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Tikinagan

Child & Family Services

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024





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Board of Directors

@ March 31, 2024

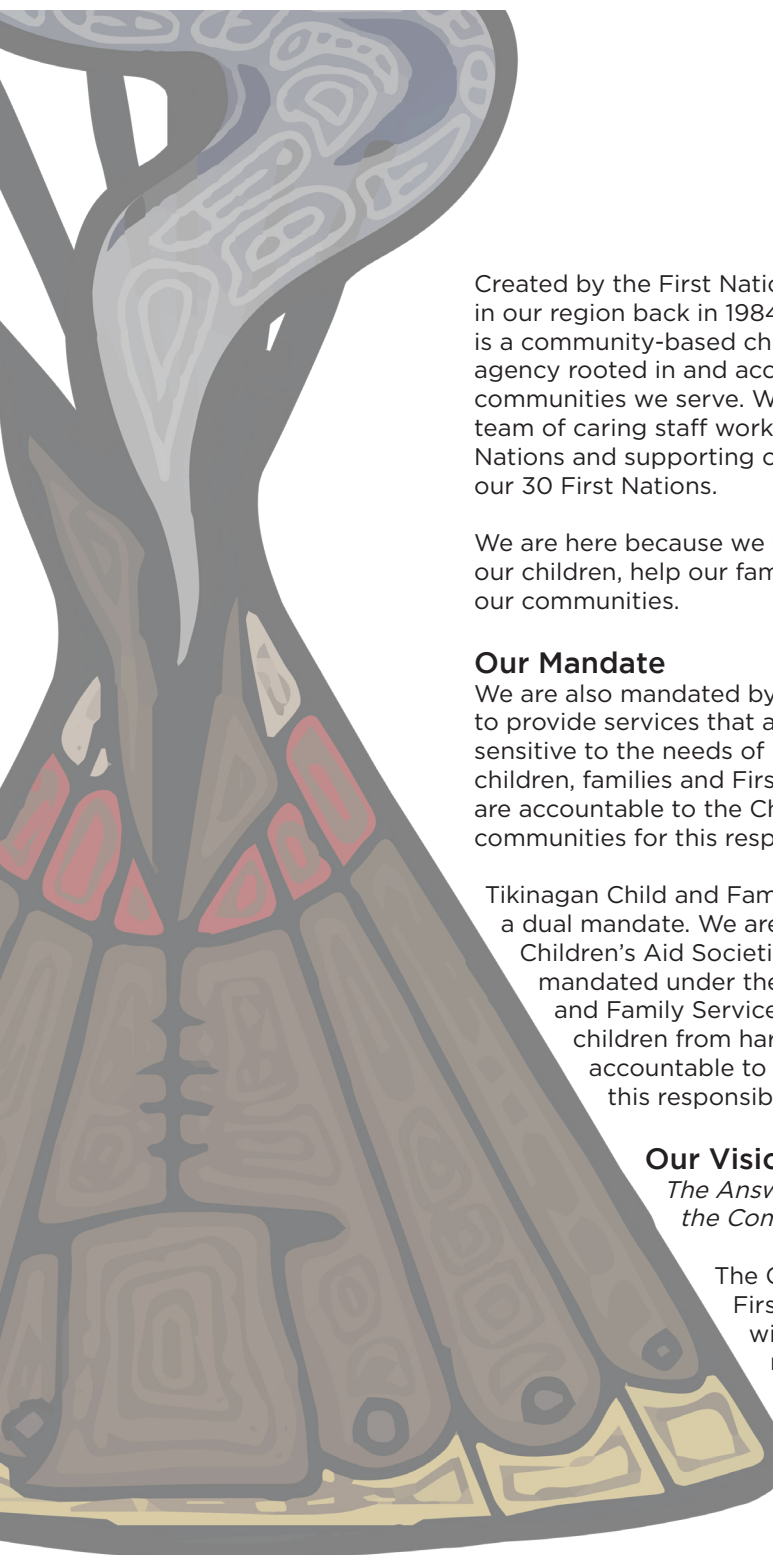
- Lorraine Crane, Chairperson
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- Russell Kakepetum, Secretary-Treasurer
- Jim Bottle, Board Member
- Simon Winnepetonga, Board Member
- Samantha Kejick, Board Member
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Elders Council

Georgina Neshinapaise

YOUTH COUNCIL

- Reina Foster
- Tyleen Strang



ABOUT TIKINAGAN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Created by the First Nation leadership in our region back in 1984, Tikinagan is a community-based child wellbeing agency rooted in and accountable to the communities we serve. We are a large team of caring staff working in First Nations and supporting our families from our 30 First Nations.

We are here because we want to protect our children, help our families and nurture our communities.

Our Mandate

We are also mandated by our Chiefs to provide services that are culturally sensitive to the needs of Indigenous children, families and First Nations. We are accountable to the Chiefs and to the communities for this responsibility.

Tikinagan Child and Family Services has a dual mandate. We are also one of 53 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario mandated under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act to protect children from harm. We are accountable to Ontario for this responsibility.

Our Vision

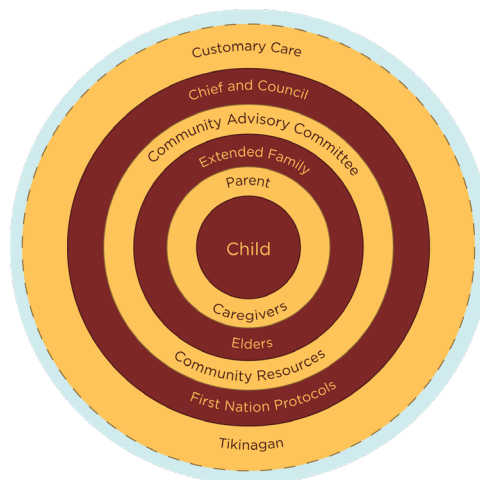
The Answers Lie Within the Communities

The Creator entrusted First Nations with the sacred responsibility of protecting our children and developing

strong families and healthy communities. The Chiefs created Tikinagan to support and strengthen our children, our families, and our communities. The future of our communities is our children. They need to be nurtured within their families and communities. As such, community responsibility for child protection is an essential aspect of First Nations' self-government.

Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin

Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin is the Tikinagan service model. In Ojibway/Oji-Cree, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin means, "everyone working together to raise our children." It is a system of protecting and caring for children and supporting families that has been designed and is delivered by First Nations people.



Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin represents the culmination of almost 40 years of work to develop a culturally appropriate

response to children and families who are in need of help in the First Nation communities. In developing Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, we have sought to be true to the original vision that the Chiefs and Elders had when Tikinagan was created.

Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin is designed to respect the inherent authority of First Nations to care for our own children. It acknowledges that our First Nation mandate supersedes provincial legislation and that our ultimate goal is the pursuit of complete First Nation jurisdiction over our own child welfare services. Until this goal is achieved, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin services are designed to be culturally appropriate and meet the needs of our First Nations and provincial legislation, regulations and standards.

Customary Care

Customary care is an integral element of Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin. Within the customary care system, the First Nation Chief and Council have the authority to declare children to be placed in Tikinagan care when removal from their home is required. The First Nation, parents, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin caregivers and children in care sign a Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin Care Agreement for children coming into the agency's care. Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin care puts the decision in the hands of families, extended family, communities, and First Nation leadership, and not mainstream Court systems.

Scan to learn more about our service model



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Lorraine Crane
Board Chair

This year, our Board, staff and communities grieved the passing of two Elders, Emily Gregg and Elsie Fox. Both of these inspirational individuals carried the vision and values of the agency through their traditional ways of raising children.

The loss of these two incredible women has left an impact, not just their contributions to the direction of our agency but also the knowledge they shared. They often reminded our Board about the importance of passing on our traditional knowledge.

Whenever I spoke with Emily and Elsie, I connected with them on the way we were taught to parent. I remember their teachings about the cradle, better known as the Tikinagan. It was our way of traveling with our babies, and I used it with my children. While you were picking berries or traveling on a boat, the baby was safe and comfortable.

Keeping the traditional ways of raising our children is embodied through the Tikinagan service model, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin. Our First Nations approach puts the focus on our families by ensuring children remain connected to their family, community, and culture. This was part of the original vision when the Chiefs formed the Tikinagan almost 40 years ago. We have to remember this, just like our Elders have taught us.

As our Board transitions by welcoming new faces, including the Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwigwag “Hear Us Youth” team, and giving our blessing to others, we strive to keep the original vision of Tikinagan: keeping children with their families in their communities. I want to thank those who have contributed to our leadership’s vision, both past and present.

Lorraine Crane
Board Chair

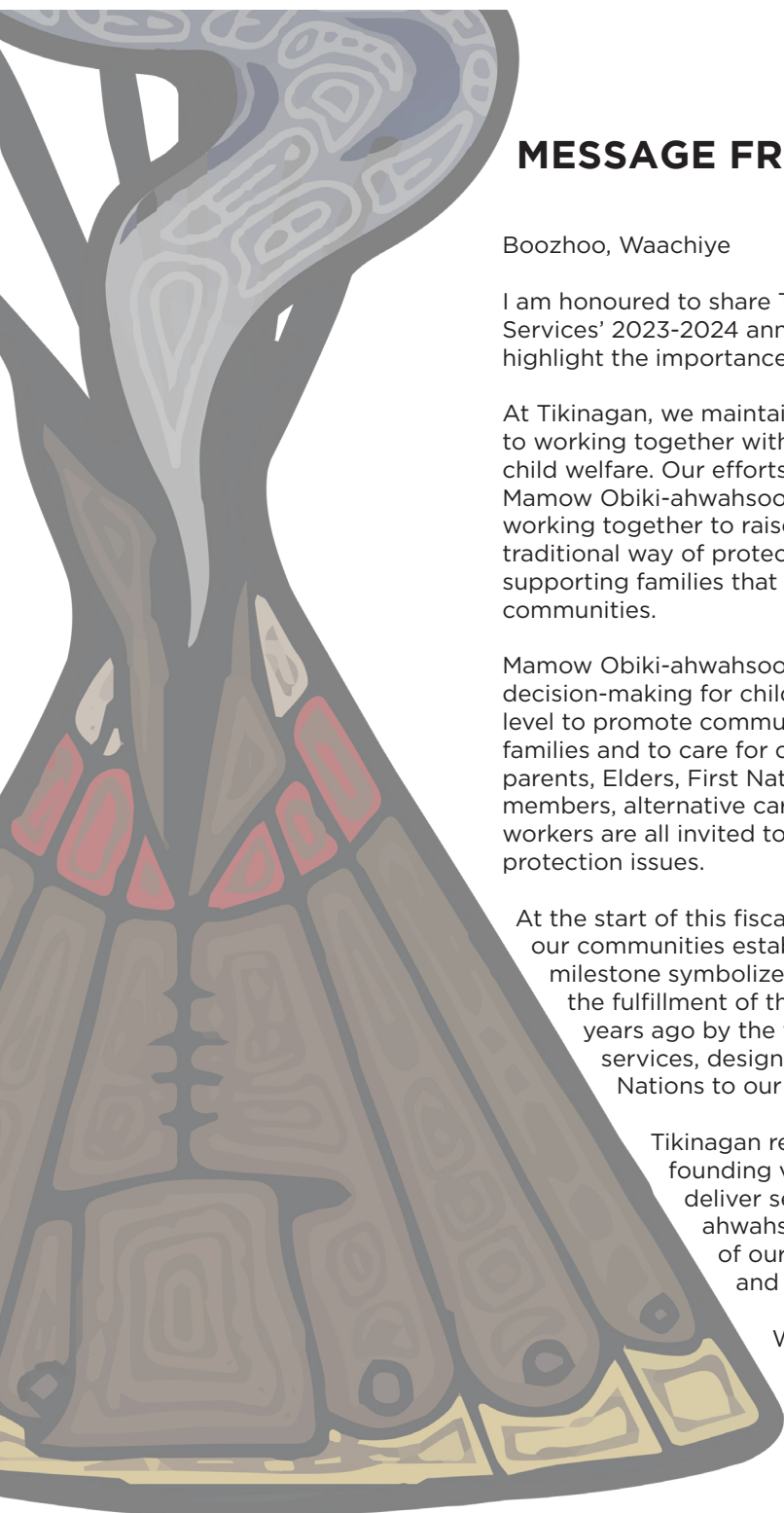


Elsie Fox



Emily Gregg





MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Boozhoo, Waachiye

I am honoured to share Tikinagan Child and Family Services' 2023-2024 annual report. This year, I want to highlight the importance of empowering our communities.

At Tikinagan, we maintain our unwavering commitment to working together with our First Nation communities in child welfare. Our efforts are guided by our service model, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, which means "everyone working together to raise our children." It is based on our traditional way of protecting and caring for children and supporting families that is delivered by our people in our communities.

Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin seeks to bring control and decision-making for children back to the community level to promote community responsibility to help families and to care for children. Within our model, the parents, Elders, First Nation leaders, extended family members, alternative caregivers, and community resource workers are all invited to be partners in addressing child protection issues.

At the start of this fiscal year, we witnessed one of our communities establish its own family law. This milestone symbolizes a monumental step towards the fulfillment of the dream established nearly 40 years ago by the founding Chiefs: child and family services, designed and delivered by our First Nations to our First Nations.

Tikinagan reaffirms its dedication to our founding vision while we continue to deliver services guided by Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin to promote the well-being of our First Nation children, families, and communities.

We will continue to support our communities until they are ready to implement their own law, applicable to their community's traditional way of raising

children. We will help anyway we can, including our work with Niigaanshkaawin.

Another milestone we celebrated this fiscal year was Neegaan Inabin, our post-majority care service which provides culturally-appropriate, holistic supports to youth aging out of care and young adults formerly in care. Midway through the year, we began empowering our young people with the resources to achieve their goals and secure their future into early adulthood. By year-end, we had service agreements with close to 150 youth — a number expected to triple by the end of 2024-25.

A third transition, though still uncertain, is the anticipation of the decisions related to the federal government's Final Settlement Agreement on Long Term Reform of the First Nation Child and Family Services Program. This decision will have an impact on our future, but more importantly, this is also another step closer to moving our communities closer to achieving the founding vision.

This fiscal year at Tikinagan we celebrate several noteworthy successes, including a decrease of children in care and the numerous engagements at the community level. We have noted these throughout this annual report, demonstrating the influence of Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin in our communities.

I'd like to thank the Board for their hard work and commitment all year long. Their support and leadership are important to guiding our work with children, youth, and families. Also, I want to thank our staff, who are working in the true spirit of Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin.

Miigwetch,

Thelma Morris
Executive Director



Thelma Morris
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION TO SERVICES

Since Tikinagan was established in 1984 by the Chiefs of this region, we have been prioritizing our traditional practices and Indigenous values in the ways we provide service. Moving away from mainstream service delivery, we incorporate storytelling and the voices of our leadership, our Elders, our Foster Parents, our children and youth, and our staff to embody the true spirit of our service model Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, “everyone working together to raise our children.” This section of our annual report captures our activities in 2023-24, explained through the voices of our First Nations people.



KI FAMILY LAW COMES INTO EFFECT



Since our beginnings in 1984, we have been accountable to the Chiefs and the Province of Ontario. However, we have always been working towards achieving the Chiefs' founding vision – First Nation law and First Nation service delivery.

On April 1, 2023, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) commemorated the official proclamation of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Dibenjikewin Onaakonikewin (“KIDO”) – the revitalized KI Family Law that gives the First Nation jurisdiction over their awaashishag, oshkadizag egwa dibenjikewinan (children, youth and families). KIDO is responsible for providing child and family services that honour the language, ways, customs, and traditions of the people of KI – their own law, and their own service delivery.

“I didn’t think I would survive just to see this day,” said Elder Clara Sainnawap in Anishiniimowin, translated by Angus Chapman.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug is the first among the 30 First Nations served by Tikinagan and was the second in Ontario to create their own family law under Bill C-92, An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families.

“We’re going to be moving forward, and moving forward means everybody has to play a role – Chief and Council, families, organizations – each and every one of us will come together to make our community go forward to a brighter future, a prosperous community and our children to have stable homes growing up,” said Chief Donny Morris during his speech.



Scan to watch the
KIDO signing ceremony

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE

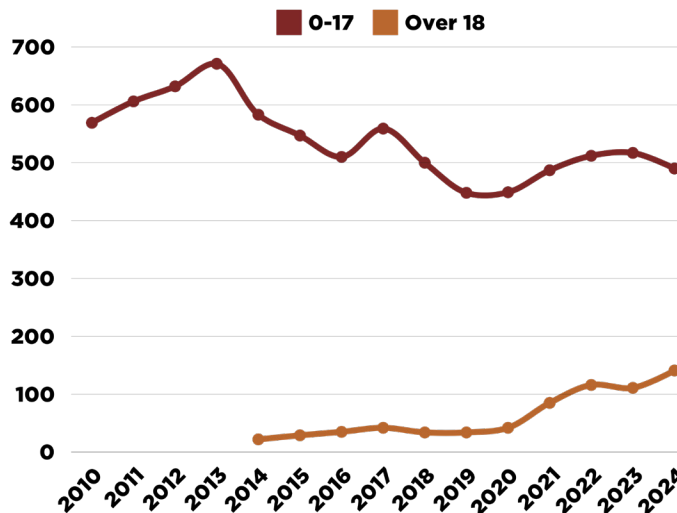
Former youth in care like Reina (see her story on page 8) understand the experience of the 489 children who were in care as of March 31, 2024. As both a member of the Tikinagan youth team Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwig (“Hear Us Youth”) and serving as a Youth Advisor on the Tikinagan Board, Reina is now working to ensure that children and youth in care today have better outcomes. She also wants to break the cycle of an intergenerational legacy that stems from the residential school.

Over the last decade, we have been improving services to our families by reducing the number of children and youth in care with a focus on keeping children at home. The chart below represents data over the last 15 years, showing a decline that began in 2013 with a focus on file reviews and reunification plans wherever possible.

The number of children and youth in care saw an increase due to transfers as a result of our expanded jurisdiction into the district of Thunder Bay, beginning in January 2020.

In 2014, we began reporting separately the number of youth over 18 receiving services. An increase, which began in 2020, is represented by a provincial directive to not discharge youth during the pandemic, expanded jurisdiction, and then the beginnings of our post majority care service, Neegaan Inabin (see page 9).

Children and Youth in Care - End of Fiscal Year





Reina Foster

Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwag
(Hear Us Youth) Member

As a Grade 12 student, Reina and her younger brother, Liam, made the decision to return themselves into care after realizing their mother couldn't support them.

"It was a very difficult act to go through, but our safety is what mattered most," said Reina, now 24 and living in her home community, Lac Seul First Nation, with two of her own children.

Today, being deeply rooted and grounded in her culture guides Reina in the work she does as a leader and as a mother.

Reina has worked at local, regional, provincial, national and global levels, accomplishing many of her dreams before 20, including former Youth Chief in Lac Seul.

"If any form of abuse still occurs in child care today, children and youth need to know that they have a safe place within the system; that they can trust their foster family, child care worker and child care agency. Healthy child development is essential in a child care setting."



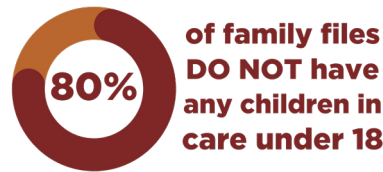
Scan to read
Reina's full story

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Intake Workers at Tikinagan help maintain community relationships through meetings and case conferences with families, extended family, and relevant supports in each community, ensuring the best outcomes for children and families.

Our Intake Unit receives referrals and develops plans for children and families that need services. If a family needs ongoing support - whether that be counselling, help setting up appointments, or anything else that may require additional assistance - they will be partnered with a Family Service Worker, who will work closely with them.

We make every effort to prevent bringing children into care. As of March 31, 2024, Tikinagan is serving 1,013 ongoing family files; 80% of family files do not have any children in care under 18. This means only 20% of families have one or more children in care.



When children come into care, we immediately begin working on family reunification and getting everyone back together again. This fiscal year, 327 children returned to their families.



children returned to their families

In the best circumstances, children are often able to return to the families very shortly after coming

65% of children in care were in care for
Less than 2 weeks

into care. This fiscal year, 65% of children were in care for less than two weeks.

when coming into care with Tikinagan, it is important for each child to be apart of a network of caring people. Every person who has interest in the care of a child is asked to become a member of the Wee-chee-way-win Circle for the child. Decision-making in the Wee-chee-way-win Circle includes meetings with Band Representatives and Chief and Council to create a plan of care for the child.

Keeping families together and children in the communities is the focus of our work of Tikinagan. This fiscal year, half of all children in care (50%) remained in their community. More than half of siblings (59%) were able to remain together with one or more sibling(s). More than one-quarter (27%) of children in care were living with relatives.

"Our service model Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin means 'Everyone working together to raise our children,' and the community is a key part of that," said Hailey McFatridge Intake Worker at Tikinagan. "We're there to put supports in place for families and we need to work alongside family services and child care services to make sure that's being provided. We're working together a lot of the time."



Hailey McFatridge
Intake Worker

"It's a collaborative approach to ensuring the safety and well-being of children and families at Tikinagan," said Hailey. "Ultimately, we want to create the best outcome for the family and the child. We're here to help."

Since expanding our service area, we have been putting supports in place to better serve our families living in urban areas like Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout, Red Lake, and Dryden.

Not every child who comes into Tikinagan care resides in their home community. There were more children living in an urban area (69%) at the time they came into care compared to a First Nation (31%).

Guided by our First Nation mandate and provincial guidelines, Intake Screeners play an important role at Tikinagan by responding and taking action to protect a child from harm. The first step involves filtering through confidential inquiries and requests and ensuring each referral is sent off to the right people the same day it's received. Inquiries could include child protection concerns, services for children in care, requests from First Nations, legal requests, and inquiries from other children's aid societies, agencies, or service providers.

A phone call to Tikinagan is an important first step to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of a child.



Cora Gregg
Intake Screener
Supervisor

"We're the first point of contact," said Cora, a Tikinagan Intake Screener Supervisor. "We receive the information, and we get it out as soon as possible. We're here to pass on your information to the right people and ensure every concern is handled

by the appropriate individuals with the right knowledge to handle each situation."



Scan to read about
our Intake Screeners

This may include receiving a referral. A referral is a report of a child protection concern. Many of these reports come from concerned individuals from all over our region and beyond. The referral may come from extended family, neighbours, schools, health professionals, or even from parents reaching out for help for their family. This fiscal year, we saw an increase of referrals that came through our online reporting form, which was launched in the previous fiscal year.

As technology and communication methods evolve, we remain committed to providing accessible options for ensuring the safety and protection of our children.

As of March 31, 2024, we received 8,471 referrals, an increase of 324 referrals compared to the previous year. Over half (56%) of these referrals were received from within the First Nations we serve.

YOUNG ADULTS LOOKING FORWARD WITH NEEGAAN INABIN

According to a report released by the Conference Board of Canada in September 2023, young Indigenous people leaving foster care have important skills but are underemployed and have lower earnings than non-Indigenous youth in care. Tikinagan participated in this research that explores the impact of foster care on the economic, education, and mental well-being of young Indigenous people.

For too long, our communities have struggled with underfunding and limited access to essential resources, forcing them to be away from their families to travel for mental health services and education. This impacts their identity formation, graduation rates, and future indicators of success.



Scan to read the
full report

The report's emphasis on Indigenous-led programs and culture-based approaches aligns with Tikinagan's commitment to keep our children with us, and within our community, as well as our Neegaan Inabin services for young adults.

As an extension of our Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin services, we adopted the name of Neegaan Inabin to represent our new post-majority supports program.

Neegaan Inabin, which means "Looking Forward" in Oji-Cree, provides culturally-appropriate, holistic services supporting youth aging out of care and young adults formerly in care (up to their 26th birthday) from Tikinagan's 30 First Nations. This includes education, housing, culture, and wellbeing.

Initially launched late in 2022-23, Neegaan Inabin Services has continued to evolve to increase supports and promote early planning, engaging youth in decision making, identify short and long term goals and identify barriers in order for our youth and young people have a smooth successful transition into independence and adulthood. We want to ensure Neegaan Inabin's 8 Pillars of Support are accessible for youth and young adults; which include, education and learning opportunities, employment, financial security and mental health wellness.

Our Neegaan Inabin services are completely voluntary.





Caitlyn Carpenter
Neegaan Inabin Supervisor

Almost 17 years later, after choosing to leave the care of Tikinagan in order to raise her own daughter, Caitlyn recalls the many challenges of pursuing her education: switching schools, racism in city housing, and becoming a mom.

Through it all, Caitlyn kept moving forward while reminding herself that no matter what she was doing, education would be the key factor in her being successful and breaking the family cycle.

“I ended up flunking out of college my first year just because I couldn’t keep up on all those responsibilities that I had on me and minimal support at the time,” she recalled.

“I was embarrassed to reach out for support, I think, because I didn’t want to be seen as asking for help.”

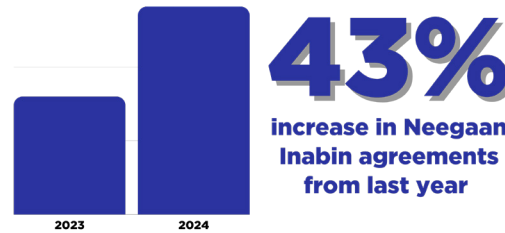
Eventually, Caitlyn learned how to access the resources available within the community and graduated.

Caitlyn is now looking forward to giving back to young adults on a similar education and life journey as a Neegaan Inabin worker.



Scan to listen to Caitlyn's full radio interview

As of March 31, 2024, we have agreements with 141 young adults, a 43% increase from last year. We expect this number will increase as we continue to reach out to former youth in care and create plans to support those already in care before they turn 18.



Housing for young adults is one of the biggest new challenges they face. To help with this, Neegaan Inabin has developed transitional supported living arrangements in the following locations: tiny homes on a large acreage in Vermilion Bay, a three-bedroom transitional home in Sioux Lookout, a two-bedroom home in Dryden, and a renovated motel with 8 individual units for independent living in Thunder Bay. Additionally, each unit is fully furnished for our young adults.



Scan for a tour of our Munro housing in Thunder Bay



Pierre Angeconeb
Former Youth in Care

Pierre, a young adult from Lac Seul First Nation, living in our new Thunder Bay independent living homes, was one of our first residents.

“My experience with Neegaan Inabin was, at first, very rocky, just because it was newly forming. They were just talking about it, it didn’t exist. Now, I have a place to call home!”

Pierre admits getting older is scary, but also Neegaan Inabin is helping him gain the confidence to deal with coming into early adulthood and the responsibilities that comes with it. He is also receiving supports to pursue his education and maintain his job.

“Then we started grocery shopping, and that felt like adulting,” he added.

Working with his Neegaan Inabin workers, Pierre said they have made a positive influence in believing in himself. He points out his workers have been fully accepting of his transgender identity, as well as another young adult with Neegaan Inabin.

“My outreach worker introduced us, and I noticed the outreach worker referred to him as ‘him,’ his chosen name. So, like, I feel like other workers would do the same for me.”

Scan to watch Pierre's video interview



INCLUSIVE, SAFE SPACES FOR 2SLGBTQ+ YOUTH

Recognizing the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for all members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, Tikinagan affirms gender identity by reducing unnecessary disclosures for young individuals in care with changes to its database system.

In our ongoing efforts to provide the best care and support for children and youth, we are proud to be a trailblazer in implementing changes to our systems that affirm gender identity. We firmly believe that every child and young person deserves to be seen, respected, and celebrated for who they truly are.

This fiscal year, we supported several youth in care who chose to identify by a different pronoun, name, and/or gender.

Children and Youth in care of Tikinagan only need to disclose their gender identity and pronouns once, eliminating the need for repeated disclosures.

Memekwe, a 17-year-old youth from Weagamow Lake First Nation who is bisexual and demi-sexual on the asexuality spectrum, said it's not only important to protect queer youth from the discrimination, but also to support them.



**Memekwe
Apetawakeesic
Morriseau**

Noodawishinaam
Oshkiniigiwig (Hear Us
Youth) Member

“Supporting the identity of our youth is important to me because I have a lot of friends who are part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, myself included, and I feel afraid to speak up about my labels because the world is so mean to us.”

Children and Youth in care of Tikinagan only need to disclose their gender identity and pronouns once, eliminating the need for repeated disclosures. Tikinagan workers make notes of their current, specific gender identity and preferred pronouns. Prior to this change, the only option for gender was only male or female. Now, our options include: Bisexual, Transgender, Genderfluid, Two-Spirit, Non-Binary/gender non-conforming, and prefer not to identify.

This forward-thinking approach not only respects the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of these young individuals, but it could also save lives. We understand that multiple disclosures can be intrusive and potentially harmful to the mental well-being of young people. By reducing the need for repeated disclosures, we are creating a safe and inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and supports their overall well-being.



**Kaa-iishi-Waabamidiziwaach
Tikinagan's 2SLGBTQ+ Committee**

Kaa-iishi-Waabamidiziwaach Tikinagan's 2SLGBTQ+ committee made the recommendation and led the change for the entire database system — which is also used by other Indigenous Children's Aid societies in Ontario.

The impact of this change reaches beyond administrative procedures; it sends a powerful message to all children and youth seeking Tikinagan's support, that their gender identity is not only respected but celebrated. By embracing

their identities, Tikinagan aims to nurture a strong sense of self-confidence, belonging, and resilience in these young individuals.



**Scan to read our 2024
2SLGBTQ+ Resource Guide**

BUILDING COMMUNITY AWARENESS ABOUT KEEPING KIDS SAFE

The journey for current and former children and youth in care requires strength, bravery, and resilience in the face of adversity. At Tikinagan, we have two important annual community awareness campaigns to show our children in care that our community is here for them. Dress Purple Day takes place in October and Children and Youth in Care is held in May. These campaigns also provide an opportunity for youth to be heard — to share their experiences, their voice.

For Kasiah, a youth in care, the support of her family and Tikinagan workers has been a big part in her life.



Kasiah Fox
Youth in Care

“For the last two years, I made a lot of bad decisions in my life,” they said. “A lot of people helped me and supported me through the decisions and made sure they were always there for me. I helped myself by sticking to myself and learning more about myself and engaging my youth workers.”

The advice I'd give to youth today would be to keep working on yourself and accepting help,” said Kasiah.

**Scan to watch
Kasiah's video**



All throughout May, Tikinagan joined other Children's Aid Societies across the province in acknowledging Children and Youth In Care Day. Children and Youth in Care Day is an opportunity to acknowledge children and youth currently and formerly in care for their strengths and unique identities. This day allows us to strengthen our networks of support by increasing participation of community members and partners so that children and youth in and from care feel supported and thrive. It also helps to destigmatize views about children and youth in and from care by increasing awareness and understanding with the public.

New this year, we developed an education package for educators in our communities. This package contains important information on the history of Tikinagan, Duty to Report, and understanding what is abuse. As well, we provided three Ontario curriculum-based lesson plans for teachers to help students understand the experience.



In October, Tikinagan celebrated Dress Purple Day. It offers an opportunity to encourage everyone to speak up for every child and youth's right to safety and well-being in all spaces. Not just physical safety and well-being—children and youth have the right to be supported in all spaces.



This year for Dress Purple Day, we extended our partnership with Windsor-Essex CAS and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, featuring the Beastie Valley video series. The Beastie Valley videos are an incredible tool to reach our First Nations students with an easy message to understand that are relatable and fun. For teachers, it's a helpful, ready-to-use resource that is easy to adopt into their Ontario curriculum.

We asked children from our 30 First Nations to create their own beasties for Dress Purple Day. Below are some of the creations they sent to us.



MAMOW OSHKI-PIMAGIHOWIN - "WORKING TOGETHER TO LEARN NEW LIFE SKILLS"

Tikinagan's service model emphasizes prevention - prevention of harm and prevention of children coming into care. Mamow Oshki-Pimagihowin, which means "working together to learn new life skills," is Tikinagan's Prevention Services program. We develop and host activities, workshops and programs and connect families and children to community resources.

At the end of September, the Toronto Blue Jays and their Jays Care Foundation invited us for their Truth and Reconciliation Day game. In addition to the game viewed from Box Seats, six youth (from Sandy Lake, Poplar Hill, Bearskin Lake, Kasabonika and Pikangikum) were given VIP treatment and the opportunity to be a part of Blue Jays batting practice. Youth also experienced shopping in Toronto and visits to the CN Tower and Ripley's Aquarium.

"I felt like we were getting so pampered," said Jessie, one of the youth who attended the trip.



Scan to watch the youth trip to Toronto

MAMOW OSHKI-PIMAGIHOWIN - “WORKING TOGETHER TO LEARN NEW LIFE SKILLS”

Throughout the summer and into the fall, we held more than 20 Honouring Our Children Day events. Honouring Our Children Day is a time to celebrate our children, and remind them that they are special, as well as supported and cared for by their community. New this year, we created a HOC Day Toolkit intended to support the participation of various stakeholders, including Tikinagan, our communities, our families, our Foster Parents, and our youth.



At the Lil' Bands Tournament that took place in early February, Tikinagan sponsored 26 youth hockey teams. We hosted a wide variety of events including, a self-care day with free haircuts and manicures, bowling, movie night, craft night, pancake breakfasts, laser tag and a dinner with special guest, former NHLer Jason Simon. We also promoted player safety by providing equipment such as neck guards, mouth guards, and more.



**Scan to watch our 2024 Lil' Bands
Tournament video**

In our communities, we've held numerous prevention activities throughout the year, including: Halloween events in five different communities,

bannock making classes, traditional teachings, colouring contests, ribbon skirt making, sewing circle, craft nights, friendship bracelet making, Elders tea, movie nights, and community BBQs.



THE VOICES OF OUR YOUTH

At the Annual Chiefs Assembly in September 2023, two former youth in care took to stage in front of the Tikinagan Chiefs to announce the official launch of Tikinagan's newly formed youth advisory team.

This dynamic, youth-led initiative is aimed at empowering Indigenous youth in care and creating positive change within Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities by providing opportunities for children and youth currently and formerly in care from Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities including: opportunities to speak up and share

concerns, ideas, and visions for themselves; opportunities to engage with other youth; and to help guide Tikinagan's mandate.

The Team, later named by the youth as Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwig which means “Hear Us Youth,” will serve as a voice for children and youth in Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities. Comprised of a growing number of dedicated members, each bringing unique perspectives and experiences to the table, the team worked collaboratively to outline a shared vision, values, and goals over the last several months.



Tyleen, an 18-year-old from Poplar Hill First Nation, shared her personal journey through the child welfare system and her determination to give back.

“I joined the youth team to give back and to help support children who were like me going through a difficult time,” she said.

Tyleen stressed the importance of creating avenues for children and youth to seek help, and reminding them that they're not alone.

“I never thought I'd make it to this age, but I made it and I am really proud of myself. I was five when I first went into care and I absolutely hated being in care for a long time,” she said.

“Now that I’m older and know a lot more, I realized that Tikinagan had helped me a lot and made me into a person that I thought I’d never see. That’s why I joined the youth team – to give back and to help support children going through the same struggles I was,” said Tyleen.

Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwig have identified eight core values to guide their work: Leadership, Inspiration, Mobilization, Opportunities & Experiences, Being Heard, Advocating, Safe Spaces, and Skill Development. Their values reflect their commitment to creating a supportive environment for all youth, aimed at empowering and supporting Indigenous youth in and out of care.



Today, the team has grown to eight youth:

- **Reina Foster**, Lac Seul First Nation
- **Jaida Gregg**, Lac Seul First Nation
- **Memekwe Apetawakeesic Morriseau**, Weagamow First Nation
- **Aiden McKay**, Bearskin Lake First Nation
- **Tyleen Strang**, Poplar Hill First Nation
- **Moriano Owen**, Poplar Hill First Nation
- **Kris Moore**, Fort Severn First Nation
- **Nathan Linklater**, Sandy Lake First Nation



Scan to learn more about the youth team and how to sign up

FOSTER PARENT APPRECIATION

After fostering children for over 20 years, Jean and Art of Poplar Hill First Nation said the choice came as second nature.

“My parents used to be foster parents and it just seemed right that we follow in their footsteps by fostering children,” said Jean, translated from her Ojibway language.



The pair said they enjoy their role as foster parents and have compassion for the children they look after. They also emphasized the importance of being a safe and positive presence.

“You have to think about their safety and look after the children in a good way,” said Jean.

Having fostered children for both long-term and short-term periods, Jean and Art said the key to making it work is their partnership and working together.

“Sometimes my husband was busy with work or when the children would need to go to school, it was important to help each other out,” said Jean. Jean and Art understand the value of Tikinagan’s service model Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin “everyone working together to raise our children.”

Helping each other when it’s needed and supporting one another to successfully raise children in their care, the couple is a working example of the Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin service model put into practice.

They acknowledged their support for one another, but also the ways in which Tikinagan has supported the couple throughout their foster parenting journey.

As of March 31, 2024, Tikinagan has 213 Foster Homes. Our recruitment efforts continue through our relationships with our communities and our Human Resources’ meet and greet events.

To help promote the importance of community responsibility for raising our children, especially with Foster Parents, we hosted our third annual Foster Parent Appreciation Month in March. The celebration capped off with a gathering of over 120 attendees across Northwestern Ontario in eight communities.



Scan to watch Jean and Art’s video interview

Over **60%** of children in care are placed in a **Tikinagan foster home**
70% of those foster homes are in one of **Tikinagan's 30 First Nations**

Providing a positive, safe, and caring environment for children in care is always one of our top priorities. This year, we set up more Live-In Parent Model Agency Operated Homes (AOHs) separate from group care and staff model AOH's allowing our children and youth in care to live in an environment that feels like home with a consistent adult in their lives.



Scan to watch our staff's thank you message to our foster parents



Niigaanshkaawin was developed to honour the original vision of those who came before us. With the support of Bill C-92, Niigaanshkaawin gives us the opportunity to develop and govern our own child welfare laws.

This fiscal year, The steps we took on the Niigaanshkaawin trail included ongoing community engagement and discussions with our First Nations and community partners, development of toolkits, and Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin Kiiwebimaajjikaade (Revitalization) Project.

In the fall, we held multiple Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin Kiiwebimaajjikaade sessions with former and current staff and with our Elders. We asked them, does Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin hold true to the original vision and intention? What does Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin mean to you? Based on the traditional teachings of our communities, how we can apply this to our service delivery model today? We hosted these sessions in our language. We value language as the keystone to our cultural identity and to the preservation of culture.

"Let's keep the kids at home, let's teach the parents to be parents," said one of the participants on the last day of Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin Kiiwebimaajjikaade.



We continue to provide support and assistance to First Nations by assisting with First Nation Representative templates. Additionally, we have responded to requests for legal presentations by First Nations interested in learning more about what it takes to revitalize their own child wellbeing laws.

Robin Bunting, Niigaanshkaawin Project Manager, said: "We look forward to breaking trail with our First Nations and the steps they want to take to envision what child welfare looks like in their community. We will support their initiatives and provide tools and maps to support their journey."



Scan to learn more about Niigaanshkaawin

STAFF RECOGNITION

Our staff are dedicated and hardworking. In all our engagement, we are prioritizing more on in-person connections, both internally and externally. In June, we held a special day to connect with families with our Bring Your Children to Work Day. In the fall, we held our first in-person Supervisor meeting since the pandemic.

In 2023-24, our Training Unit delivered more than 416 training days to more than 1200 participants, including staff, Foster Parents, and our partners. We focused heavily on Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, case management, mental health strategies, leadership and first aid. In addition, we started offering language courses. Language is one of our values, so it's important our staff have the opportunity to learn the language so they can further their relationships with communities and families.



Tikinagan Child and Family Services would like to recognize employees who have reached their 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, and 35th anniversary of employment with the agency in the 2023-2024 fiscal year. Our thanks and congratulations go to the following employees for their many years of dedicated service to the families and children of this region.

5 Years

Taran Anderson
Sarah Backa
Whyderman Black
Jeremy Brown
Donna Bull
Nicole Burt
Mary Catzeddu
Gordon Closen
Carla Collins
Joyce Crawford
Sandra Fox
Kelly Franczak Dubreuil
Jamee Gordon
Dinah Kakekagumick
Teresa Littledeer
Elsie MacDonald
Ronald Macpherson
Rosemary McKay
Ester McKay
Caitlin Mitchell
Raul Morales-Morales
Tcakejik Morales-Morales
Jessica Peel
Ashley Pollock
Vicki Quedent
Connie Richer Vezeau
Naomi Sainnawap
Manzil Salman
Maria Schmidt
Sabreina Siliezar
Ernest Simard
Justin Stevens
Bryan Thompson
Selina Vincent
Joanne Wicklund

10 years

Brenda Beardy
Alicia Brown
John Coulombe
Karla Fuentes-Elizondo
Jamie Jobson
Rose Keewaykapow
Bill Kuzemczak
Carmen Letourneau
Ashley Mandryk
Alistair Mathews
Dion Ningewance
Katherine Pollard
Cindy Richards
Rita Toft (Duncan)

15 Years

Ella Barkman
Stanley Bois
Katherine Machimity
Jennifer Sapay
Jennifer Tinney
Florette Turpin
Curtis Zoccole

20 Years

Lillianna Barkman
Jim Cook
Marcella Fiddler
Fred Sky

25 Years

Roseanne McKay
Karla Stanley

35 Years

Diane Hoey



Scan to see what Mamow
Obiki-ahwahsoowin means
to our staff

FINANCIAL POSITION 2023-2024

Statement of Child Welfare Fund	Operations 23/24	
Operating Revenue	23/24	22/23
Child Welfare	\$ 74,803,600	\$ 73,971,700
Other	<u>\$ 62,510,166</u>	<u>\$ 40,829,795</u>
Total	<u>\$ 137,313,766</u>	<u>\$ 114,801,495</u>
Operating Expenses	23/24	22/23
Salaries & Benefits	\$ 54,882,310	\$ 51,968,227
Boarding & Client Services	\$ 54,129,181	\$ 40,710,550
Administration	<u>\$ 29,118,885</u>	<u>\$ 24,394,234</u>
Total	<u>\$ 138,130,376</u>	<u>\$ 117,073,011</u>
Fund Balance, Beginning of the year	\$ (2,271,516)	\$ -
Settlement of prior year deficits	\$ 2,067,638	\$ -
(Deficit) or Surplus for the year	\$ (816,610)	\$ (2,271,516)
Fund Balance, End of the year	\$ (1,020,488)	\$ (2,271,516)

A summary from Schedule 1 - Statement of Revenue and Expenses Child Welfare
- compiled by MNP LLP, Chartered Professional Accountants





IN MEMORIAM



Elsie Fox

Tikinagan mourns the loss of former Board Member and Elder Elsie Fox of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation.

The Independent First Nations Alliance Council, which includes KI, appointed Elsie as representative on Tikinagan's Board in 1998. She held that position until the Tikinagan Board of Directors appointed Elsie to the Elders Council in 2005.

"We're really going to miss Elsie, and we're certainly going to feel that absence of her guidance," said Thelma Morris, Tikinagan Executive Director. "Elsie was always sharing the history of our people and the way we raised our children. Those stories guided us in what we wanted to achieve at Tikinagan. She reminded us how those practises should be continued."

Morris added that Elsie was known for her spiritual guidance, as she would often pray for our people, our families and staff who were traveling.



Emily Gregg

Tikinagan mourns the loss of former Board Member and Elder Emily Gregg of Kasabonika Lake First Nation.

Shibogama First Nations Council appointed Emily as representative on Tikinagan's Board in March 2005. Two years later, the Tikinagan Board of Directors appointed Emily to the Elders Council.

Emily served Tikinagan right up to her final days, appearing via a video message at the 2022-2023 Annual Chiefs Assembly. She spoke passionately about Tikinagan, and encouraged the continued support of our families.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Kris is an artist and former youth in care currently receiving services through the Neegaan Inabin program. Kris is also an active member of our youth team, Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwag (Hear Us Youth).

“Boozhoo, Hello! My name is Kris Moore, I’m 20 years old. I come from Fort Severn First Nation. I’ve been in the foster care system ever since I was six years old and been with two different foster care agencies. Growing up in foster care has a long lasting impact on me, both good and bad, and I wish to share my experiences and elevate youth and their voices. Change is slow but just because it’s taking time it doesn’t mean it’s not happening.”

“I wanted to create artwork that would show love and togetherness. This is why I chose to create a family and a teepee. I used the teepee because it’s a traditional indigenous home and added a night sky with stars because as a kid I found some sense of comfort knowing my other siblings and my mom were seeing the same night sky as I was, even if we were separated.”



Scan to watch our Youth Spotlight on Kris and hear more about their story





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Tikinagan

Child & Family Services



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