

A photograph of children in traditional Indigenous regalia, including beaded skirts and moccasins, standing on grass. A semi-transparent circle is overlaid on the image.

Annual Report 2025|2026

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

Honouring 40 Years of Service to Community





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About Us

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) is a multi-service agency founded in 1986 over four days of Ceremony on the land, by First Nations and Métis community members to support the wellbeing of Indigenous children and families living or staying in Toronto region.

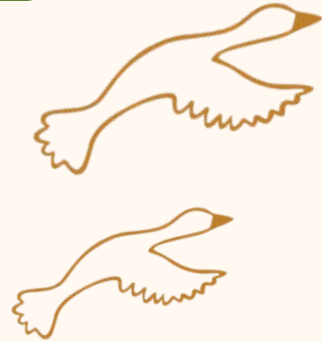
Guided by the vision of providing culturally connected, land-based wholistic support to Section 35 rights holders living or staying in Toronto, our programming offers support across all directions of the medicine wheel, focused on honouring the wellbeing and self-determination of children and families through all stages of life.

We work with over 249 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, ensuring children and families receive distinct and appropriate services guided by their Nations.



Board of Directors

Mae Maracle
Ashley Quinn
Stephen Lindley
Aliesha Arndt
Richard Cummings
Jennifer Franks
Jessica McKenna
Fred Martin
Erin Moe



The NCFST Board of Directors consists of members from a range of First Nations and Métis communities including: Six Nations of the Grand River, M'Chigeeng First Nation, Lac Seul First Nation, Dokis First Nation, and the Manitoba Métis Federation.

Elders Advisory Circle

We are deeply grateful for the guidance of the NCFST Elders Advisory Circle. The Circle comprises members from a range of First Nations and Métis communities including: Wikwemikong First Nation, Moose Cree First Nation, Oneida of the Thames First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, Wasauksing First Nation, Constance Lake First Nation and the Métis Nation of Ontario

Leadership Council

Alita Sauvé, Kookum
Melissa Hamonic, Governance & Strategy, Leadership Council Chair
Jessica Wilson, Wholistic Services
Jennifer Turner, Child & Family Wellbeing
Veronika Bencze, Finance, HR, IT, Admin

The Leadership Council is composed of Indigenous and allied women.

Our Shared Values

The Seven Sacred Teachings



Zaag'idwin (*Love*)

The Eagle flies closest to the Creator, carrying all the teachings upon its wings. From its high vantage point, the Eagle reminds us that love connects us to all teachings and all of creation. It teaches us to see the world with peace and understanding, and to approach every interaction with unconditional love for ourselves and others.

We approach conversations, each other, and community from a place of compassionate inquiry, kindness and care.



Aakdewin (*Bravery*)

The Bear calls us to honour all of creation. The Bear gives its entire being to sustain human life. It teaches us that respect is mutual and reciprocal. To receive respect, we must also give it. The Bear's selflessness shows us how to live in harmony with all of creation.

With the Bear, we hold space for a diversity of experiences and perspectives. We honour the teachings of this territory shared with us through Elders, Knowledge Carriers, animals and the Land. We practice them in all aspects of who we are.



Minaadendamowin (*Respect*)

The Buffalo guides us to live with courage and integrity, facing ourselves and making difficult but necessary decisions. It reminds us to trust our inner guidance and ancestral wisdom, stand up for our beliefs, and act rightly, even against colonial pressures.

In doing so, we honour shared decision-making and Indigenous governance, even when it is not recognized by colonial systems.



Debwewin (*Truth*)

The Turtle teaches us to live with care and intention, showing that truth is in how we move through life. Its deliberate pace reminds us to value the journey, fostering patience, humility, and thoughtful action.

By walking in relationship with our communities, we honour kinship, acknowledge the harms of inherited systems, and commit to restoring Indigenous ways in our words and deeds.



Gwayakwaadiziwin (*Honesty*)

Honesty is living our values with integrity—speaking truth, listening with humility, and taking accountability for our place in the world. The Sable reminds us to walk tall in truth; integrity flows from honesty, guiding us with respect, humility, and care for all of creation.

We tell the truth, even if it is uncomfortable. We listen to those telling us their truths with open and humble hearts. We are accountable for how the systems we have inherited work today.



Dabaadendiziwin (*Humility*)

The wolf lives for the pack rather than for the individual. Its wisdom reminds us that every being is a sacred and integral part of creation. It teaches us to understand our place in the world while honouring our inter-dependence with all things. Its devotion to the pack shows how balance and cooperation strengthen both ourselves and the communities we are part of.

Guided by the Wolf, we honour our roles in the lives of others, act with care, and speak thoughtfully. We acknowledge what we know, and what we don't, and face mistakes with humility, kindness, and respect.



Nibwaakaawin (*Wisdom*)

The Beaver teaches us to use our gifts wisely for the benefit of all. Like the beaver building lodges in harmony with the land, we act with foresight and care for future generations. Wisdom is applied knowledge, shared and strengthened in the circle through humility and collaboration.

The Beaver reminds us to live sustainably, nurture the world, and honour the gifts each brings, walking in balance with responsibility to all of creation.

Message from the NCFST Founder

Kenn Richard

Greetings to all on the agency's 40th year.

As founder, and Executive Director for most of its history, I continue to be amazed at the agency's progress and stand honoured to have been involved. I don't know how we managed to create such a powerful force in Indigenous child welfare. Luck, grit, persuasive powers, legal action, the forces of social justice, commitment, unity and the blessing of creation took us on a path to where the agency stands today.



I write this from Labrador, where I am just finishing three years of work with the Musheau Innu. Since leaving NCFST I have been involved in multiple projects spanning the country. I am enriched by the chances I have had to make a difference and continue to put my activist side out there. Retirement was not for me.



Throughout it all - no experience has been more intense and more satisfying than the three decades plus that I spent at NCFST. To this day I am unsure of how we ever managed to get the agency off the ground. NCFST was never really meant to be. When it was founded, off-reserve services were limited and the community lacked formal recognition by both Federal and Provincial governments. Funding was scarce, non-existent really, and Toronto's Indigenous child welfare was the domain of the Catholic Children's Aid. At the time, incredibly, twenty percent of the children in care of Toronto mainstream CASs were Indigenous. No clinical services, EarlyON programs, youth drop-ins, summer camps, or prevention initiatives were available.



Toronto was not recognized as having an Indigenous community. Many Torontonians expressed incredulity on hearing the reality of Indigenous urbanization thinking that all Indigenous people lived out west, or somewhere north of the French River. Recognizing the urban Indigenous community as having a unique and constitutional relationship was a battle that took a decade, basically the 90s.

Gus Ashewasega, Reva Jewel, Wilson Ashkwe, Emma King, and other residential school survivors were also founders, though their names are not as well known. I became involved after meeting Gus, who recruited me to assist in negotiating a modest protocol with the CCAS regarding their having so many Indigenous kids in care.

Two years later, with an \$80,000 budget, we were recruiting the founding Executive Director. We could not find anyone. An Elder, not remembering my name, told them to hire the "guy in the cowboy boots." The committee looked at me, at my feet, my Tony Lama boots, and the rest is my story.





We started by renting some basement space next door to where we are today. I had a desk and a phone. It was a beginning. When the time came to welcome newly hired staff, our first steps were not taken in a traditional office setting. We first spent four days fasting and in Ceremony, guided by Elder Herb Nabigon, outside Peterborough. This unified staff and bound us to the spiritual and cultural values that formed the foundation of our work.

The agency had to maintain an activist stance during the nineties. We became a CAS only after taking court action to obtain our mandate. Not being mandated as a CAS did however have one advantage - it allowed us to focus on prevention and healing and indeed helped create the agency as it is today.

Throughout the development of NCFST there has been some very tough times. As an agency that was never meant to be - we always struggled with funding. The current complex mix of funding sources, far more than other agencies, is what saved us during repeated efforts on the part of the powers that be to curtail our growth.

There came a time when we were tested in a way never anticipated during our celebratory beginnings. The tragic death of Katelynn Sampson, and the inquest that followed, brought us to our knees. We searched our souls to understand, despite multiple agencies involved, how her murder could have happened. Katelynn became a powerful teacher in helping us appreciate the weight of this work, to pay attention to the children, and her legacy remains.

So I say congratulations to us all on making it this far. The future of off reserve services like NCFST is always jeopardised and requires strength, resilience and strong community support. Direct and clear relations with First Nations is increasingly needed.

NCFST is not the same organization it was forty years ago. However, despite the challenges of today's world - marked by noise, confusion, and threats - the core instructions that guided us from the beginning continue to provide our "marching orders".

The foundational principles woven into our service model remain as relevant and vital as when first developed. They are also under threat with vigilance and critical thought more important than ever. Your efforts in serving the community, based in Indigenous ways of seeing, knowing and doing, is, according to Peter O'Chiese, the "cleanest" of work, from him, an Elder who lived to be 108, that says a lot. Thank you everyone for what you do to make this real.

All my relations,
Kenn

Message from the Board President

Mae Maracle

As we mark 40 years of service to community, I offer my deepest gratitude to all who have carried, shaped, and sustained Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. From its beginnings in Ceremony on the land to its present role as a multi-service organization, NCFST has remained focused on supporting the wellbeing of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families in Toronto.



The past year has been one of reflection and recalibration. In response to evolving community needs and a changing operating environment, the organization has taken important steps to reassess its priorities, governance practices, and service delivery approaches. This work has reinforced the importance of remaining grounded in the teachings and values that have guided the agency since its founding. The Board, together with the Leadership Council, have focused on strengthening governance structures in ways that reflect these values, including the application of the Seven Sacred Teachings in decision-making processes and organizational oversight. This includes ensuring that accountability and cultural alignment remain central to how the organization operates.



Over the past year, there have been several areas of meaningful progress. These include continued investment in culturally grounded programming, increased access to land-based and ceremonial practices, and efforts to strengthen relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The work to embed culture more fully across all aspects of service delivery has been particularly important, reflecting what has long been understood within community, that culture is foundational to wellness and healing.



On behalf of the Board, I would like to recognize the Leadership Council, staff, Elders Advisory Circle, and Knowledge Carriers for their ongoing commitment to this work. Their contributions ensure that the organization continues to respond to community needs with care, integrity, and respect. To the community, children, youth, families, and Nations, we offer our deepest respect and gratitude. It is an honour to be entrusted with this work. I would also like to thank the current board members who support the work of Native Child through committee work, participating at cultural events, attending meetings with government funders and financial institutions. Overseeing a large vibrant agency has many ups and downs and the board members are consistent in the attention and support they give to the continued success of the agency.



As we look ahead, we remain committed to strengthening relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, to advancing self-determination, and to ensuring that every child and family has access to culturally grounded, wholistic supports rooted in identity and belonging. Together, we will continue to walk this path in a good way, guided by Spirit and grounded in culture.

It is a privilege to serve alongside those who contribute to this work, and to support an organization that plays a vital role in the lives of so many families and communities.

Sincerely,
Mae Maracle

Message From the Leadership Council Chair

Melissa Hamonic



Every season brings with it a distinct bundle of gifts, invitations and challenges. 2025-26 provided a bounty of both. As an organization birthed 40 years ago, NCFST has grown and shed its skin multiple times, recalibrating with the cadence of community, and shifting to meet evolving needs all while balancing the tension of political and financial climates. We grew bravely, taking on the child welfare mandate in 2004, expanding our locations to offer more services to community members in Scarborough, Malvern, and Mount Dennis, and acquiring an all-season camp. All of this expansion required staffing, and we grew accordingly there as well. Then came the complicated gift of reflection. A shift in the political and financial landscape we operate within has called us to pause and consider our purpose, how we govern, where and how we best serve community, what is abundant and what is missing in service delivery and operations.



The original vision of NCFST, birthed through four days of Ceremony on the Land, reminds us anew that Spirit is what brought NCFST into being, and it is Spirit that we must return to in order to work in ways that honour the community we are humbled and grateful to serve. This year called us to reflect on the role of spirituality, culture, and traditional ways of being in all aspects of the agency, with a renewed focus on ensuring our services are culturally-led and immersed, delivered by First Nation, Inuit and Métis people along with culturally humble, safe allied staff.



We defined our shared values, understood through the Seven Sacred Teachings. We reflected on how these values shape our governance practices and let these guide the way. We greatly considered how we practice the teachings as an Indigenous organization with overlapping and at times contradictory mandates: as a ministry funded, designated CAS agency, as a unionized work environment with a mainstream local, as a multi-service agency charged with balancing risk with wellness and healing.



Governance, in its definition, is the operating system that lays out the processes for how an organization acts, it is the ethical underpinning for how decisions are made and what values are prioritized. We spent 2025 focused on remembering the root 'source code', the teachings that underpin and guide the network of relations in how we do everything at NCFST, from service to administration, communications, quality assurance, finance, IT and HR. We built out interconnected processes to support the expression of our shared values in all we do. While there is much work ahead, we are proud of what we have achieved so far:

- We invested in Culture and land-based offerings, prioritizing access to Ceremony and traditional practices as a fundamental right of all community members accessing services at NCFST.



- We assembled an Elders Advisory Council to provide critical guidance and feedback in all of our practices, from our vision and mission through to our frontline service delivery. We are deeply grateful to the Elders and Knowledge Carriers who have supported us, challenged us and reminded us why we are here as an organization and our accountabilities therein.
- We developed an intensive allyship training program, 'Moving Into Kinship', to foster culturally safer practices and spaces to best serve the community.
- We are strengthening our hiring and succession approaches to better recruit and support Indigenous staff.
- We continue to advocate for the rights of Indigenous people living off-reserve to receive services in ways that honour and do not interfere with the available resources for those living on-reserve.
- We are focused on developing service protocols with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to ensure children and families receive the culturally distinct support they deserve, guided by their Nations, communities and themselves.

We are inspired by the courage of our founding Board Members, a group of strong matriarchs intent on creating a culturally-led, Indigenous space to support the wellness and self-determination of First Nation, Inuit and Métis children and families living or staying in Toronto: Reva Delores Jewell, Ethel Priscilla Hewitt, Francine Mendoshkin, Yvonne Lunham, Andrea M Williams, Mary Ann Catherine Keely, Elizabeth Perrot, Nellie June Ashawasaga, Emma King, and Michael Roy Roy.

We express deep gratitude to our Indigenous and allied staff, and current board of directors, led by Mae Maracle for entrusting us with this work and supporting us throughout. We are profoundly appreciative for the community we are honoured and humbled to serve and remain steadfast in our commitment to providing wholistic prevention and child & family wellbeing services grounded in and led by Spirit.

All my relations,

Melissa Hamonic

Mahmoh Wiichehitowin

Helping One Another, Together



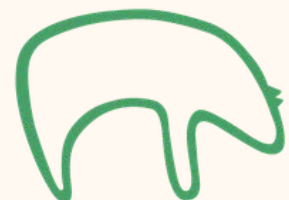
Culture is medicine. Culture guides all the work we do at NCFST, informing the strategies that define our governance and processes, and shaping our program offerings and service delivery.

The Cultural Services Department supports the cultural identity, healing, and wellbeing of Indigenous children, youth, and families across all programs at the agency and through distinct culturally specific offerings.

The Mahmoh Wiichehitowin team, stewarded by Knowledge Carrier Rosary Spence, ensures that Indigenous culture, language, and Ceremony remain central to service delivery by creating opportunities for strengthening identity and community ties, connection, learning, and healing through access to Ceremony, traditional healing, land-based experiences, and creative programming.

Offerings:

- Teachings & Cultural Knowledge
- Plant medicine teachings
- Medicine Wheel teachings
- Grandfather teachings
- Sacred Bundle teachings
- Ceremony protocol teachings
- Life skills and traditional knowledge teachings
- Ceremony & Healing Supports
- Access to traditional healers and ceremonial practitioners
- Referrals to traditional counsellors
- Full Moon ceremonies
- Sunrise ceremonies
- Pipe ceremonies
- Cedar baths
- Sweat lodge ceremonies
- Talking and sharing circles
- Crisis response (culturally grounded support)
- Life Transitions & Rites of Passage
- Placenta and welcome ceremonies
- Walking out ceremonies
- Berry fast ceremonies
- Fasting ceremonies and teachings
- Funeral supports (including moccasin and pipe ceremonies)
- Reunification ceremonies
- Land-Based & Seasonal Programming
- Fasting camps and teachings
- Land-based cultural and ceremonial gatherings
- Arts, Craft, & Skill-Building
- Hand drum making and teachings
- Women's hand drum circles and teachings
- Men's grandfather drum circles and teachings
- Feather case teachings
- Medicine bag teachings
- Rattle making and teachings
- Ribbon skirt and shirt making
- Moss bag making
- Beading circles
- Sewing socials



Mahmoh Wiichehitowin

Helping One Another, Together



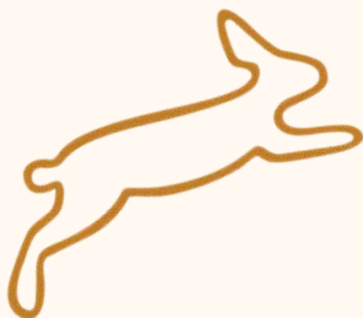
Expanding Cultural Access for Children In Care

Every Indigenous child deserves consistent and ongoing access to cultural connection, grounded in their distinct identities. Over the past year, the Mahmoh Wiichehitowin team prioritized cultural offerings for Children in Care.

Culture Days

These monthly in-person gatherings provided dedicated space for children in care, their caregivers, and families to participate in teachings, ceremony and hands-on activities that foster belonging and identity stewarded by Knowledge Carriers and Elders.

Cultural Services also facilitated land-based Children in Care gatherings in collaboration with Child and Family Wellbeing (CFWB) teams at Glen Rouge Campground. These on-the-land experiences provided opportunities for families and children to engage in ceremony, teachings, and cultural activities in a natural setting, strengthening connection to land and community.



Kinship Visiting

The Mahmoh Wiichehitowin cultural staff have worked closely with Child & Family Wellbeing to provide individual kinship visiting opportunities for children in care with Knowledge Carriers, both in person and virtually. These experiences support identity development, cultural pride, and intergenerational learning within the home.



Supporting reunification is an important aspect of walking with families in a good way

Cultural Services provides Reunification Ceremonies to honour this important milestone for families reconnecting and moving forward together. In July 2025 a Ceremony was held for a reunifying family with NCFST Elders Advisory members in attendance, a beautiful, multi-generational, community circle of support! We continue to explore ways to increase awareness throughout the community to ensure that children and families know this ceremony is there for them.

Mahmoh Wiichehitowin

Helping One Another, Together



Walking with Families

The team also works closely with families through at-home visits and individualized cultural support, ensuring accessibility and responsiveness to each family's unique needs. Through this approach, children have been able to engage in meaningful, hands-on cultural learning experiences, including: creating regalia, learning foundational beading skills, making moccasins and ribbon skirts, naming ceremonies and language learning.

Expanding Relations

Many families reside in areas such as Brampton, Bradford, Hamilton, Oshawa, and surrounding regions, where travel to downtown Toronto can be a barrier. Cultural Services is actively compiling resources and strengthening connections with Indigenous agencies and organizations in these regions, ensuring families can access culturally grounded supports closer to home.

These efforts reflect Cultural Services' commitment to providing flexible, relationship-based, and culturally responsive supports that meet children and families where they are, whether in community spaces, on the land, or within their homes.

On The Land

Land-based programming is central to healing, cultural connection, and ceremony. In partnership with Parks Canada, we are developing a new medicine garden and expanding access to land, increasing our capacity to host fasting camps, rites of passage, and other cultural gatherings.

Stewardship remains a shared responsibility. Our team is committed to caring for these spaces in a good way by maintaining the land, supporting ceremonial areas, and ensuring they remain safe and welcoming for community. As programming grows, we are strengthening safety and security measures to protect sacred spaces and supporting infrastructure. We continue to work with Parks Canada to enhance the protection, sustainability, and respectful use of these lands.



Mahmoh Wiichehitowin

Helping One Another, Together



Traditional Healing

A major area of growth this year was the continued development and strengthening of our Traditional Healing Program. This program provides access to Indigenous healing opportunities facilitated by a rotating group of Elders and Knowledge Carriers through Ceremony and 1-1 engagements.

The program primarily serves Indigenous children, youth, and families navigating grief, trauma, identity disruption, mental health challenges, and systemic barriers. Many participants have experienced disconnection from ceremony and traditional support systems. This program restores access to culturally anchored healing pathways that are often unavailable within mainstream services.

By providing predictable and ongoing access to traditional healers, the program:

- Strengthens cultural identity and sense of belonging
- Reduces isolation and increases community connection
- Supports emotional regulation and trauma recovery
- Builds resilience and protective factors
- Enhances caregiver capacity to support cultural continuity in the home

Participants consistently report increased feelings of safety, clarity, and spiritual grounding, while caregivers and staff gain culturally relevant tools to support families in a wholistic and strengths-based way.



Wholistic Services, Mino Bimaadiziwin

Living in a Good way

Wholistic Services provides a continuum of braided services that support spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wellness for children, youth and families.

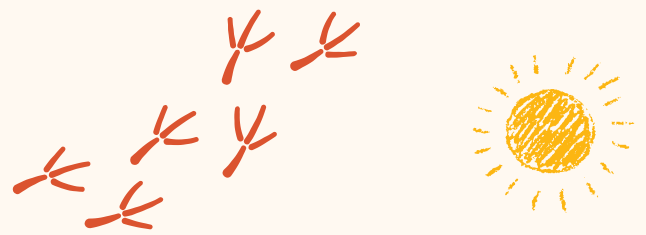
This year has been a period of deliberate stewardship and recalibration across Wholistic Services. As community needs continue to grow in both depth and complexity, we remained responsive to families while strengthening clarity, boundaries, and sustainability across our service system. Foundational work advanced alongside direct service: role clarity and scope, stronger intake and pathway alignment, and continued commitment to culturally based, trauma-informed, relational practice, especially in a system that often asks Indigenous-led organizations to absorb pressures beyond mandate or funding.

Teams continued to show remarkable commitment and care while supporting community members navigating trauma, housing instability, child and family transitions, identity healing, and systemic barriers. We also held important internal conversations about sustainability, workforce wellbeing, and protecting specialized services so they remain safe and effective for both community and staff. We strengthened braided approaches across services while maintaining clear accountability, cultural governance, and role integrity.

Looking ahead, our focus remains on deepening culturally based practice, strengthening leadership and workforce continuity, and ensuring services remain guided by Indigenous values, community accountability, and long-term wellbeing.



Early Years



Aboriginal Head Start Program

The Aboriginal Head Start Program supported 41 children and families this year through parental workshops and council, strength-based approaches, and a renewed focus on core program components. Work this year prioritized school readiness, food support, and cultural connection, supported by quarterly reflection using the LOVIT Way Evaluation and guided by a wholistic approach grounded in respect and care.

With support from the Dream Keepers Team, AHS offered enriched workshops and intentional March Break programming that strengthened family and community engagement. In partnership with Toronto Public Health, Nurse Cassandra also joined the classroom to support Culture Kitchen activities with children, further integrating cultural learning into daily experiences.

This year focused on restoring core program values and culture, strengthening parental support, and promoting wholistic family well-being. Families participated in culturally rooted activities such as drum workshops, rattle making, moccasin making, gauntlet building, and creating children's bundles. March Break further emphasized family involvement through daily outings that supported connection, participation, and community belonging.



Childcare

The childcare program served 34 spaces filled across the infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms. We remain proud to be an established Indigenous childcare program in Toronto and to serve as a model for Indigenous early years and early intervention programming across the city.



EarlyON

The EarlyON program supported 240 children and 292 parents this year, with a total of 1,432 visits, reflecting strong and consistent community engagement. This participation underscores the program's role as a trusted, welcoming space where families can connect, learn, and grow together, grounded in care and respect for each family's lived experience.

Families consistently shared that they value the program's focus on caregiver empowerment and self-care. Opportunities such as book clubs and writing workshops created space for reflection, connection, and personal growth, supporting caregivers to build confidence, strengthen community ties, and draw on collective wisdom.

240 Children
supported this
year

292 parents
supported this
year

1432 visits to
EarlyOn
program

The community kitchen remained a key component, building nutritional awareness while offering shared meals in an inclusive environment. Activities such as cooking sessions and family baking supported bonding, practical skill-building, and learning related to food security and healthy living.

In partnership with the Culture Team, the program also offered a microgreens workshop that provided practical skills to grow fresh, nutritious food at home - supporting food literacy, sustainability, and self-sufficiency.

The program continues to foster a strong sense of support and belonging, with participants increasingly shaping the space through their voices and identified needs in a way that honours self-determination and community leadership.



Family Supports

Dtebashkine Bawaajige (Dreamkeepers) Family Wellness and Prevention

One of NCFST's core family wellness and prevention pathways, this program supports families through pregnancy, early parenting, reunification, and periods of vulnerability. This culturally grounded kinship-based work strengthens caregiver capacity, safety, attachment, and connection, helping prevent deeper system involvement where possible.

Seasonal programming remains foundational to community engagement and reflects our responsibility to show up with love, respect, and consistency. **This year's Winter Solstice Celebration marked a return to being hosted at 30 College, welcoming just under 400 community members. Supported by the Wholistic and Child and Family Wellbeing Teams, the gathering reflected the organization's commitment to relational accountability and community care. Families shared a traditional lunch and participated in crafts, games, music, face painting, balloon artistry, and caricature art.**

Community Experiences: DB's Story

DB is a mother of two young boys who has demonstrated remarkable strength and commitment in her healing journey. Following experiences of intimate partner violence and substance use, her children were brought to a place of safety. DB engaged in her recovery process and attended M'dewgaan Healing Lodge, where she began her sobriety journey and built a strong foundation for healing. After completing the program, she connected with a Ninoshe who provided aftercare and in-home support as DB navigated early recovery and parenting with dignity, care, and cultural connection.

DB further strengthened her parenting capacity by participating in programs such as Circle of Security and Mothers in Mind, which support attachment-based parenting and healthy parent-child relationships. Through consistent participation and a willingness to learn and grow, she built the skills and confidence to support her children's emotional and developmental needs. As a result of her dedication and progress, DB was reunified with her sons and continues to remain actively engaged in her healing journey, supported through ongoing relationship, honesty, and accountability.

Program Spotlight: Mothers In Mind

Mothers in Mind (in partnership with the Child Development Institute) reflects and supports Indigenous approaches to parenting. Participants are paired with a Ninoshe (Auntie) who provides in-home parenting support and case management, and who encourages ongoing engagement in the group.

This model has strengthened trust, improved consistency in participation, and supported positive outcomes for families through relationship-based care rooted in love and respect. Each child also receives a weekly storybook by an Indigenous author, supporting early literacy and cultural connection.

Upon graduation, participants are gifted items to begin building their family's bundle, including feast kits, a woven basket, medicines, and traditional clothing items. Participants were also invited back to take part in drum- and rattle-making workshops.



Bekaadendang (Being Peaceful) Family Violence Supports

The Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) **Anti-Human Trafficking Program** provides culturally grounded, trauma-informed support for Indigenous youth who are at risk of or impacted by human trafficking. The program helps individuals navigate complex systems while accessing safety planning, advocacy, counselling and Indigenous oriented healing supports.

The program supported 91 community members this year.



Mooka'am (A New Dawn) Clinic

The Mooka'am Clinic was birthed at the agency's beginning and was initially focused on providing culturally-led therapeutic support for those healing from sexual abuse and other impacts of residential schools and colonial violence. Since then, services have expanded based on community feedback and need. Today, the Mooka'am Clinic provides counselling support to Indigenous children, youth and families around a diverse range of issues impacting Indigenous people.

The clinic served 400 community members in 2025-2026.

The NCFST **Wholistic Family Violence Prevention Program** provides a comprehensive, family-centred approach to addressing violence within Indigenous families and communities. Rooted in Indigenous beliefs that healing must involve the whole family, the program supports survivors, children and individuals who have caused harm through case management, supportive counselling, ceremonies, teachings and healing circles. Specialized programming includes the Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program, a culturally based court-mandated intervention that helps participants understand the roots of violence, the impacts of colonization and strategies for building healthy relationships.

The program supported over 242 individuals this year.

Mdewgaan (Medicine) Healing Lodge

This live-in healing lodge provides wholistic support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis women with young children, those who are pregnant, and those working toward reunification. It serves women experiencing the ongoing impacts of intergenerational and complex trauma, addictions, and mental health concerns, offering wraparound parenting support to enhance confidence and support reunification goals. Guided by the sacred understanding that culture is healing, the Lodge's approach to wellness is culturally centred. It focuses on fostering balance across all quadrants of the medicine wheel, and is rooted in relationships with self, children, family, community, land, and the environment.

The Mdewgaan Lodge served 19 Women and their children this year.

Wholistic Case Management

This culturally grounded support helps individuals and families affected by trauma, violence, or substance use address multiple areas of wellness including mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

Support includes: coordinating mental health and addiction support, helping clients access housing, healthcare, education, and community resources, co-creating wellness and healing plans grounded in culture.

The program supported over 166 community members this year.



Developmental Services

Developmental services support children, youth, or adults who have developmental, cognitive, behavioural, social, or learning-related needs. Workers support with coordinating culturally safe assessments, daily living and life skills, emotional and behavioural support, social skills development, school and community participation, family support and advocacy, connections to specialized developmental or disability services

Developmental services are delivered within an Indigenous cultural framework in which supports are relationship-based, community-focused, and connected to culture, identity, and traditional teachings.

The program supported over 185 individuals this year.



Youth Services

Native Youth Resource Centre

Our drop-in wrap-around program serves Indigenous youth ages 16–29 through culturally grounded, responsive programming that reflects the diverse needs of urban Indigenous youth in Toronto. Youth drop-in programs operate six days a week, providing daily cultural activities and nutritious meals, with 17,602 meals distributed over this last year. Core services include Youth Justice supports for youth in detention, Youth in Transition programming for those aging out of care, and education and employment supports that promote pathways to housing stability, mental wellness, and job readiness. All programming is guided by culture, Ceremony, and the Native Youth Advisory Council.

Monthly **Maamawi Cultural Events** continue to be a cornerstone of engagement, offering ceremony, teachings, and community connection, including the **3rd annual Permanent Regalia Tattoo Gathering** in partnership with the University of Toronto, featuring 16 Indigenous artists providing no-cost tattoos and ceremony for youth.

New this year, the **Youth Outreach Encampment Program** provided direct, wraparound support to 21 unhoused Indigenous youth during the winter months, including food, supplies, and referrals, strengthening outreach to some of the most vulnerable youth in the city.



Niizhoodeh Mshiikenhik (Twin Turtles) Youth Shelter

During the COVID 19 pandemic, NCFST partnered with the City of Toronto to create temporary hotel shelter programs for Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness. This later evolved into Niizhoodeh Mshiikenhik (Twin Turtles), a 14 bed Indigenous Youth Shelter that has since supported more than 100 youth in transitional stays and in securing permanent housing.

Community Programs

Malvern Child and Family Centre
Scarborough Child and Family Centre
Mount Dennis Child and Family Centre



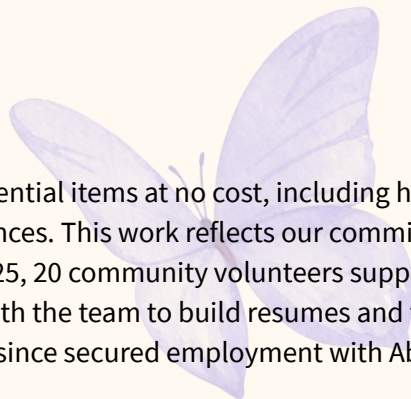
All locations are guided by daily cultural programs, teachings, and ceremonies, with input from Community Councils. Each hub also offers weekly Culture Nights featuring Indigenous teachings, guest speakers, ceremonies, and programming aligned with the 13 Moons and seasonal cycles. Food security remained the highest identified need during this reporting period, and staff responded with humility and practical care. Programs such as Feed Scarborough provide 200 free meals weekly to community members, and food pantry programming across the three hubs serves an average of 100 community members.

The community-based Family Peacekeeping Program, located at the Scarborough hub, is open to Indigenous children and youth (0–29) and their families to support violence prevention in Scarborough, including concerns related to guns and gangs. The program provides culturally grounded services that include youth justice supports, ceremonies, and referrals to community resources. Over this reporting period, 341 participants accessed a total of five programs. This work supported families with trauma-informed, culturally responsive services while navigating complex and difficult circumstances, grounded in truth, respect, and accountability to community.



Program Spotlight: Butterfly Boutique

The boutique is a vital community resource, offering essential items at no cost, including hygiene products, diapers, clothing, footwear, and small household appliances. This work reflects our commitment to dignity, humility, and meeting immediate needs with care. In 2025, 20 community volunteers supported boutique operations. Following their cohort, many also worked with the team to build resumes and translate their experience into transferable skills. Two volunteers have since secured employment with Aboriginal Head Start at NCFST.



On The Land Camps

Cultural connection has remained foundational to the agency's work through the Cultural Camps Program, which has operated for thirty-seven years.

Established to provide land based cultural programming for Indigenous families in the Greater Toronto Area, the program became permanently rooted at Grundy Lake Provincial Park in 1990 before relocating to North Frontenac in 2022.

What began as a summer camp has evolved into a four-season program.

Over the decades, an estimated 8,000 campers have attended the program, with many later returning as counsellors, staff, and parents bringing their own children to camp.

Culture Camp served over 180 individuals this year.



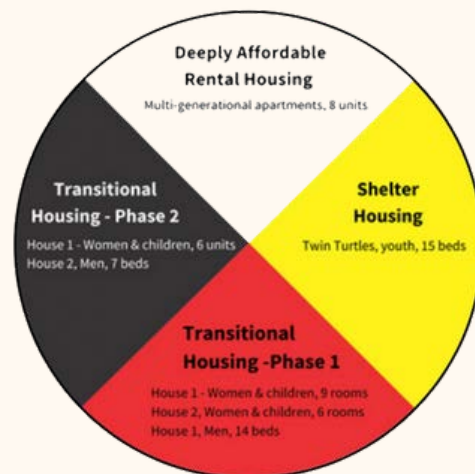
Housing Services

For four decades, NCFST's housing programs have provided support 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.

As the portfolio continues to grow to meet community need, NCFST remains committed to expanding Indigenous-led housing solutions rooted in Culture, safety, healing, and community.

Housing Support Continuum



Eagle's Nest House:

Honouring 25 Years of Operation

One of the earliest developments within Housing Services was the creation of transitional housing programs for Indigenous youth. Opened in 2001, Eagle's Nest Native Men's Transition House is celebrating 25 years of supporting Indigenous youth in rebuilding independence, reconnecting with culture, and establishing long term goals. Over the years, Eagle's Nest became more than housing. It became home for many youth navigating difficult transitions, with former residents later returning as staff and mentors.

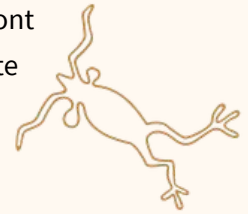


Partnerships

Partnerships continue to strengthen our ability to respond with wisdom and humility, and expand access to culturally safer supports.

Miigwetch – Nia:wen – Maarsii – Kinana'skomitin – Nakurmiik – Thank you to our partners

- Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circles
Mobile ID clinic
- University of Toronto Scarborough
- Indigenous Greenhouse Geodesic Domes
- University of Toronto – Hart House
- City of Toronto – various programs
- East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club / Malvern Family
- Resource Centre
- Metro Toronto Zoo
- Malvern Community Network
- National Ballet of Canada – weekly program
- Theatre Direct
- The Boundless School
- East Scarborough Storefront
- Canadian Training Institute
- FoodShare
- Second Harvest
- Daily Bread Food Bank
- Feed Scarborough
- Sunrise Food Donation
- Highland Creek RCL Branch 258
- North York Harvest Food Bank
- ICHA – Ode'i Min Clinic
- STRIDES



Staff Spotlight

Amber Varadi

About Amber

Amber Varadi is an inspiring Anishinaabekwe and Sixties Scoop survivor who has returned home to Rama First Nation. Her journey reflects resilience, reconnection, and a deep commitment to living her teachings. Amber is a mother of two, who speaks with honesty and strength about navigating her way back to community through both systemic and personal barriers. Guided by her knowledge of the Life Cycle and Clan System teachings, she brings forward a powerful blend of lived experience and cultural wisdom that supports healing and belonging. She is especially gifted in building bridges by creating meaningful connections between institutional systems and community members accessing supports. In this role, Amber acts as a translator between worlds, fostering relationships grounded in respect, understanding, and cultural safety.

About the work:

O-do-idaym-i-wan' (The way we walk together)

The O-do-daym-i-wan worker supports families engaged with the Child and Family Wellbeing program in service navigation and advocacy across systems both internally and externally, wellness and crisis intervention, and in achieving mandated and self-identified goals in good ways.

Building trust during a high-risk family intervention

In a situation involving intimate partner violence, police presence, and urgent safety concerns, relationship-based support helped create calm and trust during a highly stressful intervention. Cultural practices, consistency, and immediate service navigation helped the family move from crisis toward stabilization while preserving dignity and strengthening the bridge to ongoing supports.



In her own words

*Since joining NCFST in 2022, I have been learning deeply from community, staff, and the many parts of the agency that come together in service of children and families. Through that learning, I saw both the complexity of our system and the opportunity to strengthen collaboration across teams in ways that create safer, more supportive experiences for community members, especially those connected to Child and Family Wellbeing services. In early 2025, I brought forward what I had been witnessing on the ground and shared an Anishinaabe clan-based framework as a way of understanding how different roles across the agency can work together with greater clarity, respect, and connection. That conversation helped create space for this hard work to take shape in practice as the **O-do-daym-i-wan (the way we walk together)** position I hold today. Over the past year, this approach has been applied in real-time community work, helping bridge service navigation, relationship-building, and immediate family support.*

When relationship-building, cultural practice, and service navigation are offered alongside statutory or crisis response, families are more likely to experience safety, trust, and meaningful connection from the beginning.

This work continues to demonstrate the importance of collaboration across roles and the power of meeting families with dignity, immediacy, care and kinship.

Child and Family Wellbeing

This past year, the Child and Family Wellbeing program remained committed to supporting the safety, wellbeing, and cultural identity of the children and families we serve.

Through collaboration, family-centred planning, and culturally grounded practice, we focused on strengthening family connections, promoting stability, and helping children stay connected to their communities, culture, and traditions.

This annual report highlights the progress made, the challenges experienced, and the positive outcomes achieved in supporting families over the past year.

405

Total investigations completed

357

Families served through Ongoing Protection, Alternative Care, and Kinship Approved Home

298

Children served

82

Children and youth discharged from care to family or kin

Kinship Connections

The Kinship Team works alongside families to help identify extended family connections when a child needs alternative care. At NCFST, kinship is understood as more than a placement option, it is a meaningful way that helps preserve relationships, identity, and cultural connection.

The Team walks alongside caregivers throughout their kinship journey, offering support, resources, and practical assistance to help create stable, nurturing, and culturally connected homes. This responsive, family-centred way of working is shaped by the unique needs of each child and family. It is further enriched by cultural events held throughout the year, which bring families, children, and youth together to strengthen connection, belonging, and community.

This past year, 88 children were supported through the Kinship program, with an average of 75 families receiving per-diem support.

Community Story

In June 2025, my husband and I received a phone call that changed our lives. We learned that our great-niece had been born and was in the NICU. At that time, we knew very little about the circumstances, only that she had been left at the hospital and that there might be an opportunity for us to care for her. We said yes without hesitation. From that moment forward, we did everything we could to bring her home and provide the love, stability, and care every child deserves.

Throughout the process, the team at NCFST guided us with compassion, patience, and respect. They helped us navigate a system that was entirely new to us and supported us at every step. We will always be grateful for the role they played in bringing our family together. Today, our home is filled with love, laughter, and gratitude.

What began in heartbreaking circumstances has become something deeply meaningful, and we are profoundly thankful for the Kinship program and for the people who helped make this possible.

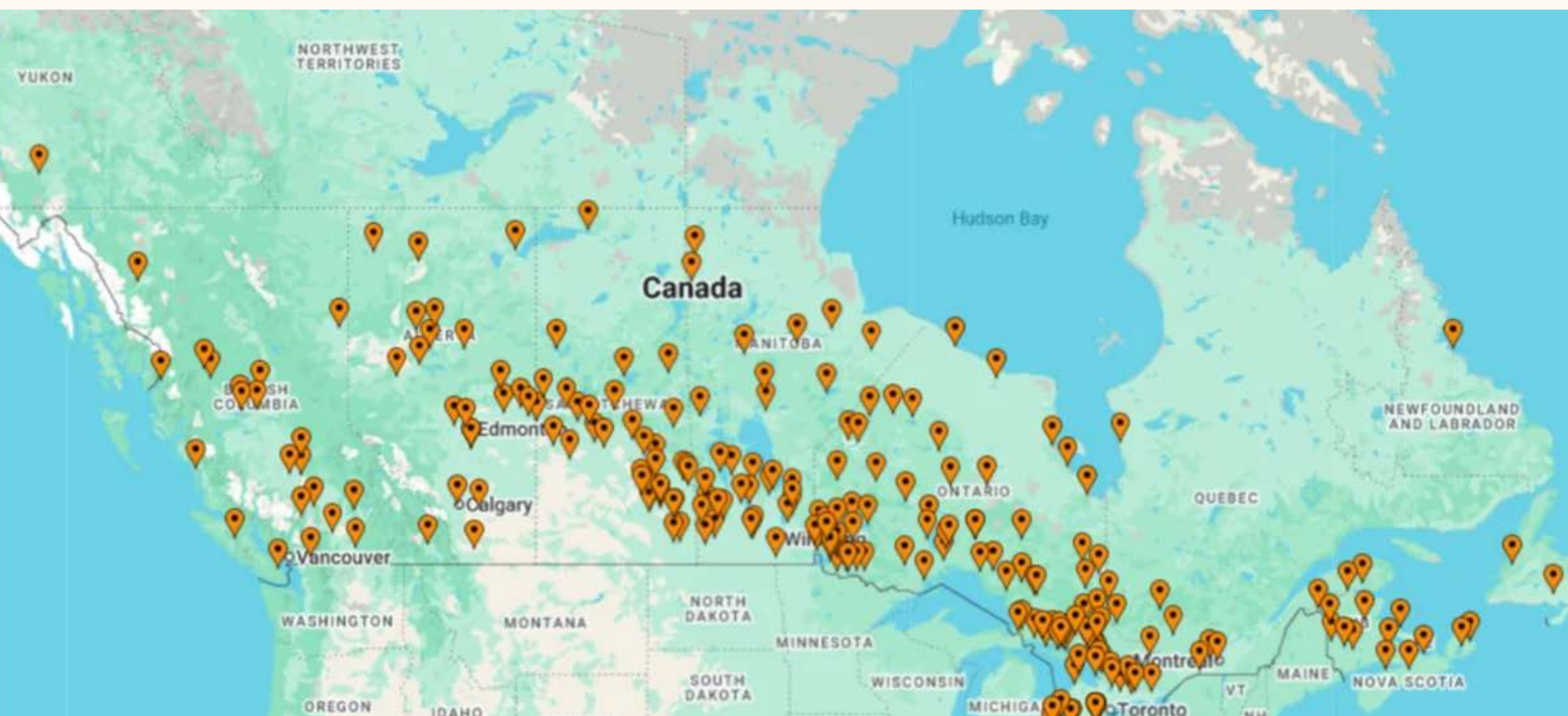
All Our Relations: Band Engagement

The All Our Relations Band Engagement role is rooted in respect, kinship, and reciprocity. This work centres on walking alongside First Nations communities in ways that honour their inherent rights, laws, and worldviews. It focuses on building and sustaining meaningful connections with leadership, representatives, and community, grounded in trust, transparency, and shared accountability.

Through this work, NCFST supports the strengthening of kinship and community ties by collaborating with First Nations in aligning agency practices with community-led laws, protocols, and ways of caring, ensuring that children and families remain connected to their identity, culture, and Nation. This role reflects the agency's commitment to honouring self-determination and upholding the wellbeing of children, families, and communities for generations to come.

This year NCFST provided services to 1,028 First Nations members across 165 First Nation communities, reflecting the many relationships we are honoured to be a part of and the importance of sustained, community-centred kinship.

Map of communities served in 2025-26.



Community Experiences: DG's Story

DG has lived with her Customary Care caregivers since the age of two. Over the years, her caregivers have prioritized maintaining and strengthening her connections to her biological family and First Nation community. These sustained relationships have fostered a strong sense of belonging, cultural identity, and connection to traditional ceremonies and practices.

Her connection to land-based experiences has nurtured a passion for animals, particularly horses. DG has been riding since the age of five and has accumulated over eight years of experience in therapeutic and competitive horseback riding. Her dedication and talent have enabled her to compete at high levels, most recently advancing to the Silver Star Series. Participation in equestrian sports has contributed significantly to her confidence, resilience, and overall wellbeing.

DG benefits from a collaborative circle of care. Her biological family and Customary Caregivers maintain a close and positive relationship, ensuring a cohesive and supportive network around her.

Deeply connected to her culture, she remains actively engaged in her community and has developed a meaningful and lasting relationship with her First Nation, further strengthening her identity and sense of belonging.

Her pursuits have been supported by NCFST through Children's Services funding opportunities, including OCBE, CIBC Miracle, and the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada. These supports have played an important role in enabling DG to continue to thrive and achieve her goals. DG's journey reflects the true essence of "it takes a village to raise a child".



Community Experiences: Kayla's Story

The Children's Services team began working with Kayla through a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement before supporting her transition into the Ready, Set, Go Program upon her 18th birthday.

Now 21, Kayla is a vibrant, confident, and resilient young woman who demonstrates strength and determination beyond her years. She is committed to breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma and building an independent, stable future for herself. With the support of NCFST, including access to psychiatric services and consistent guidance from her workers, Kayla has successfully managed significant anxiety and agoraphobia. Equipped with a supportive circle of care through ongoing supports, she recently secured her first job. A major milestone in her journey towards independence.

Kayla is currently working with a Step Stones worker and has begun exploring post-secondary education opportunities. A strong advocate for her siblings in alternative care, Kayla is self-aware and intentional about her growth. Her journey reflects resilience, determination, and the impact of coordinated supports in empowering youth to achieve their goals and build brighter futures.



Staffing and Operations



Successful labour relations

Negotiated and implemented a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (May 2025–April 2028), supporting positive employee relations and stability.

Strengthened workforce sustainability

HR supported organizational stability through restructuring in a shifting fiscal environment, carefully managing layoffs and recruitment.

Commitment to Indigenous employment

Recruitment processes prioritized Indigenous candidates, reinforcing culturally aligned service delivery. We continue to focus on Indigenous staff recruitment, retention and succession planning.

Enhanced operational efficiency

Transitioned Performance Feedback processes to ADP, improving accuracy, accessibility, and record-keeping

152 Indigenous Employees

288 Active Employees

54 Employees on leave

Information Technology

- Key initiatives: digital archive implementation, case management system optimization, wireless infrastructure refresh, and expanded data analytics through Microsoft Fabric and Power BI.
- Cybersecurity controls aligned with Zero Trust principles were strengthened, with no major cybersecurity incidents reported.
- IT delivered these outcomes while remaining below sector-average spending and managing a reduction of staffing.

Facilities

Facilities focused on asset sustainability and preservation through targeted capital repairs including: roof replacements at multiple sites, flooring upgrades at transition homes, and energy efficient improvements at 1290 Weston, including a new PVC roof.

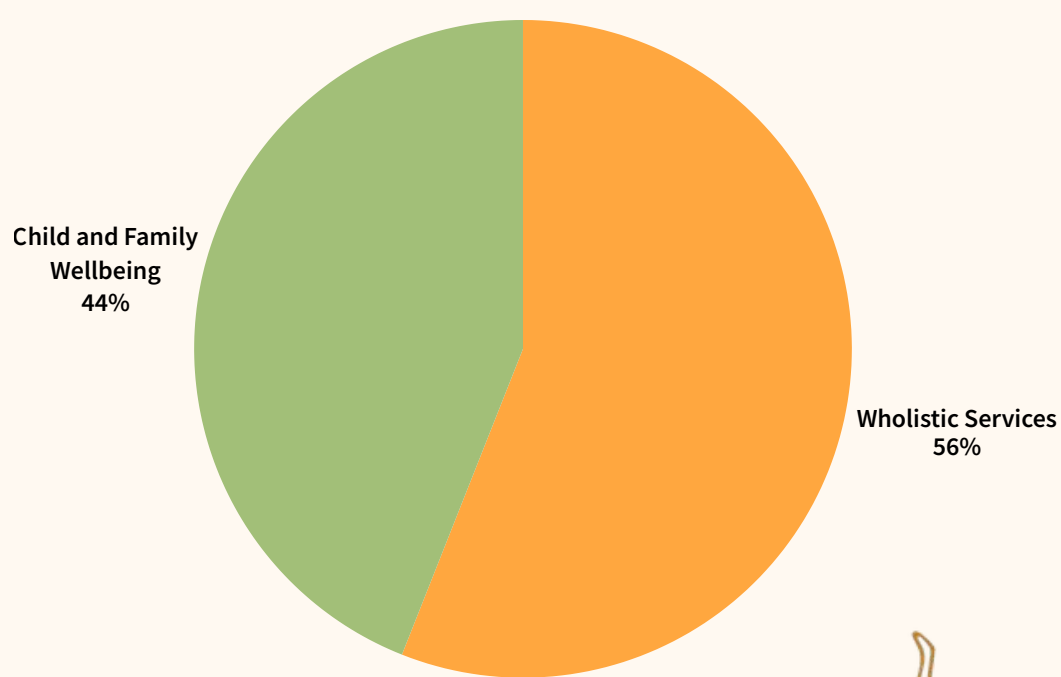


Financial Summary

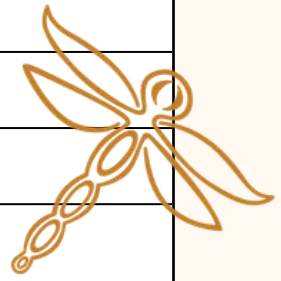
Funding for fiscal 2025-26 increased by 6% compared to the prior year mainly due to an increase in the level of funding received from the provincial government.

Total funding for fiscal 2025-26 was \$63,828,832 that includes Child and Family Wellbeing funding of \$28,167,935 and Wholistic Services funding of \$35,660,897. The comparative total in fiscal year of 2024-2025 was \$60,011,586 that included Child Welfare funding of \$25,056,659 and Wholistic funding of \$34,954,927.

	2025-26	2024-25	CHANGE YEAR OVER YEAR
CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING	44%	42%	2%
WHOLISTIC SERVICES	56%	58%	-2%



	Revenue 2025-26
Child and Family Wellbeing	28,167,935
Wholistic Services	
Childrens' Mental Health & Family Wellbeing	5,945,496
Scarborough Enhancement JT, Mt. Dennis & Malvern Hubs	3,037,347
Organizational Enhancement	4,414,096
Pre & Post Natal	399,716
Kin Finding	1,482,780
Volunteer Drive	943,514
Jordan's Principle	159,043
Headstart	2,122,288
Indigenous Culture	704,595
Family Support	2,116,100
Scarborough Program	1,316,177
Day Care	1,375,703
Social Recreation	779,086
Transitional Housing	6,915,705
Youth	1,792,341
Admin	2,156,909
Total Wholistic Services	35,660,897
Total Child and Family Wellbeing and Wholistic Services	63,828,832



Miigwetch – Nia:wen – Maarsii – Kinana'skomitin – Nakurmiik – Thank you to our Funders

ACSA Community Services (ACSA)

ALFDC - Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle Funding

Andrew and Lynn Torres Foundation at Toronto Foundation

Archdiocese of Toronto

Centennial College of Applied Arts & Technology

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada

City of Toronto - Community Funding Community Service Partnerships (CSP)

City of Toronto - Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA)

City of Toronto - Toronto Children's Services

City of Toronto - Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) and (HSS)

Clayton Gyotoku Fund at the Toronto Foundation

Community Foundations of Canada (CFC)

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care (Dilico)

Doane Grant Thornton Foundation

Dow

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)

Eva's Thanksgiving Fund at Toronto Foundation

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

Kevin Burke Family Foundation at Toronto Foundation

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)

Ministry of Health (MOH)

Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG)

Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training



Miziwe Biik Development Corporation (MBDC)
Nike Foundation
Ontario Arts Council
Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)
Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant
Peter Gilgan Foundation
Right To Play - Indigenous Programs - Program Enhancement Partnership 2025
Scotiabank
Shum Vourkoutiotis Fund at Toronto Foundation
Sport for Development Fund at Toronto Foundation
Strides Canada
TD Bank Group
Teow Family Foundation at Toronto Foundation
The Toronto Star Fresh Fund
Tippet Foundation
Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)
Trajectory Foundation at Toronto Foundation
Turner Fleischer Architects Inc.
United Way Toronto & York Region
Vital Toronto Fund at Toronto Foundation
York University





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Email: info@nativechild.org

Have immediate concerns about a child? Call 416-969-8510

