditional governance practices of the Great Lakes region. We are grateful for this time of learning and growth and look forward to celebrating its full integration into practice in the year ahead.

The Board is confident in the ILC, comprising a team of Indigenous and allied women. We trust in their capacity to advance our mission, mandate, and the governance model as we look ahead to excellence in service delivery with children and families at the center.



*Mae Maracle*

# MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The Interim Leadership Council (ILC) was established in January of 2023 upon the divestment of the Agency from an Executive Director model, toward a governance model aligned with Indigenous ways of being and governance practices. The ILC is comprised of the Directors of Governance and Strategy, Finance and Administration, Child and Family Wellbeing, Holistic Services, and People and Culture. The ILC is strengthened by the Board of Directors and the Elders Advisory Council who continue to provide important knowledge and feedback. The ILC practices shared decision-making in their work moving the Agency forward in fulfilling NCFST's mission and mandate.

This past year has brought many teachings, gifts, and connections. We moved through four seasons of research and co-design toward a governance model aligned with traditional practices of this territory, honoring the distinct Indigenous cultures we serve. During this time, we connected with various communities, Nations, Elders, Knowledge Carriers, and educators to develop a governance model grounded in shared decision-making, with the values of the Seven Grandfather teachings at its core. We are excited to begin the implementation phase and look forward to practicing shared decision-making through Indigenous processes across all aspects of the Agency. These processes strengthen our work in providing culturally centered services that support the safety and holistic wellbeing of Indigenous children and families in Toronto and Peel region.

*The ILC humbly thanks The Anishinabek Grand Council, The Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, The Six Nations of the Grand River, The Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies at Trent University, Knowledge Carriers Diane Longboat, Hilton King, Alita Sauvé, and Curtis Copegog, community councils, our Board of Directors, community members, and the entire NCFST staff community for their engagement, knowledge sharing, guidance and co-design of our new Indigenous governance model. We look forward to launching the governance model and permanent leadership circle in Autumn 2024.*



# QUOTES FROM OUR ELDERS

“The importance when we started this process was decolonization. This model takes us away from the western way of doing things and coming back to our traditional ways of doing things. That, to me, is very important in giving us ownership in how we work with our community and work with the people who work in this city. “

Mae Maracle

“Our expectation is that our organizations are in accordance with our values, our traditions, our history and our way of being in the world. It represents who we are, and it also means we haven’t turned our back on our culture. It represents the fact that our culture is alive and that it’s dynamic and that it can survive in the 21st century environment.”

David Newhouse

“A process like this will keep people together, because I believe in blood memory. I believe that people know this in their spirit. They may not know it mentally, but emotionally and spiritually, I believe they know that. So, when they come to Native Child, they have a sense of belonging and I believe that’s what’s being created here.”

Hilton King

“I want to see NCFST evolve, I want to see it really work and set its feet grounded in community, serving community and having community feedback for all the things that we do here. It’s such an important Agency in this city because our children are the ones who are going to carry on, in the next seven generations, all these teachings, all these ceremonies, all these ways of life and values that they’re going to be walking with in the world.”

Diane Longboat



# LOOKING FORWARD WITH FOUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

NCFST developed a strategic plan to guide the Agency's work over five years from 2023-2028. This plan was developed collaboratively with community members, staff, Elders and Knowledge Carriers, caregivers and resource parents, community and youth advisory councils, partner agencies, the ILC, and the Board of Directors.

Through this process, four strategic interconnected directions emerged to guide all of the work NCFST undertakes:



These four directions guide us deeper into divesting from colonial child welfare practices through trauma-informed, relational practices guided by ancestral knowledge and ways of being shared with us through Elders, Knowledge Carriers, and the Land. Our teams have developed operational plans, and we continue to monitor and evaluate our progress in collaborating with community and partners to implement our strategic plan with support and guidance from our Board of Directors, community councils, and the Elders Advisory Council.

These directions have brought important teachings and considerations into many aspects of the work, including the development of the NCFST Indigenous Governance Model, our focus on, and prioritization, of Kinship care to keep families and communities together, and a deeper braiding of Holistic services, Ceremony, and Land. The tenets of this strategic plan in action are evidenced across all aspects of the Agency throughout this report.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



## **Dr. Jeffrey Schiffer**

The Board of Directors and the ILC honour the lasting contributions of Dr. Jeffrey Schiffer, who served as Executive Director from July 2018 to December 2022. During his tenure Jeffrey focused on enhancing relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities by initiating service protocols that honour the sovereignty of individual nations. He also contributed greatly to placemaking for the Indigenous community across the city, securing and developing community hubs in the Mount Dennis and Malvern areas, the Mdewgaan Healing Lodge, the Mino Bimaadziwin Centre for Prevention and Healing, a multi-generational and deeply affordable residence, and an expansive all-season camp near Clarendon Station, ON. In 2023, Jeffrey led the Agency in a process of divesting from an Executive Director model toward a governance model more closely aligned with Indigenous values. Jeffrey stayed on as the Director of Governance and Strategy until April 2024, ensuring that the model development was well underway. He also led the development of the Agency's most recent strategic plan, introducing an inclusive process of engagement and co-design with staff, partner organizations, and community. Chi-Miigwetch to Dr. Schiffer for his commitment to supporting the wellness of Indigenous children, youth, and families.

## **Ron Hodgson**

Chi-Miigwetch to Ron Hodgson for his contributions as Director of People and Culture from July 2021 to April 2024. During this time, Ron established the Peaceful Relations Committee to support good relations internally and externally and was instrumental in transforming HR processes to better align with Indigenous worldviews and ways of being.

## **David Van Overdijk**

David retired on December 31, 2023, after 15 years of service at NCFST. He started his career at NCFST in December 2008 as the Manager of Children's Services and Resources. David became the Director of Child and Family Wellbeing in March 2014, until January 2023, when he transitioned to the role of Strategic Consultant, Child and Family Wellbeing. He was instrumental in the development of NCFST's pre and post natal support team, the integrated service team, the band engagement liaison program, and the family finding team. David also spent many years at the BBQ during the annual Pow Wow making sure everyone got a hot dog or hamburger! David's allyship has made all the difference and his impact will continue to be felt for generations to come.

## **Doreen LaRiviere**

Doreen retired on March 28, 2024, after nearly 23 years of service at NCFST. She began her career in Holistic Services and dedicated the last 18 years to Children's Services. Doreen consistently went above and beyond to support the children, youth, alternative caregivers, and families she worked with. She was a valued colleague who always offered help and guidance to our new team members. Chi-Miigwetch, Doreen, for your unwavering dedication and support to the community, the Agency, and your colleagues.



# HOLISTIC SERVICES

Holistic Services provide prevention and wellness support across all quadrants of the medicine wheel (spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical).

Our goal is to ensure that all community members have equitable and culturally appropriate access to services that address all aspects of wellbeing.

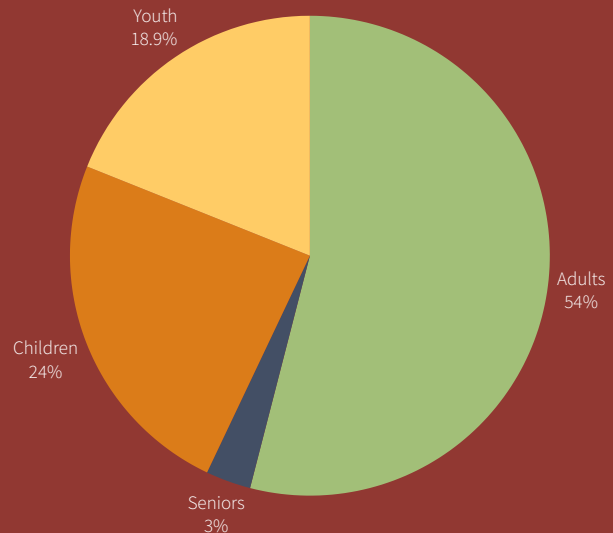
## CLINICAL SERVICES

Clinical services provide a range of wellbeing supports grounded in Indigenous ways of being and Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing). Programs include child, youth, individual and family counselling, anti-human trafficking support, developmental services, concurrent disorders support, harm-reduction, family violence, Original Talking circles, and brief services.

## Community Circle of Care

NCFST offers more than 100 prevention and healing programs. The Community Circle of Care (CCC) was developed to best support service coordination and collaboration across all NCFST service providers. This process ensures community members receive coordinated, wrap-around services that meet their distinct needs. The CCC ensures service providers remain in sync, understand one another's roles, co-create and maintain a community-member led service plan, and enables ongoing collaboration of the circle of care team to better meet the needs of the family or community member.

## HOLISTIC SERVICE PARTICIPANTS



**Total People Accessing Holistic Services: 8289**

## Intensive Family Healing

The NCFST Mooka'am Clinical Team and The Garry Hurvitz Centre for Community Mental Health at Sick Kids Hospital (GH-CCMH) collaborated with Elders and Knowledge Carriers to implement a culturally grounded Family Healing Model designed to provide intensive therapeutic support both in-office and in-community. This model is designed to support parent-child relationships and promote positive Indigenous identity and wellbeing among high-risk families. The program addresses various forms of trauma, including grief and loss, sexual, physical, and violence, bullying, eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, and other high-risk behaviors. It also aids families working toward reunification. This comprehensive service supported 13 families this year and has shown positive results for the participants. We look forward to our continued service to community through our innovative partnership with GH-CCMH.



## Aboriginal Head Start (AHS)

The Aboriginal Head Start Program is dedicated to nurturing the holistic development of each child.

Grounded in culturally connected practices, programming encourages spiritual, social/emotional, cognitive/language, and physical growth. By fostering empathy, promoting lifelong learning, and emphasizing healthy lifestyles, this initiative creates a positive and enriching environment for Aboriginal preschoolers preparing them for their next adventures in primary school classrooms.



### Sheriece's Story

Sheriece Jackson is a former AHS Kiiwednong parent. She is an active member of the community and regularly attended parent council meetings where she was inspired to become more involved.

Sheriece was hired as an Early Childhood Educator Assistant at NCFST, and she is now a supply teacher at Kiiwednong and Epnigishmok. Sheriece's ethic and commitment to supporting the youngest community members has been deeply inspiring. She is patient, nurturing, and implements cultural values into the classroom. Sheriece is a quick learner, adapting to the high needs of the children and co-workers in the classroom.

We are excited to share that she will be working to enroll into the ECE program while maintaining her casual ECA position. Sheriece is also an accredited esthetician with her own business and looks forward to bringing her services to community hubs for future events. Congrats, Sheriece! Chi-Miigwetch for all your hard work!







## EarlyON

Aboriginal EarlyON programs offer complimentary programs for parents and caregivers with children aged birth to six years. These inclusive centers provide valuable programs that strengthen parent-child bonds, offer parental education, and promote healthy child development while being culturally grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Our teams are on hand to provide guidance, support, and connections to a network of resources. These centers play a crucial role in connecting the community to a diverse range of engaging programs, services, and workshops and further connecting families and their children to additional services within and outside of NCFST.

## On The Land Programming

The Scarborough Child and Family Life Center EarlyOn program hosted a Family camp in the Spring at NCFST's Camp, near Clarendon Station. Families engaged with On the Land programming that included Indigenous teaching around the plants and animals that are local to the area, nature hikes during the day, family time around the fire at night, and storytelling.

The EarlyOn staff and families worked together like a big extended family while sharing all the responsibilities around cooking, facilitating activities, and taking care of the children. It takes a village, and that is what a family camp with SCFLC EarlyOn is – a wonderful village with Indigenous values at its core!

**OVER 2500 INDIVIDUALS RECEIVED SERVICES  
THROUGH OUR EARLYON PROGRAMS  
DURING 2023-2024**

## CHILD CARE

The childcare programs are designed to provide a culturally enriching and nurturing spaces for Indigenous children ages 0-6 years old.

The Scarborough Childcare classrooms support up to 56 children annually, while the Dundas Kindergarten Enrichment Program (before and after care) accommodates 112 children ages 4.5-12 years old.

## Dundas Courtyard Revitalization

The Parent Council at Dundas Jr. PS is undergoing a revitalization project of the school's courtyard. They reached out to the NCFST Dundas team for support in redesigning the space to accommodate Indigenous placemaking.

We continue to work closely with the council and Knowledge Carriers to ensure a safe and vibrant Indigenous community space, including a garden for traditional medicines and the Three Sisters.

## FAMILY SUPPORTS

### **Dtbashkine Bawaajige (Dream Keepers)**

This multidisciplinary team provides culturally connected, wrap-around supports for pre and post natal individuals and their children up to age 6. The team comprises Ninoshes (Aunties), Zishays (Uncles), Case Managers, and Program workers who work collaboratively to provide intensive supports to participants that includes 1-1 supportive counselling, home visiting, group learning, drop-in programming, and advocacy.

### **Community Events**

To support community connection and wellbeing for new parents and their young children, Dtbashkine Bawaajige hosts a variety of events and celebrations.

The 2023 Winter Solstice Celebration was truly extraordinary. Having outgrown our head office space, we took the celebration offsite to Daniel Spectrum, drawing a crowd of more than 600 community members who rallied together to support around 888 children. The occasion featured an Indigenous Feast, engaging activities for children and families, captivating entertainment through dance, song, and jigging, highlighting the talents of both community members and children in care.

## YOUTH SERVICES

Youth services offers drop-in wellness, education and training support to Indigenous youth ages 16-29. Programs are focused on supporting individuals exiting care and enhancing skills and resiliency through cultural connection and community building.

### **Embracing Expression**

The youth department is committed to supporting youth in expressing their resilience and Indigenous pride through a range of youth-led social enterprises and activities.

Tribal Lands (TL) launched new products including an eagle shirt design, sage green crew neck, shorts and t-shirt set, and an orange shirt for Orange Shirt Day. The TL crew was approached to design Humber College's new Rugby Jersey, honouring the Indigenous people of this territory. The team collaborated with Humber College to create a distinctly Indigenous jersey, honoring the sport's connection to Indigenous people.



The Native Youth Resource Centre (NYRC) hosted its second annual Maamawi Tattoo Gathering in October, 2023, in partnership with University of Toronto's Hart House. The event brought 340 individuals and 10 traditional tattoo artists from across Turtle Island (including Saskatchewan and BC) together. 110 youth participated in obtaining permanent regalia, receiving teachings, and participating in ceremony throughout the day.



## CAMPS

The NCFST Camp, located near Clarendon Station, ON, is an all-season community space offering on the land cultural experiences for children, youth, and families, aligned with the teachings of the territory and the seasons.

Camp programs offered throughout the past year included: Day summer camp, overnight weeklong summer camps, family camps, kids in care camp, youth berry fasting, youth harm reduction, language camp, and staff development retreats.

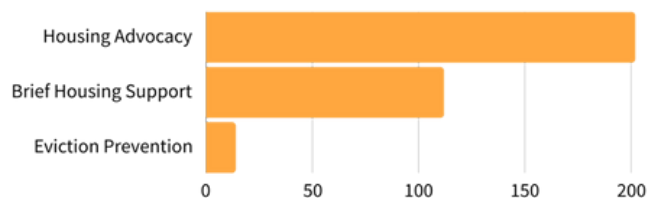
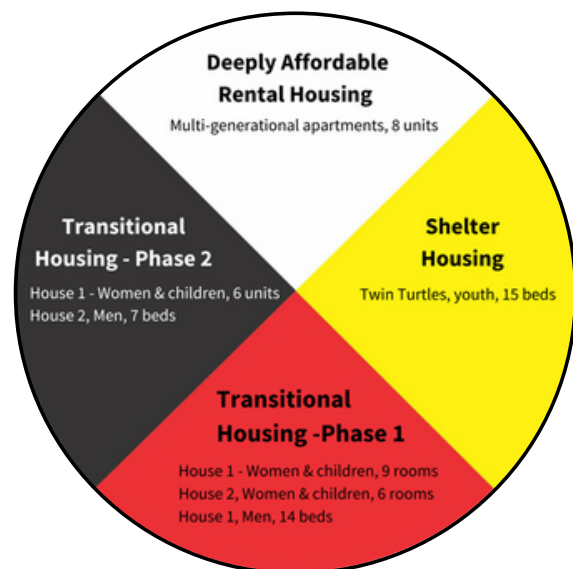
**33 Specialized Camp experiences were attended by a total of 1,066 campers (children, youth, and families)**

## HOUSING

The Housing program at NCFST offers community members across all ages an opportunity for stabilization and self-determined growth.

Community members can access housing supports wherever they are on their housing security journey. NCFST offers housing from shelter to deeply affordable rental housing, along with a range of programs including housing advocacy support, brief housing support, and eviction prevention.

Community members are supported on their individual journeys, connecting with their culture, expanding their circles, developing a housing plan, and strengthening life skills to prepare them for long-term sustainable and independent living.









## Scarborough Child and Family Life Centre (SCFLC)

SCFLC is a vibrant centre that offers a range of culturally grounded community services, including childcare, Waabanong Aboriginal Head Start, EarlyON, middle years and youth programming, and the Ode'l Min Health Clinic, connecting community members to much needed healthcare services close to home.

### Basketball League

July 2023 marked the start of the first SCFLC co-ed basketball league season. This league was done in partnership with the City of Toronto and continued throughout the summer of 2023.

The team played every Thursday and were given team jerseys. They placed 2nd overall in the finals. This league brought together staff, community members and cheering spectators, strengthening relationships and community connectedness, as well as promoting getting everyone moving and taking care of themselves physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.



## **Malvern Child and Family Center (MCFC)**

MCFC offers a diverse range of community programs, an EarlyON location, youth services, and regular weekly culture night events. Staff work in partnership with the MCFC Community Council to bring in programs based on community feedback and identified need.

### **Kiizhay Anishnawebe Niin (I am a Kind Indigenous Man)**

In 2023, Zishay (Uncle) workers were certified through the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) to deliver the Kiizhay Anishnawebe Niin (I am a Kind Indigenous Man) program. This program supports male identified community members with culturally connected wellbeing and communication strategies grounded in traditional roles and ways of being. With support from the OFIFC, the Zishay workers continue to deliver this innovative program to community members.

In conjunction with this program, Malvern youth workers ran a Kanawayhitowin Program that increased the knowledge and awareness of violence against women and relationship violence. We express our sincere gratitude to OFIFC for their continued support in bolstering community capacity.

## **Mount Dennis Child and Family Center (MDCFC)**

MDCFC offers programs and services to support community members across all ages in the west end of Toronto. These services include the Kiiwednong Aboriginal Head Start, EarlyON, and a range of after-school and community programs.

### **Sweat Lodge**

This fiscal year saw the completion of Mount Dennis Child and Family Centre's Sweat Lodge. The team at MDCFC spent many weeks and months learning about ceremonial and medicine teachings and then together as a team went on the land with Elder John Laforme to harvest the materials to build the lodge. The team then held their first ceremony in birthing the lodge. They continue to offer and support those in attending various Sweat Lodge ceremonies.





# CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING

Child and Family Wellbeing remains committed to keeping families together, whatever it takes. The All our Relations Band Engagement program and the Kinship Family Finding team are key strategies in supporting family preservation.

## KINSHIP

The Kinship Family Finding team exemplifies our efforts to prevent children and youth from entering foster care and instead placing them with their extended families or community members.

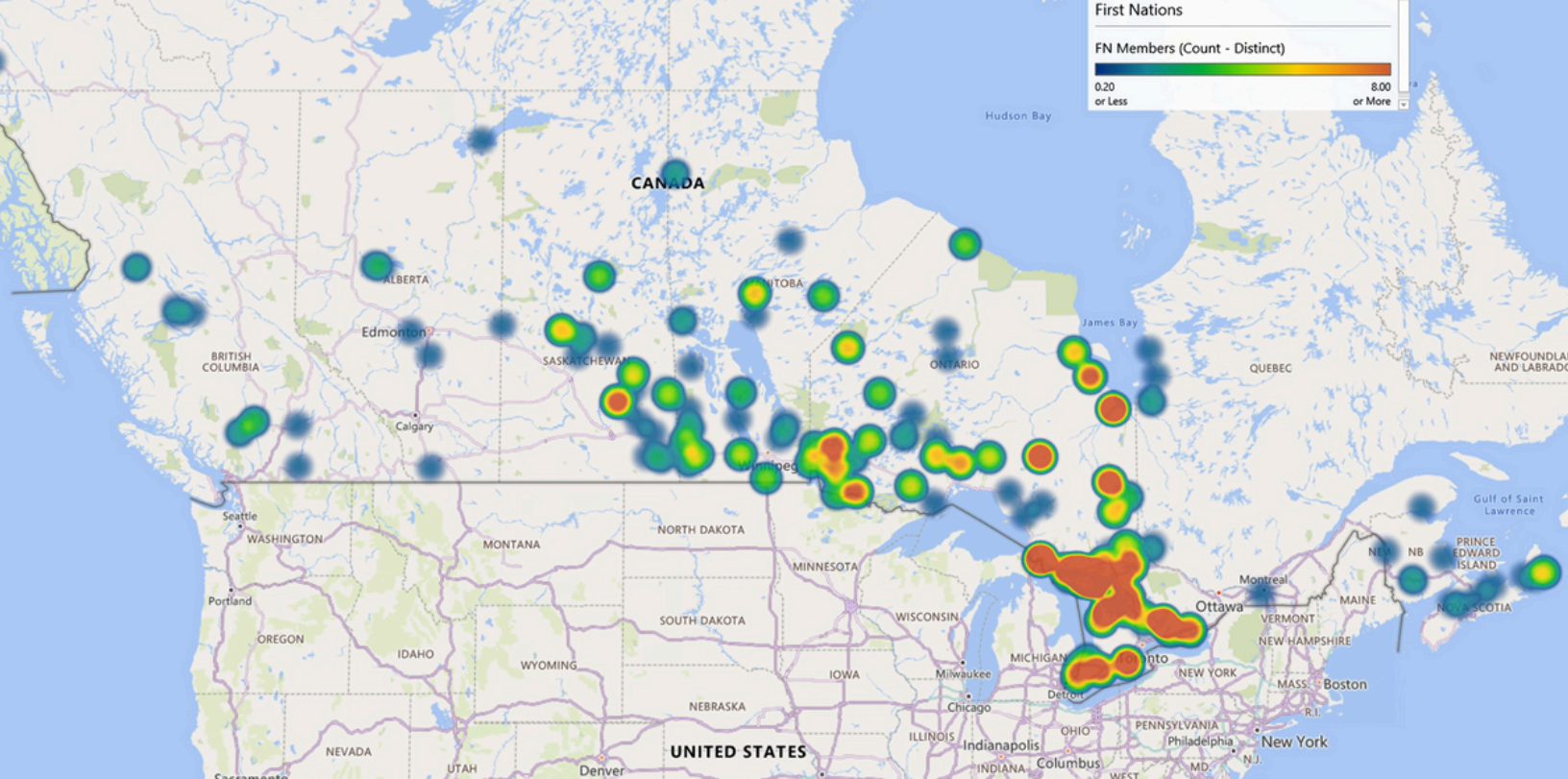
KINSHIP	
Kin families supported with a per diem	72
Number of children who returned home	20
Number of children who achieved permanency	30
Number of children who transitioned from ‘in care’ to ‘out of care’ status	27
Number of children who were placed directly into ‘out of care’ placements	53

Throughout this past year the Family Finding team hosted three cultural events:

Toronto Zoo, June 2023: The day consisted of cultural teachings at the Conservation Clubhouse, followed by a 'Meet the Zoo Keeper' session with polar bears and wolves. Families then enjoyed the remainder of the day at the zoo at their own pace.

Black Creek Pioneer Village, November 2023: The day featured lunch and cultural teachings centred on Sacred Bundles, along with a private village tour highlighting Indigenous contributions during this period.

Hand Drum Event, February 2024: 40 people attended this event at the Malvern site as part of our Bundle Series events. 32 drums were gifted to the children, youth, and families in attendance, with a ceremony to birth the drums.



## ALL OUR RELATIONS: BAND ENGAGEMENT

NCFST works with community members who have connections to various First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities across Canada.

We have been working collaboratively with several communities across Canada to develop healthy working relationships and partnerships for our Child and Family Wellbeing workers and community members. This includes updating our contact information and identifying a point of contact for each First Nation, Inuit, and Métis community.

**NCFST currently has signed protocols with two First Nation communities:**

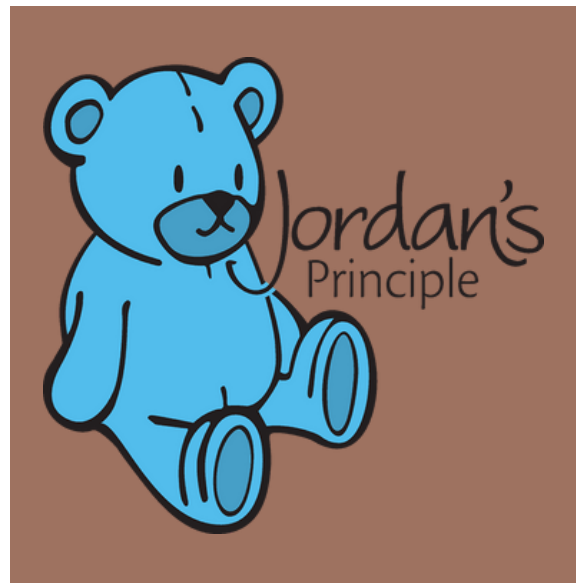
- **Sandy Lake First Nation**
- **Nipissing First Nation**

**During this past year, NCFST has worked with 142 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities across Turtle Island**



## JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

Our Jordan's Principle Navigators have had a busy year supporting children, youth, and families in the community to be able to access services and activities that have provided enrichment in their lives.



## A NOTE FROM JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE FUNDING RECIPIENT

*"First, I would like to share that I am so happy and truly grateful for the support from Jordan's Principle that has allowed my four children to attend YMCA and participate in physical activities. Together, we attend as a family and engage with the YMCA community. The children are currently enjoying swimming, basketball, and ping pong. We are looking forward to registering for other programming throughout the summer and into the 2024-2025 year. This has been life-changing as it has brought our family much closer. My kids are the happiest they have ever been and for that I am grateful. I would like to thank Native Child and Family Services of Toronto for their dedication and support to the children, youth, and families they serve."*  
S.J., Jordan's Principle Funding Recipient

## YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT: KIRSTEN

Kirsten was one of the five recipients of the 2024 Honouring The Indigenous Spirit Award. Her former worker, Doreen, nominated Kirsten before retiring. Emerald is now supporting Kirsten and was delighted to attend the awards ceremony.

Kirsten is an incredible young woman who has overcome significant traumas, experiences, and barriers in her life. She spent the last few months working in British Columbia and has returned to Ontario to further her education at Carleton University.

In addition to her own studies, Kirsten will also be teaching at the university. Sharon, Kirsten's long-time alternative caregiver attended the awards ceremony along with her sister Alexis, Emerald, and NCFST Supervisor, Courtney.



## YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT: JACOB

NCFST Worker Jordan started working with Jacob this past year. Jacob's father had passed away several years ago, and Jacob had not been informed. Jordan connected with the First Nation community, who facilitated contact with Jacob's paternal family. NCFST collaborated with the First Nation and Jacob's family to create a supportive plan to inform Jacob about his father and to introduce him to his extended family.

In August 2023, a pipe ceremony was held at NCFST to inform Jacob of his father's passing. Many attended, including Jacob's biological family members, a band representative, the alternative caregiver, Jordan, and a Knowledge Carrier. It was Jacob's first meeting with this side of his family. In September 2023, Jordan and Jacob travelled to Timmins, Ontario, where Jacob had the opportunity to meet his Kokum (Grandmother) and several cousins for the first time.

A member of Jacob's family has since presented a plan to care for him. The kinship assessment has been approved, and Jacob will be moving in with his family member.



# CULTURE

The Indigenous Culture Program at NCFST supports children, youth, families, and elders in connecting with ceremony, language, land-based teaching, and culturally grounded, trauma-informed circles, groups, and one-on-one supports.

The program recognizes the importance of cultural knowledge, traditions, and practices in fostering positive self-identity, promoting healing, and strengthening community relationships.

Knowledge Carriers provide guidance and counsel to the Service Leadership Circle and various departments and teams, as well as through one-on-one consultations with NCFST staff.

We are dedicated to nurturing Indigenous capacity and creating meaningful cultural spaces for our community. Through our initiatives, we honour our ancestral knowledge, support cultural identities, and strengthen community connections. Our team's dedication to continual learning and commitment to the cultural empowerment of our people are fundamental to building self-determination and respecting the values of the people we serve.

We are honoured to serve the Indigenous community in this capacity.



## THE CULTURE TEAM ON THE LAND

In 2023, the NCFST space at Rouge National Urban Park was revitalized. NCFST collaborated with Parks Canada to prepare the land for our Sweat Lodge. Parks Canada staff attended our Spring Culture Camp and Summer Day Camp Staff Training Day, sharing knowledge on identifying toxic plants to ensure community safety. We also strengthened our partnership with the Toronto Zoo. CEO Dolf DeJong and his leadership team supported our Sweat Lodge Building Day and donated a new storage shed.

A Shabotowan (Cree Teaching Lodge) was built at the site creating opportunities for larger gatherings, shelter in inclement weather, and a warm, winterized structure for year-round land-based ceremony and teaching. The space is also used for 4-day Sacred Fires and we are honored to be able to work with Knowledge Carriers, community Fire Keepers, families, and teams to support this sacred work.



## CULTURE CAMPS

Spring and Fall Culture Camps provided seasonal teachings and focused on wellness strategies from an Indigenous perspective. Activities offered to the over 200 staff participants included:

Seasonal Teachings with the NCFST Culture Team: Tobacco Teachings, Water Walk, Hike through Rouge Valley, traditional and contemporary Indigenous crafts.

Coming Together in Circle: Circle Teachings and Talking Stick Making co-facilitated by Knowledge Carriers Rosary Spence and John Laforme.

Walk with Creation, a guided 7km hike through the Rouge Valley, facilitated by the Culture Team.

Feasts and Fasts: Staff were introduced to the concept of ceremonial fasts with a powerful experiential activity.

Sweat Lodge Ceremonies over the course of the year were facilitated by Alita Sauv , Jimmy Dick, Jode Ketchgo, James Carpenter, and David Bolton. We are grateful to have the support of Sweat Conductors from many nations, reflective of the diversity of the staff and community we support.



## COMMUNITY CEREMONY ON THE LAND

The team was very excited to be able to bring Culture Night to the Land by creating opportunities for community to come to Sweat Lodge ceremonies and Youth Full Moon ceremonies. Over the course of the season we had over 50 participants, primarily residents of the city core, come to experience ceremonies in a natural setting. The youth attending Full Moon on the Land received teachings to support them in making a commitment to start their Berry Fasts. The team also worked with internal stakeholders to support family ceremonies as needed, including naming, drum-birthing, healing circles, circles for grief and loss, and pipe ceremonies.



## BERRY FASTING CAMP - NOVEMBER 2023

The Berry Fast is a rite of passage ceremony for girls who have begun their moon times (menstruation). The team hosted a traditional fasting camp where young women and their chaperones participated in land-based activities which included ceremony, Sweat Lodge, teaching lodges, traditional cooking, harvesting of medicines, and traditional parenting teachings. The participants fasted for three days, while being supported with bone broth and cedar tea. Elders Marie Gaudet and Jimmy Dick facilitated these ceremonies. The participants had a meaningful experience, ending with a traditional feast and a renewed sense of purpose for their journey into womanhood.

## 26th ANNUAL COMMUNITY POW WOW EVERY CHILD MATTERS

The 26th Annual Community Pow Wow was held on September 30th, a significant day in community where many mourn the losses incurred in the Residential School System and the continuing impacts of the system on Indigenous Peoples today.

NCFST chose to honour the day by gifting orange “Every Child Matters” shirts and by including an enhanced area for Elders and Survivors to sit in comfort and enjoy the Pow Wow. Our special pavilion included hosts and servers to provide meals, drinks, and support to our honored guests. Elders and Survivors also received a wooden plate and bowl to use and take home for future community feasts.

Over 100 volunteers received virtual competency training and reported a deeper sense of understanding by listening to the first-hand experience of Residential School survivors.





## ENHANCING LANGUAGE IMMERSION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

With the invaluable support of funders we have enhanced our language immersion programs, strengthening cultural identity within our community.

### HONOURING THE LANGUAGE ROUND DANCE

In February, we hosted the Honouring the Language Round Dance, which brought together over 300 participants.

This gathering is a cornerstone of Indigenous culture, fostering healing, honour, and celebration through the cultural practices of language, song, and dance.

### VIRTUAL LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Our weekly Virtual Language Classes evolved into a nationwide Virtual Language School, offering instruction in six Indigenous languages: Cree, Ojibway, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Plains Cree, and Inuktitut.

The program expanded to over 244 registered participants, with more than 50 actively participating in weekly Zoom classes, demonstrating our dedication to addressing the varied linguistic requirements of our diverse language needs.







### **LEARN TO SING AN HONOUR SONG DEDICATED TO MMIWGS2+**

We hosted a workshop with professional recording artist, language instructor, and respected ceremonial singer, Marie Gaudet.

This workshop provided six participants with language immersion as they composed and learned a song collectively to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S+).

The workshop not only fostered language learning but also created a valuable resource for the Agency and will now be sung and shared, building further awareness and continuing to foster self-determination within our community.

### **ANISHNAABEMOWIN & ININIIMOWIN LANGUAGE IMMERSION CAMP:**

During March Break, we hosted a transformative Language Immersion Camp at our Native Child on the Land Camp in Clarendon Station.

This camp offered families an immersive experience in Anishinaabe and Mushkegowuk languages and culture, combining language learning with land-based activities such as de-quilling a porcupine and an introduction to children and youth to a Sweat Lodge.



## COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL PRACTICES

### FULL MOON CEREMONIES

We have scheduled regular Full Moon Ceremonies to further embed cultural practices within our community.

These ceremonies are integral to our efforts in maintaining and practicing our Indigenous ways of being.

### CULTURE NIGHTS

We have expanded our cultural programming by introducing hand drumming classes to our regular activities.

Ongoing discussions with community and staff aim to further develop these gatherings, enhancing opportunities for cultural identity building and consistent self-determination

## TRANSFORMATION AND ALIGNMENT

This year, we initiated a significant transformation within NCFST by activating Four Seasonal Agency Ceremonies. These ceremonies are pivotal in honouring our ancestors and feasting sacred items, including the Agency's eagle staff, big drum and red dress, while providing prayer flags for protection and continued guidance.

Scheduled to coincide with the New Moon in each season, these ceremonies symbolize our ongoing commitment to integrating cultural practices into our Agency's core operations.







## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURAL PLACEMAKING

**Namebin Giizis Maawanji'idiwag**

**Indigenous Artist and Entrepreneur Gathering for Indigenous Youth**

At the end of March, we hosted an inspiring gathering for Indigenous youth featuring workshops, presentations, and panel discussions with award-winning and influential Indigenous leaders and artists.

This event aimed to provide Indigenous youth with the information and tools needed to guide, motivate, and inspire them to share their gifts with their communities and the world.

The gathering included an Opening Ceremony, workshops, performances, traditional tattooing, a film screening, and artist panel discussions, complemented by delicious catering from our friends at Pow Wow Cafe (@powwowcafeto).





# QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DECOLONIZATION

## HOLISTIC PROGRAM EVALUATION

Quality Assurance and Decolonization (QAD) focuses on holistic program evaluation, identifying strengths and gaps in service delivery and ensuring programs are grounded in and guided by culture, Indigenous worldviews, and best practices.

## RESEARCH

QAD participates in evidence-based research projects, approved by community through our community councils and a research panel comprising board members, staff and Knowledge Carriers. Approved projects must demonstrate a commitment to upholding The First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP), while also ensuring insights are rooted in community voice, and seek to improve service and program delivery outcomes. QA is committed to ensuring ideas brought forth receive community feedback not only to ensure transparency and accountability, but to amplify their voices as an important facet of conducting research with Indigenous communities.

## Vision Clinics

This fiscal year, NCFST collaborated with the Hospital for Sick Children to host Vision Clinics across our Scarborough hubs. Community members who participated have given positive feedback, which has helped improve upcoming clinics at our Mount Dennis hub and Head Office.

## Youth Housing

We also partnered with the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) to provide an opportunity for our youth to attend a gathering in March 2024, where they were able to share their stories and feedback to improve housing outcomes for Indigenous Youth.

## Governance

NCFST partnered with Trent University to facilitate a large-scale project about Indigenous Governance across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, as part of NCFST's efforts toward transforming our governance structure to better suit community needs. We are collaborating with a PhD student from Toronto Metropolitan University on a project to understand factors that promote engagement in holistic programming and enhance community involvement.

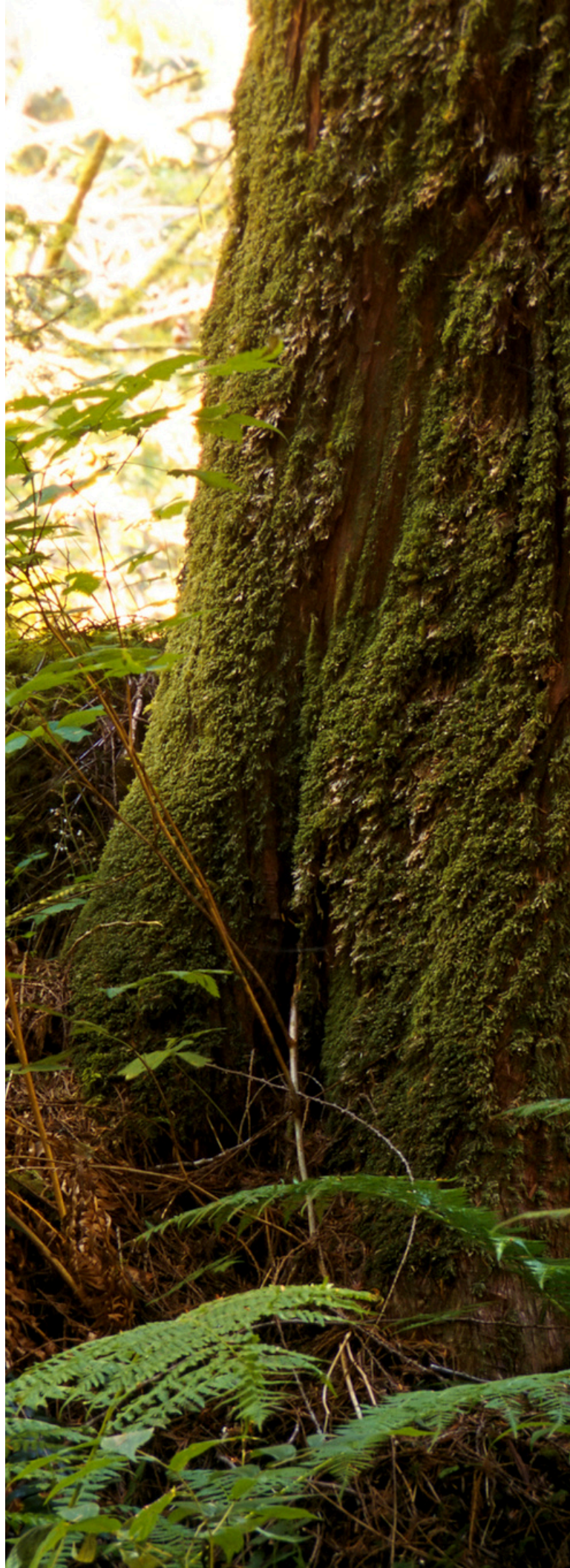






## **CULTURALLY RELEVANT PRIVACY ASSESSMENT TOOL**

This past year saw significant projects in Privacy. The Ministry of children, Community, and Social Services provided Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Agencies with a Privacy Impact Assessment tool (PIA) to help identify and mitigate privacy risks. Recognizing the Western perspectives of these tools, NCFST participated in ANCFSAO's Privacy Community of Practice to develop a culturally relevant privacy assessment tool grounded in the Seven Grandfather Teachings. This tool was showcased at the International Association of Privacy Professionals' (IAPP) Canada Symposium in June 2023, and received significant interest at the Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Conference in Ottawa in January 2024. These prototypes have the potential to become models for culturally appropriate privacy tools for Indigenous agencies in our sector.



# FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The expansion of NCFST has driven our Finance team to continually improve processes for efficiency, maintaining strong controls for accountability and transparency. Recent upgrades to our financial software systems enable us to provide accurate and timely information to budget holders, supporting informed decision-making aligned with funder requirements and our commitment to fiscal responsibility. Our ongoing review has streamlined financial procedures, fostering a more agile and responsive Agency environment.

## **Facilities**

The Facilities and Administration teams have played a crucial role in supporting NCFST's operations over the past year. We successfully completed two significant projects aimed at enhancing our facilities. First, we renovated the camp lodge in Clarendon Station, adding heating to enable year-round use and support winter on-the-land programming. This improvement allows us to consistently offer cultural and educational programs throughout the year, benefiting the community and the children we serve.

The second major project involved replacing the cooling tower at our 30 College Street location. This upgrade ensures a reliable and efficient climate control system, contributing to a comfortable and safe environment for both staff and visitors.

## **Information Technology**

Our Information Technology (IT) team has been instrumental in advancing NCFST's technological infrastructure to support our expanding operations. This year, we focused on upgrading our IT systems to enhance connectivity, security, and user experience across all our locations. These improvements include implementing a more robust network infrastructure, upgrading hardware and software systems, and enhancing cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive data.

Additionally, we introduced new collaboration tools to facilitate better communication and workflow among staff, ensuring that our team can work more effectively and efficiently.

As we continue to grow, our IT initiatives will play a vital role in supporting the Agency's mission and improving service delivery to our community.

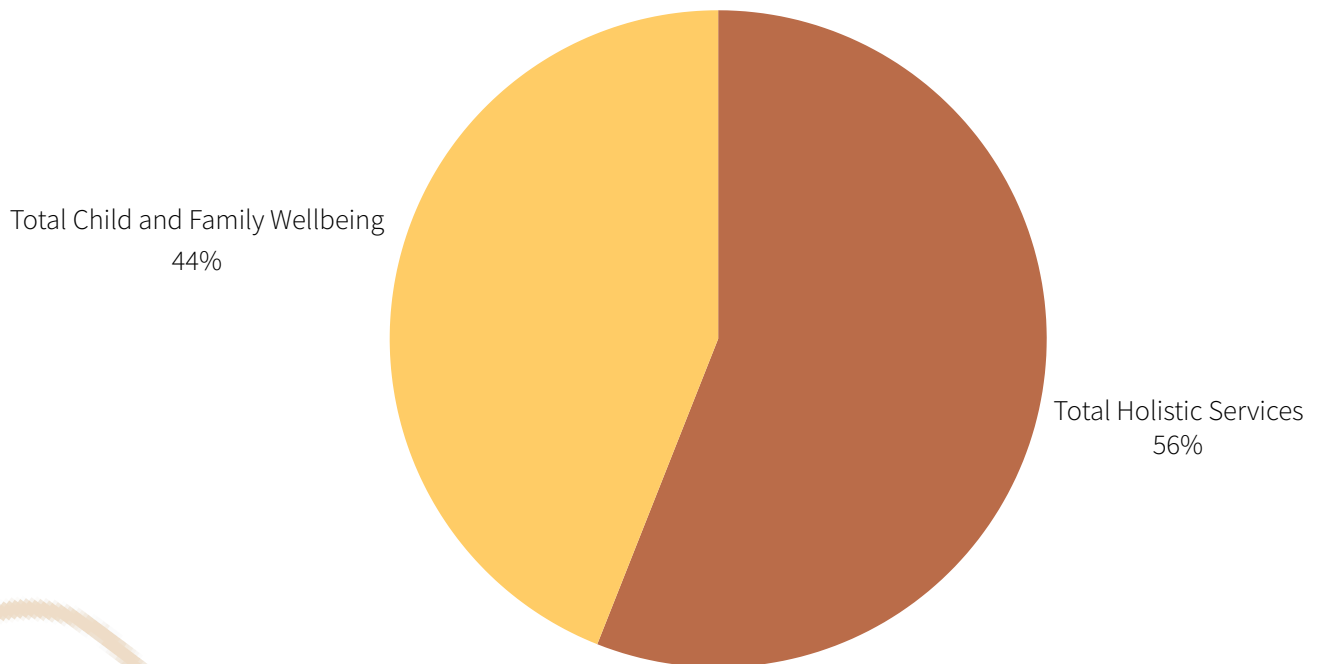


# FINANCE

Funding for fiscal 2023-24 increased by 12% compared to the prior year mainly due to the increased level of funding received from the City of Toronto, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and Employment and Social Development Canada.

Total funding for fiscal 2023-2024 was \$60,801,959 that includes Child and Family Wellbeing funding of \$26,811,206 and Holistic Services funding of \$33,990,753. The comparative total in fiscal year of 2022-2023 was \$58,756,076 that included Child Welfare funding of \$23,861,804 and Holistic funding of \$34,894,272.

## BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING



## FUNDING 2023-2024

	Total Funding
<b>Total Child and Family Wellbeing</b>	<b>\$26,811,206</b>
<b>Holistic Services</b>	
Children's Mental Health and Family Wellbeing	4,696,922
Organizational Enhancement	5,011,736
Transitional Housing	5,790,692
Scarborough Enhancement JT, Mt. Dennis & Malvern Hubs	3,107,989
Youth	2,176,856
Head Start	1,980,227
Tikinagan	941,494
Day Care	1,667,678
Volunteer Drive	1,123,726
Kin Finding	1,397,750
Scarborough Programs	1,237,163
Family Supports	964,650
Indigenous Culture	1,043,535
Social Recreation	763,349
Jordan's Principle	273,892
Adminstration	1,813,093
<b>Total Holistic Services</b>	<b>\$33,990,753</b>
<b>Total Child and Family Wellbeing and Holistic Services</b>	<b>\$60,801,959</b>





# OVERVIEW

## CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING

Child Welfare revenue recognized has increased by \$2,949,402 in 2023-24. Program costs increased by \$4,269,258 compared with 2022-23 mainly due to boarding costs and supports for youth.

## HOLISTIC SERVICES

Prevention funding decreased in this fiscal year by over \$903,519. Funding from Indigenous Services Canada provided reduced supports for Tikinagan, Kin Finding, culture, infrastructure, and the volunteer drive program. The City of Toronto funded increased needs for shelter supports.

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND FAMILY WELLBEING

Total Children's Mental Health and Family Wellbeing funding decreased by \$868,650 over the prior year due to one time funding in previous year and gapping due to turnover.

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Total Transitional Housing funding for the current fiscal year increased by \$1,225,989 with a majority related to shelter supports with expenditure increases in the same proportion.

## SCARBOROUGH ENHANCEMENT, MOUNT DENNIS AND MALVERN

Funding recognized increased by \$132,158 for fiscal year 2023-24 with expenditures increasing at the same rate.

## YOUTH

Total youth funding utilized stayed relatively consistent, year over with year.

## HEAD START

Total Head Start funding for fiscal year of 2023-24 decreased by 8% and direct program costs decreased in the comparable rate.

## DAYCARE

The daycares received increased funding of \$212,045 related to increased enrolment and resulting in program expenses being higher by \$463,193.

## SCARBOROUGH PROGRAMS

Scarborough programs funding increased by \$313,612 for enhancing learning development and capacity building, and community service partnerships. Total program costs also increased by \$346,437.

## INDIGENOUS CULTURE

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

## FAMILY SUPPORTS

Funding recognized increased by \$94,835, mainly due to supports for mothers with programming costs increasing by \$93,936.

## SOCIAL RECREATION

Total social recreation funding increased by \$18,033 and program costs increased by \$21,116 in support of our camp programs.

## ADMINISTRATION

Total administration funding decreased by \$414,207, mainly due to one time funding in fiscal 2022-23. Total program costs for the fiscal year decreased \$1,402,784.









## FUND DEVELOPMENT

In 2023-24 the Fund Development team continued to achieve fundraising success for the staff and community we serve.

Working in close collaboration with Service, Finance, and Quality Assurance and Decolonization staff, the Fund Development team supported NCFST with effective fund development, stewardship, reporting, and government and stakeholder relations.

Revenue continues to increase year-over-year, which includes growing the proportion of funding we receive for our holistic, prevention-focused, culture-based services up to 59% of total funding earned in 2023-24.

This year also saw us renew our commitments to diversifying NCFST's revenue streams by bringing the Indigenous Spirit Fund under the oversight of the Funds Development team, allowing us to streamline and focus our efforts to grow community-based fundraising activities at NCFST.



# INDIGENOUS SPIRIT FUND (ISF)

This past year saw the continued growth of the ISF, the philanthropic arm of NCFST. Working in close collaboration with existing and new partners, ISF was steadfast in its focus to broaden its impact in the community by building sustainable philanthropic and strategic partnerships.

The ISF was proud to be a collaborative partner in this year's Children's Aid Foundation of Canada Gala – Teddy Bear Affair. This annual event is held in support of families, children, and youth whose lives have been impacted by the child welfare system. The ISF was the recipient of the Gala's Fundraising Minute raising over \$120,000 for vital programs and services at NCFST.

On April 24, 2024, staff, families, friends, and community came together to celebrate the remarkable achievements of five youth recipients of the 2024 Honouring The Indigenous Spirit Awards. After three years of hybrid gatherings, the ISF was thrilled to welcome guests to the first in-person award ceremony. Congratulations to Jahmar Element-Ford, Diamante Garcia-Smallwood, Kirsten Stacey, Kaiya Maracle, and Storm Johnathan Jamie Parberry-Keim on receiving their awards. As we look ahead to scale the impact of this unique award program, the event will become one of NCFST's signature programs.

In January, the ISF moved under the oversight of the Fund Development Team which will enable the Agency to commit to its community-based fundraising activities.





# HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources (HR) team at NCFST has been pivotal in fostering a supportive, inclusive, and culturally aligned work environment. Over the past year, we have focused on several key initiatives to enhance our HR processes and support the Agency's growth.

## **Workforce Development**

We expanded recruitment efforts to attract and retain talented individuals who are committed to our mission, with lived experiences. This includes developing partnerships with Indigenous education and training organizations and creating pathways for career development within the Agency.

## **Training and Development**

The HR team has implemented comprehensive training programs that emphasize cultural capacity, trauma-informed care, and leadership development. These programs are designed to empower our staff with the skills and knowledge needed to serve our community effectively and compassionately.

## **Employee Wellness**

Recognizing the importance of holistic wellbeing, we introduced new wellness initiatives, reflective of the Medicine Wheel, that support the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health of our employees. This includes access to traditional healing practices, mental health resources, wellness workshops, and discounted gym pricing through corporate membership.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

We are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace that reflects the communities we serve. Our HR policies and practices are designed to promote equity and inclusivity, ensuring that all employees feel valued and respected. In addition, we continue to support the Peaceful Relations Committee in creating meaningful learning and engagement activities.

## **Performance Management**

The HR team has refined our performance management system to better align with our strategic goals and the values of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. This includes regular feedback, goal setting, and professional development opportunities to support continuous growth and improvement.

## **Policy Updates**

We have updated our HR policies to better align with Indigenous ways of being and to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. This includes revising our onboarding processes, employee handbooks, and HR guidelines to reflect our commitment to cultural sensitivity and organizational integrity.

The HR team remains dedicated to supporting our staff and fostering an environment where everyone can thrive. By prioritizing the wellbeing and development of our employees, we strengthen our capacity to deliver high-quality, culturally centered services to the Indigenous children and families we serve.

# COMMUNICATIONS/PUBLIC RELATIONS AND EVENTS

Last fiscal, the Communications/Public Relations and Events team at NCFST continued to elevate brand recognition, foster connections, and empower communities through strategic communication and impactful events.

Our team expanded the Agency's online presence with dynamic and engaging social media content, including a new Instagram page (@ncfstprogramsandservices) dedicated to promoting programs and events across NCFST locations. Through compelling storytelling, digital engagement, and stakeholder outreach, we amplified our Agency's voice, shared stories of community and stakeholders, and promoted valuable programs, services, and events. Our platforms serve as hubs for information dissemination, community building, and resource sharing, reaching a wider audience than ever before.

We aligned our messaging with the Agency's strategic direction, streamlined internal communications processes, and strengthened our framework for effective, consistent, and responsible communication practices.

We revised our communications and social media policies, as well as our crisis communications protocol. Our team conducted staff training on social media best practices, design software, branding protocols, and the new Agency Intranet. Through online and print surveys, we gathered external feedback on our communications processes, refining our workflows to better meet community needs.

Our team's expertise in content creation has led to an increase in video production including awareness videos for commemorative days and months such as International Day of Awareness MMIWG2S+, Black History Month, Pride Month, and National Indigenous History Month. We also produced video interviews with Elders and Knowledge Carriers on the development of the new Governance Model at NCFST.

We are dedicated to leading and planning Agency and community events, ensuring seamless coordination and engagement. Notable events last year included the 2024 Honouring The Indigenous Spirit Awards and the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada Gala – Teddy Bear Affair, produced in collaboration with Children's Aid Foundation of Canada. The event held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre brought together more than 700 philanthropists, business leaders, youth advocates, and government representatives. The Children's Aid Foundation of Canada Gala – Teddy Bear Affair was awarded the 'Best Event for a High-Profile Non-Profit' at the 2024 Canadian Event Awards.

## FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA







# TO OUR FUNDERS

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

- Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
- Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation
- Bell Let's Talk Canada
- Community Arts Guild
- Community Foundations of Canada and the Equality Fund, with support from the Government of Canada.
- The Government of Canada Department of Canadian Heritage
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto
- Centennial College of Applied Arts & Technology
- Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
- Children's Aid Foundation Back to the Land
- City of Toronto
- Daily Bread Food Bank
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Family Services of Peel
- Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
- Health Canada
- Indigenous Services Canada
- J. P. Bickell Foundation
- Kinark Child and Family Services
- Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE).
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of the Attorney General
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Indigenous Affairs
- Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training
- Miziwe Biik Development Corporation
- Mondelēz Canada Inc.
- Mothercraft College of Early Childhood Education
- Nike Inc.
- Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association
- Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- The Region of Durham
- Scotiabank
- Second Harvest
- Sick Kids
- Strides Toronto
- TD Bank Group
- Timothy Eaton Memorial Church
- Tippet Foundation
- Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council
- Toronto Foundation
- Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund
- United Way Greater Toronto







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