

ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024

Collective Voices

HEALING • INTENTION • COMMUNITY



Ontario Native Women's Association

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President's Message

I am humbled to share my reflections on our achievements and challenges throughout 2023.

ONWA continues to be guided by our 10-year strategic

direction and vision as we celebrate and honour the safety and healing of Indigenous women and girls as they take up their leadership roles locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally for generations to come.

When I reflect on the last year, I am reminded how Indigenous women's realities continues to intersect with multiple systems and the impact that colonization continues to create in our lives. Despite these multifaceted challenges, Indigenous women continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and agency. One of the ways this resiliency was demonstrated over the past year through the expansion of our programs and services. ONWA launched several new initiatives or projects aimed at promoting economic empowerment, cultural and holistic wellness, Indigenous women's leadership and programs that allow Indigenous women to reclaim their rights. Our programs have not only reached more individuals, but have also increased our impact because of our Indigenous women centered solutions.

Along with our programmatic growth, ONWA has made substantial strides in diversifying our revenue to support the achievement of our strategic plan's goal of operational excellence. Through strategic partnerships, government funding, and increased engagement with the private sector, we have strengthened our financial sustainability. These efforts enable ONWA to be

a secure organization that respects our 52-year history and ensures Indigenous women have ongoing access to community, programs, and essential services for the next seven generations to come.

I was also honoured to take part in the 23rd Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I had the chance to witness the incredible leadership of ONWA Youth Council Members who amplified our collective voices on a global stage. I witnessed them not only supporting each other but also standing in solidarity with other Indigenous sisters from around the world. I am proud of our youth, for their courage and determination, they speak truth, and inspire positive change within their communities and beyond.

As we look to the future, ONWA remains committed to addressing the complex challenges facing Indigenous communities. We remain committed to amplifying the voices of Indigenous women, to advocate for policy reforms that uphold Indigenous women's rights and to deconstruct the colonial systems that have created barriers. ONWA is committed to collectively using our voices to reclaim our leadership and promote matriarchal Indigenous led solutions which will continue to guide us as we navigate the path ahead with determination and optimism.

Chi-Miigwetch,
Debra Vermette



CEO's Message

This past year has been a testament to the strength and commitment of our organization in serving Indigenous women, their families, and communities across Ontario.

We continue to see a growing need for ONWA's culturally grounded and Indigenous women-centered services and supports. This growing need is a reflection of the ongoing, systemic challenges Indigenous women face in balancing safety with meeting their basic needs. Indigenous women continue to experience disproportionately high rates of physical, sexual, and domestic abuse. This violence is exacerbated by historical trauma, inadequate access to justice, and systemic racism within the legal and social systems. Economic disparities also persist, as many Indigenous women encounter barriers to accessing stable employment, affordable housing, and quality education.

Addressing intersectional issues requires systemic changes and taking an Indigenous Gender-Based lens. ONWA's programs and services, and our "living model", consistently address the critical gaps in services and supports that best meet the needs of Indigenous women and their families. We must continue to push for meaningful reconciliation efforts, culturally safe services, and the dismantling of discriminatory policies and practices. Empowering Indigenous women to lead and participate in decision-making processes is essential to creating sustainable solutions that uphold our inherent rights.

To support our efforts, this past year we have strengthened our relations with Indigenous women and their organizations, government agencies, and community stakeholders. Over the last year, we have focused on our relationships locally and also internationally. I am honoured to work in relation with ONWA members and our sisters around the world. These collaborations have been important in advocating for policy changes, securing resources, and amplifying the voices of Indigenous women on critical issues affecting our lives. Globally, as Indigenous women, we face similar issues, but importantly, similar solutions – Indigenous women's work continues to be underfunded and unrecognized. We need core funding from governments and partners to invest in Indigenous women on the ground, in community, as that's where change is taking place.

Looking forward, we must continue our advocacy across all levels - locally, nationally and internationally. I extend my deepest gratitude to all the dedicated ONWA members, staff, Board of Directors, and youth whose unwavering commitment continues to drive our path forward. Together, we are creating positive change and building a future where Indigenous women and girls are safe, empowered and celebrated.

Chi-Miigwetch,
Cora McGuire-Cyrette



Organizational Structure

Our Vision

At the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA), we celebrate and honour the safety and healing of Indigenous women and girls as they take up their leadership roles in the family, community and internationally for generations to come.

About Us

ONWA is the oldest and largest Indigenous women’s organization in Canada. ONWA is a not-for-profit organization to empower and support all Indigenous women and their families through research, advocacy, policy development and programs. Established in 1971, ONWA delivers culturally enriched programs and services to Indigenous women and their families, regardless of their status or locality. We are committed to providing services designed and led by Indigenous women that strengthen communities and guarantee the preservation of Indigenous culture, identity, art, language, and our traditions. ONWA insists on social and cultural well-being for all Indigenous women and their families, so that all Indigenous women, regardless of tribal heritage may live their best life.

ONWA is both an Association of 14 Chapters (incorporated organizations providing frontline services) and 23 Councils (grassroots groups supporting community development models), as well as a front-line service delivery organization with 10 service delivery sites across the province. ONWA Membership provides Indigenous women the opportunity to collectively influence provincial, national and international policies and legislation as it relates to issues that affect them. Chapters and Councils are registered by regions (North, East, South, and West) based on the Medicine Wheel so that the voices of Indigenous women are heard from all four directions. Collectively, we work in solidarity with Indigenous women’s organizations across Canada and internationally.

Our Values

ONWA is committed to using a human rights framework for our work. As our foundation, we use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This framework supports Indigenous women’s individual and collective rights to have their own agencies, to be directly and meaningfully engaged on issues that directly impact them and in the reclaiming of their leadership.

RECLAIM

Indigenous women’s role as matriarchs (leadership) in their families and communities.

RESTORE

Indigenous women’s identity and inherent rights beyond a jurisdictional approach.

RECONCILE

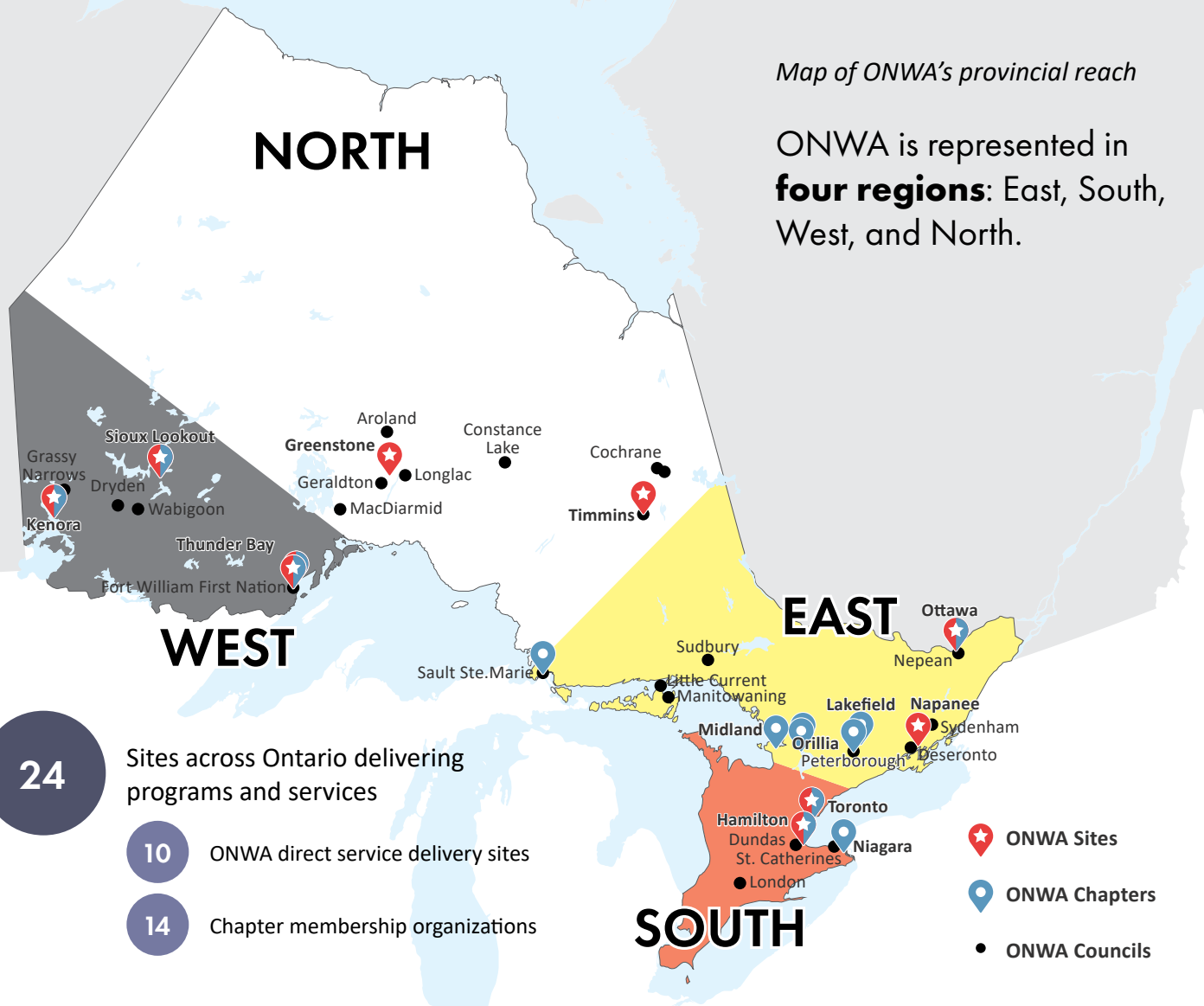
relationships to ensure that Indigenous women have a right to safety regardless of location.

RECOGNIZE

that Indigenous women are the medicine needed to heal ourselves, families, and communities.

Map of ONWA's provincial reach

ONWA is represented in **four regions**: East, South, West, and North.



24

Sites across Ontario delivering programs and services

- 10 ONWA direct service delivery sites
- 14 Chapter membership organizations

- ★ ONWA Sites
- 📍 ONWA Chapters
- ONWA Councils

ONWA Membership

14 CHAPTERS

Eastern Region

1. Biimaawzogin Regional Aboriginal Women's Circle (BRAWC)
2. Georgian Bay Native Women's Association
3. Lovesick Lake Native Women's Association
4. Minwaashin Lodge
5. Nakehndan: Knowing Your Truth
6. Nijikiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services
7. Orillia Native Women's Group

Southern region

8. Hamilton Wentworth Chapter of Native Women Inc.
9. Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
10. Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.

Western region

11. Beendigen Inc.
12. Biidaajiwun Inc.
13. Kenora Anishinaabe-Kweg Aboriginal Women's Organization
14. Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle

Northern Region

- N/A

23 COUNCILS

Eastern Region

1. All Our Relations
2. Bawaating Anishnabekwewok
3. Indigenous Women On-Line
4. Kingston Thunder Women
5. Rainbow Women
6. Tyendingaga Native Women's Association
7. Waibejawong Anishnabequek
8. Wiikwemikong Anishnawbekwek

Southern region

9. Deshkan Zii Bi Indigenous Women's Association
10. Indigenous Women of Niagara
11. Métis Women's Circle

Western region

12. Grassy Narrows Women's Group
13. Mindemoyag Women's Group
14. Thunder Bay Council
15. Wabigoon Aboriginal Women's Group

Northern Region

16. Anishnaabe Kateri Association
17. Anishnabequek Timmins
18. Aroland Ladies of 242
19. Constance Lake Anishinawbe Quek
20. Ginoogaming First Nation Council
21. Mamowedew
22. New Post Women's Group
23. Rocky Bay Women's Council



76

Programs/Projects/Services



372,701

Total Community Impact

186,006

Direct 1:1 Services

858

People ONWA has helped find and maintain safe and stable housing

751

Women ONWA has helped exit human trafficking

778

Child Apprehension Preventions
(Children ONWA assisted in prevention of CAS apprehension)

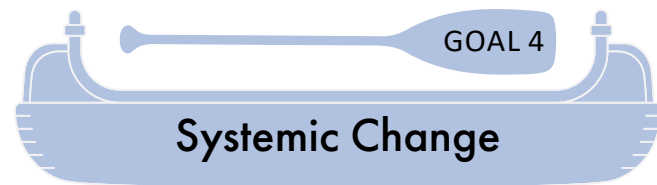
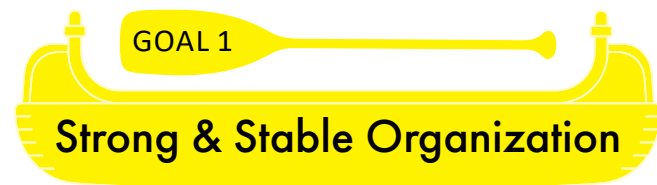
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Child Reunifications
(Children ONWA helped reunified with their families)

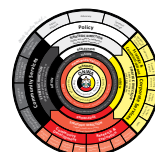
A Year in Review

In 2023-24, we moved into our third year of our Strategic Picture 2021-2031. We are well on our way to achieving our overarching goal of becoming a Centre of Excellence, recognized nationally, and continuing our growth built on a strong foundation of Indigenous women’s cultural knowledge and practices. All our work aligns with the four goals articulated by Indigenous women within our Membership, the community and organization.

In this section, we’ve provided a snapshot of some of our achievements and key activities towards our four strategic goals.



For more details read our Strategic Picture 2021-2031, available at onwa.ca/reports



To learn more about our Organizational Structure/Model, visit onwa.ca/about



Program Highlights

Centralized Intake Program

ONWA's Centralized Intake (CI) program provides immediate, brief, and case management services and referrals at the point of contact through one toll-free number. The CI program continues to meet the changing needs of the community through a provincial network of services while eliminating wait-times and service gaps.

In 2023-24, the CI program provided over 181,707 individual services and supports across ONWA's 23 service delivery locations, for example:

- 17,684 Immediate Services
- 12,877 Brief Services
- 11,944 Case Management
- 125,060 Supports & Safety Planning
- 480 Coordinated Food Security Hampers
- 2,643 Residential Addiction Treatment
- 151 Eviction Prevention Supports

In 2023-24, the CI program noted a 55% increase in service requests, including systems navigation, cultural supports, healing pathways, and advocacy. Community Services and Community Development supported these community connections all across the province of Ontario.

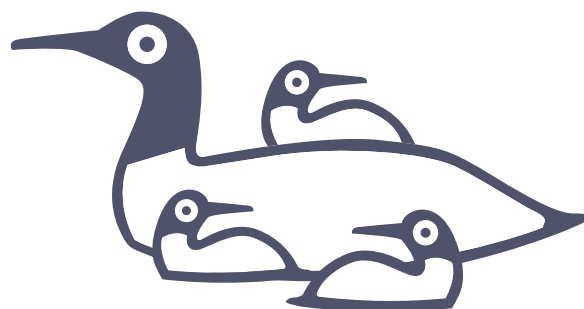
"Intake provided useful information and made me aware of supports and services I was not aware of and how I was able to access right away."

"Don't change anything, excellent services, and keep up the good work."

Trusted Sources – Indigenous Registration Program

The Trusted Sources - Indigenous Registration program has five fully operational depots at ONWA's Thunder Bay, Hamilton, Ottawa, Sioux Lookout, and Timmins Site locations. This program was developed to support community members to obtain, renew, and/or update their Indigenous family status. Since program inception at the end of 2023, evaluations show an 86% excellent experience utilizing this program with 81 (30% were youth) people being successful in obtaining new Indigenous status cards. This program has facilitated nine information sessions on services offered including Bill S-3 and addressing known sex-based inequalities in Indigenous registration. This is a beginning step towards reconciliation by ensuring Indigenous women, youth, and their families have more access to obtain their Indigenous status and connection to community.

"Very helpful, and easy to work with, the worker makes accessing services a priority."





Honoring our history to guide our path forward

ONWA published an article titled *Ontario Native Women's Association: Finding Our Voice*, in AM Digital, a UK-based digital academic publishing company, 1980's Culture and Society archival resource. The article and archive offers a reflection of the Indigenous women's movement in Canada from ONWA's inception in 1971. This publication was made possible through a historical document review including meeting minutes and newsletters from ONWA, which are also included in the resource archive. This project was undertaken in recognition that to know where we are going, we need to know where we come from. ONWA honours the hard work and dedication of our founding members and Indigenous women leaders who have advocated throughout history for change needed for the generations to come.

Honouring Louis Riel Day

ONWA led a significant community campaign, "Louis Riel Day Weaving Stories and Culture," to celebrate Metis women, reaching almost 400 individuals through Zoom and Facebook livestream.



Learn more or read the She Is Wise Magazine here: onwa.ca/she-is-wise-magazine

Celebrating She is Wise magazine

In August 2023, ONWA's She is Wise magazine received two awards at the Indigenous Journalist Association's (IJA, previously known as the Native American Journalist Association) National Native Media Conference. ONWA was honoured with second place in Best Environmental Coverage and second place in General Excellence in the Professional Division.

Indian Residential School video series

ONWA staff created and shared a 13-part video series on supporting residential school survivors and their families with healing, wellness and reconnection to culture. The video launch included a contest where participants were given the opportunity to win a wellness bundle containing cultural and safety items to support their well-being.

Advocating for Systemic Change

ONWA advocated for policy changes that increase the safety of Indigenous women and girls across all systems they interact with on a daily basis. In 2023-24, ONWA **wrote 30 policy submissions and had over 70 meetings with government officials** to respond to and influence policy and legislation at the provincial, federal and international level. Examples of our policy submissions across ONWA's nine strategic areas include:

Mother Earth

- Submission on Amendments to Ontario's *Environmental Assessment Act*
- Submission to the Special Rapporteur on Rights to Clean Water and Sanitation

Family Violence

- Submission to Department of Justice on potential coercive control offence in the context of intimate relationships

Child Welfare

- Submission on proposed policy for verifying First Nations, Inuk or Métis Elder, Knowledge Keeper, Healer, Medicine Person, Traditional Person or Cultural Person to be employed in licensed residential settings
- Submission on proposed legislative and regulatory amendments to Strengthen Oversight of Licensed Children's Out of Home Care
- Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering: What we heard from Indigenous women on their experiences with Ontario's child welfare system
- Submission on the Five-Year Review of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*
- Collaborative Submission with other urban Indigenous partners on the Five-Year Review of the *Child, Youth and Family Service Act, 2017* (Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children,

Youth and Families; Métis Nation of Ontario; Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres; Ontario Native Women's Association; and Tungasuvvingat Inuit)

- Submission to the Senior Officials Committee Responsible for Human Rights (SOCHR) on the Concluding Observations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Human Trafficking

- Submission to Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on Bill S-224s

Housing and Homelessness

- Submission to Indigenous Affairs Ontario (IAO) on the housing needs and priorities of urban Indigenous women
- Submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) on Ontario's Updated Provincial Planning Statement
- Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing

Justice

- Submission to Department of Justice on Third Annual Progress Report on Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Submission to Department of Justice on the Indigenous Justice Strategy

Health

- Submission on United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination General Recommendation No. 37 on Racial discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to health
- Submission on Ontario Health's First Nations, Inuit, Métis And Urban Indigenous Health Framework 2023-2024
- Submission on a regulation to prescribe entities under the *Seniors Active Living Centres Act, 2017* (SALCA)

- Submission on Ministry of Health’s updated Public Health Standard on Health Equity, Health Equity Guideline, and Relationships with Indigenous Communities Guideline



International Submissions

- Canada’s Fourth Universal Periodic Review under the United Nations Human Rights Council
- Ontario Human Rights Commission testimony to the Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples
- ONWA’s response to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People’s (EMRIP) call for inputs to inform their study on “Laws, legislation, policies, constitutions, judicial decisions and other mechanisms in which States had taken measures to achieve the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with article 38 of the Declaration.”
- ONWA Comments on draft CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making

“Young Indigenous women are the future leaders of our families, communities, and nations - it is important to support Indigenous youth to take up their leadership roles. Their voices, and those of all Indigenous women, are critical at these UN sessions. Under UNDRIP, and echoed in CEDAW General Recommendation 39, we have the right to be empowered in our roles as leaders and knowledge-bearers, and to be at decision-making tables.” – Cora McGuire-Cyrette, CEO, ONWA

Indigenous youth are the future leaders our communities need

In our teachings, Indigenous youth are sacred, a gift from Creator. ONWA has made a commitment to ensure an Indigenous youth attends all international sessions in which ONWA participates. At the 23rd Session of UNPFII, members of ONWA’s Youth Council called upon the Permanent Forum to take the following actions to uplift, ensure, and respect the leadership of Indigenous youth:

- Recognize and respect Indigenous youth as leaders and change makers in their communities.
- Invest in the futures of Indigenous youth through sustainable, flexible, and multiyear financing
- Ensure that Indigenous youth voices inform and lead decision making.



“It is truly a privilege to be able to be representing many of the youth here at UNFPII23. Growing up surrounded by the many gifts and teachings from the land and community, it is exciting to be able to share knowledge with other youth, and tell our stories.” – Hunter Cobiere, Youth Director, ONWA

ONWA’s Mother Earth Strategy Part of the United Nations Water Action Agenda

At the UN 2023 Water Conference, ONWA shared our plan to develop our Mother Earth Strategy as a commitment under the Conference’s Water Action Agenda. We understand that to be a national and international leader, and to make real systemic change for Indigenous women, we must begin with the land, water, and ceremony. In 2023-24, ONWA updated our commitment based on what has been heard from its engagements on Mother Earth.



Learn more about our updated commitment to the Water Action Agenda here: sdgs.un.org/partnerships/ontario-native-womens-association-mother-earth-strategy



Intergovernmental Updates

Memorandum of Understanding

ONWA and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), which represents Ontario's 444 municipalities, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU is the first of its kind relationship between AMO and an Indigenous women's organization. It is a partnership agreement for ONWA and AMO to work together in the spirit of reconciliation to improve Indigenous women's safety, wellbeing and access to services in our communities and build greater understanding within municipal governments of their role in responding to the unique and diverse needs of Indigenous women and their families in Ontario

Provincial Relationship Table

ONWA continued its Relationship Table meetings with provincial inter-ministerial partners. The Table was coordinated by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and was an opportunity to discuss and action issues of importance

to Indigenous women. Meetings focused on Indigenous approaches to health and healing and Indigenous approaches to prevention-focused services in child welfare and youth justice.

Relationship Protocol with Ontario Health

ONWA and Ontario Health signed a historic relationship protocol that marks a significant milestone in ONWA's efforts improve to health outcomes for Indigenous women and girls across the province. By formalizing this partnership, Ontario Health and ONWA committed to working together to address health disparities, promote cultural safety and enhance access to quality health care services for Indigenous women, girls, and their families across the province. This relationship protocol is a major step in ensuring Indigenous women's voices inform Ontario Health's work to improve health outcomes of First Nation, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous peoples and communities. ONWA was engaged in developing Ontario Health's framework for its First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous Health Plan.

International Updates

As ONWA works towards realizing our goal as a Centre of Excellence for Indigenous women, we know that uplifting and amplifying Indigenous women's voices at all levels of government and across systems is critical. That's why ONWA continued to use international human rights mechanisms to reclaim Indigenous women's inherent leadership and hold Canada accountable for its commitments and legal obligations to uphold Indigenous women's rights.

ONWA and members of ONWA's Board of Directors participated in key United Nations and International sessions, including:

- The **2023 Women Deliver Conference**, the largest global gathering on gender equality which takes place every four years
- The **9th Healing our Spirit Worldwide Conference** brought together thousands of Indigenous leaders and health care professionals from around the world to share and celebrate the healing power of traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultures. ONWA held the following workshops:
 - Indigenous Youth Envisioning Change session lead by ONWA Youth Board Directors
 - Trauma-Informed Approaches and Living Service Models
 - Mindimooyenh Health Program
- The **68th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**, the UN agency responsible for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The theme for the 68th Session was addressing poverty and financing from a gender perspective. ONWA hosted two parallel events that brought together Indigenous women who shared their experiences and learned about ONWA's Indigenous Gender Based Analysis (IGBA). ONWA also co-developed and facilitated Canada's only side event at CSW and the first ever that focused on Indigenous women by the Canadian Government.
- The **55th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and Canada's 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on its human rights record**. The HRC is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the world and for addressing situations of human rights violations. The UPR evaluates a country's efforts to enhance its human rights situation, with countries reviewed every 4.5 years and receiving recommendations from UN member states. Canada underwent its 4th UPR in 2023-24 and received 332 recommendations to improve human rights in Canada. ONWA participated through:
 - Engagement with Canada to provide advice on which of the recommendations Canada should accept
 - Written submission calling for all recommendations to be accepted and spoke at the Federal, Provincial, Territorial (FPT) Senior Officials Committee Responsible for Human Rights (SOCHR) meeting in January 2024
 - Submitted video statements in the 55th Session of the HRC to reiterate our feedback that Canada should accept all recommendations and immediately implement those that ensure the safety of Indigenous women
- The **23rd Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)**, which included a theme on enhancing the voices of Indigenous youth. ONWA held two side events at the Forum:
 - Unbraiding Colonization through the Restoration of Indigenous Women's Leadership
 - Collective Solidarity with Indigenous Women and Youth



Making Progress on ONWA's 9 Strategic Issues

ONWA draws on the expertise and wisdom of our members and Indigenous women throughout Ontario, recognizing their unique insights and solutions to community issues. Guided by nine strategic priorities, with safety as our central focus, depicted in the accompanying flower diagram, our efforts tackle the interconnected challenges faced by Indigenous women. This section of our Annual Report highlights our progress and initiatives within each strategic priority, underscoring our commitment to addressing the complex impacts of colonization, sexism, and racism.

Mother Earth

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women across the lifecycle have shared responsibility to care for Mother Earth and all our non-human relations. As Indigenous women, we use our traditional teachings and the wisdom of our ancestors to heal, protect and nurture Mother Earth because we know that when she is safe and well, we are all safe and well.

Program Highlights

Cultural Program

ONWA's Cultural program guides First Nation, Metis, and Inuit healing pathways that include traditional health and healing, land-based learning and language, ceremony, community events/programs, and program development initiatives in collaboration with other ONWA programs, ONWA membership, and community partners.

Over the past year, this program supported Indigenous women, youth, and their families to expand their traditional knowledge and their sacred bundles through:

- 313 individuals supported through Traditional Healing Pathways
- 335 Ceremonies
- 550 Land-Based Initiatives and Teachings
- 117 Cultural Activities
- 116 Youth supported through Mentoring

ONWA's Cultural program is guided by seasonal activities connected to the 13 Grandmother



"This is an amazing teaching and brought balance and grounding to my healing journey."

Moon Cycles and the 7 Sacred Grandfather Teachings. Each season, the Cultural team supports ONWA staff at all 10 sites, and community to prepare and to take up our roles and responsibilities. Reclaiming our relationship with Mother Earth is a priority for land and water protection, medicine healing and harvesting, ceremony, and storytelling. These traditional practices enable us to share how to safeguard Mother Earth, practice Indigenous ways of knowing and reclaiming women's role as matriarchs (leaders) for our future generations.

Healing Medicine Turtle

The Healing Medicine Turtle is part of the ONWA's Healing Bundle. The turtle is a teaching tool to guide community on their wellness journey and to promote healing from trauma. Looking through the lens of a two-eyed seeing approach, both medicines and sensory work together to guide grounding techniques and mindfulness practices along with turtle teachings of resiliency, growth, and balanced self-care. ONWA's Healing Medicine Turtle's teachings have been delivered to 157 community members and over 140 ONWA staff. The ONWA Healing Medicine Turtle has traveled throughout the province, country, and internationally to share cultural connectedness and healing wise practices.

"It was nice to be on the land with my kids to help guide them to care for the land we live on, while learning traditional teachings and about sacred medicines."



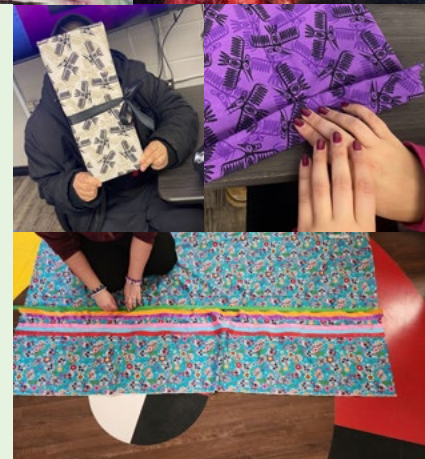


Youth Teams – Youth in Transition, Housing, Cultural Intervention, and Youth Education Programs

ONWA’s Youth Teams - Youth in Transition (YIT), Youth in Transition Housing (YITH), Youth Cultural Intervention, and Youth Education Support Workers - provided youth with case management and programming. The Youth Teams’ approach to capacity building while engaging with youth is characterized by respect, honour, and empowerment. The Youth Teams engaged participants to connect with Indigenous cultural and traditional programming. These immersive experiences empower youth to take on their inherent roles, to strengthen future generations, and to foster healing and reclamation. The Youth Teams support youth to navigate through complex adult systems while creating autonomy, empowerment, and the development of strong independent Indigenous youth into their adulthood journey.

- Youth in Transition supported 97 youth safety and care plans to prepare for transitioning out of child welfare and creating connections within community.
- Youth Education Support engaged with over 40 youth for post-secondary education and training.

“ONWA has helped me grow and connect with my culture and learn so much, the staff are always amazing and so welcoming, always making it a safe and happy environment for everyone.”



- The Youth Housing assisted 15 youth to obtain and maintain independent housing.
- Youth Indigenous Cultural Intervention supported over 60 youth for prevention-based services regarding justice, child welfare, and violence.
- Collaborated with the Treaty 3 Anishinaabe Fur Trapping Course hosted by ONWA’s Cultural Team.

Over this past year, ONWA facilitated monthly youth groups on making hand drums, ribbon skirts and shirts, sharing circles, fire stories, and making Healing Medicine Turtles. Weekly youth Anishinaabemowin (language) classes were well received, and the planning began for ONWA to create a language booklet.



Ontario Native Women's Association | 52nd Annual General Assembly | Day One: September 8, 2023

Membership Highlights

Mother Earth Day Community Cleanup Challenge

In honour of Mother Earth Day, ONWA hosted a Community Cleanup Challenge and invited ONWA members across the province to participate. Beendigen Inc., for example, hosted events at all four of their site locations in Thunder Bay. The winner of the Mother Earth Day Community Clean Up Challenge was the Orillia Native Women's Group, who used the prize to build raised garden beds to grow medicines and traditional foods for their community.

Community Gardens in Hamilton

The Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter of Native Women partnered with Home Depot for their Mother Earth Day activities and were able to rejuvenate their existing raised garden beds which will now grow sacred medicines. With Home Depot's expertise, new raised beds for flowers and vegetables were built for community members to enjoy. The new garden space will be used for teachings with Elders and knowledge sharers, moon ceremonies, for growing their own medicines such as sweetgrass, sage, tobacco, and strawberries, and to provide fresh vegetables and herbs to community members.

Throughout April 2023, ONWA launched the [Protecting Mother Earth Campaign](#), which included 5 short videos and calls for action on reducing plastics, food waste, clothing and textiles, and garbage and landfills. The Campaign was shared on social media, ONWA's website and YouTube.

Advocacy Highlights

Working in Solidarity with Land and Water Defenders

ONWA continues to raise awareness of the violence that Indigenous women face as defenders of their lands and waterways. In 2023, the Grassy Narrows Women's Group, an ONWA member, again raise awareness of the devastating impacts of ongoing mercury poisoning on the health, culture and livelihoods of members of Grassy Narrows First Nation.



Family Violence

ONWA recognizes that Indigenous women are at the center of our families and communities. ONWA celebrates the shared strength and resiliency of Indigenous women and girls, despite experiences of violence and multiple barriers when seeking help. Centering the voices of Indigenous women with living/lived experience of family violence is foundational to all of ONWA's work.

Program Highlights

Babaamendam – Trauma Informed Program

The Trauma Informed program provides Indigenous women, youth, and their families various forms of traditional healing, ceremony, balanced self-care and wellness, and activities to create safe spaces. The Trauma Informed program utilizes a “walk with approach” for community members to support long term healing, cultural connectiveness, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and reclaiming.

In 2023-24, the Trauma Informed program provided services and direct linkages between community members and Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Ceremony. This essential program continuously adapts to the cultural practices, protocols, and Indigenous knowledge from different communities. When Indigenous women are at the centre, we ensure that all Indigenous women, youth, and community have access to individualized traditional matriarchal healing supports as an integral part of their care planning.

Community Wellness Program

The Community Wellness program specializes in supporting Indigenous women and youth in Thunder Bay and Kenora to navigate domestic violence systems and provides personalized supports for healing and wellness. The program focuses on prevention-based services and supporting women who have lived experiences of domestic violence through cultural connectiveness and creating safe spaces. The Community Wellness program provides 1-1 support, specialized programming, cultural intervention practices, and brief therapy.



“Thank you for your ongoing support and helping me to reach my goals, I could not have done this alone without ONWA’s support.”

Over the past year, the program continued to support family reunification plans while assisting community members in the prevention of their children being apprehended; and advocacy; Examples of the supports provided to Indigenous women and their families was to safety plan; navigate appropriate systems; access basic needs for them and their children; ONWA support staff attending case conferences with community members; and reviewing and implementing plans of care to reduce the risk of a children being apprehended.

The Community Wellness program partnered with Woodland Artisan, Joshua LeClair of Woodland Art Workshop. The program focused on healing through art demonstrating technique and how each individual emotions are connected to the piece they created. Participants were immersed in this project as the presentation provided information on their identity, their background, and their personal history, and this created a safe space with culture.

Breaking Free from Family Violence (BFFV)

- 2,033 Families supported to improve outcomes through the BFFV Program
- 145 Children reunified with their families
- 778 Children prevented from being apprehended by a Child Welfare agency in Ontario

BFFV program operated across the province to support Indigenous mothers experiencing domestic violence and involvement with child welfare. The program reduced apprehensions and increased reunification of Indigenous children with their mothers. ONWA continued to build capacity within member organizations by also providing presentations that provided tools and resources to prevent family violence.

"You're a gift sent from the creator, and I can't put into words how much I appreciate you helping me through this process. I don't know where we would be if I hadn't met you. Thank you so much for your support..."

"I feel renewed and inspired to be kind in my everyday interactions. I work hard to have a baseline of joy and kindness; I genuinely want to help my community." (Lateral Violence to Lateral Kindness Presentation)

Membership Highlights

Parenting Across the Lifecycle program launch.

In 2023-24, ONWA launched the Parenting Across the Lifecycle program with 3 Chapters: Beendigen, Inc. in Thunder Bay, Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle in Sioux Lookout and the Georgian Bay Native Women's Association in Midland. ONWA supported Chapters to understand and deliver the program to increase engagement with other local service providers and community members to identify ongoing needs and areas of program development.

Advocacy Highlights

Learning Network's Provincial Advisory Group

ONWA signed on as an Advisory member to the Learning Network's Provincial Advisory Group. The Learning Network at the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) was established in 2011 and is based out of Western University. The Learning Network addresses the continuum of gender-based violence (GBV) including sexual and domestic violence, sexual harassment, stalking, and effects of exposure to domestic violence on children. The Learning Network releases up-to-date, evidence-based digital materials, plans and hosts public virtual educational events, and brings together professionals in the GBV field to share learnings and identify best practices and emerging issues.

The Learning Network Provincial Advisory Group (PAG) serves to help inform the work of the Learning Network by expanding the impact and reach of education and training materials; contributing to the development of the annual workplan; and supporting the Learning Network in adhering to principles of diversity, equity, and accessibility.

Addressing the Root Causes of Family Violence

ONWA submitted our considerations regarding a legislative proposal to amend Canada's Criminal Code to introduce a coercive control offence in the context of intimate relationships. ONWA underscored the imperative to address the systemic root causes of violence against Indigenous women, including coercive control, and for community-based solutions to healing. We called for action on the MMIWG National Inquiry's Calls for Justice; investment in Indigenous women's healing and leadership; and the restoration of Indigenous women's rights, including the elimination of remaining sex discrimination in the *Indian Act*.



Sexual Violence

ONWA recognizes that all Indigenous women are deserving of safety, dignity, and respect. Yet Indigenous women are three times more likely to experience sexual assault than non-Indigenous women. To end sexual violence, we must work together at all levels and across all systems to confront and address racism, sexism, and gender discrimination that fuels violence against Indigenous women.

“Miigwech for being here to support me in navigating these systems and being an advocate for Indigenous women.”

Program Highlights

Indigenous Sexual Assault Prevention Program

The Indigenous Sexual Assault Prevention program works in collaboration with ONWA’s Indigenous Victim Family Liaison program to provide immediate services and supports to Indigenous women who are survivors of assault in Sioux Lookout. The program specializes in providing specific case management practices and wrap around supportive services through cultural intervention practices that support healing. In 2023-24, this program was over capacity and there was a 58% increase in requests to assist Indigenous women to navigate judicial systems post sexual assault.

Indigenous Sexual Violence Awareness Training (ISVAT) Program

In 2023-2024, the ISVAT program established 30 partnerships with agencies and groups dedicated to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls. These partnerships enhanced our collaborative efforts in combating violence against Indigenous women and raise further awareness in the community.

Throughout the year, the ISVAT program conducted 75 workshops and engagements with over 1000 participants. These engagements were divided into two streams: education and awareness for community members, and capacity building for front-line workers and

community agencies/service providers. Within the community, the Sexual Violence Awareness Coordinator conducted over 60 workshops with more than 880 participants. Workshop topics included online safety, situational awareness, consent/healthy boundaries, sexual violence prevention/resources for service providers and ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

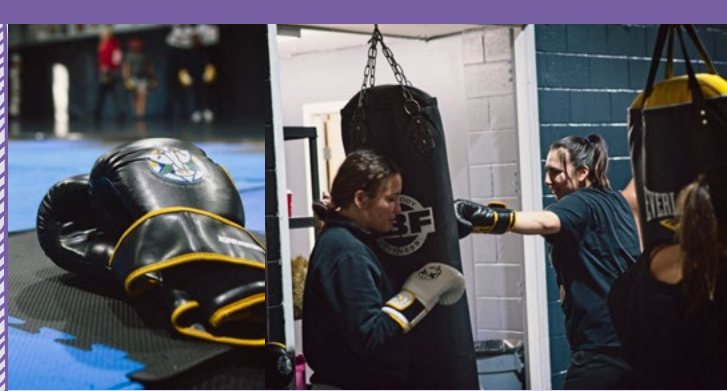
The ISVAT program organized two campaigns dedicated to advocating for transformative measures against violence targeting Indigenous women, girls and their families. ONWA also organized a Walk to End Violence in Thunder Bay in May 2023 in support of the nationwide Moosehide Campaign.

Strong Hands to Stop Violence Poetry Night

ONWA hosted its 8th annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night in support of the United Nation’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The evening featured guest poets including Cher Obediah and musicians Sara Kae and Susan Aglukark. Volume 7 of the Strong Hands Stop Violence Annual Poetry book was released at the event. This volume was ONWA’s largest to date with 70 poems submitted by poets and artists from across Turtle Island.

She is Strong and Stand-Up Boxing Program

ONWA’s She is Strong program expanded to 12 weeks, with two sessions running during the year, supporting over 300 participants. Each session supported Indigenous girls aged 11-18 in increasing their knowledge of online safety, consent, situational awareness, healthy



Chi-Miigwetch/ thank you so much for the amazing opportunity to be a part of tonight's ONWA's event. I truly appreciate it 🙏 my heart feels full ❤️. ONWA really knows how to put on an event, What a beautiful evening!



Child Welfare

ONWA honours and celebrates Indigenous women's inherent rights and traditional roles as life givers, mothers, and caregivers. ONWA advocates for a reduction in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system through wholistic prevention-focused services that support the family, which are designed and delivered by and for Indigenous women.

Program Highlights

Indigenous Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program

The Indigenous Healthy Babies Healthy Children (IHBHC) program supported Indigenous women and their families with prevention, early intervention strategies and services, and health supports. In 2023-24, the IHBHC program supported 448 Indigenous families to access cultural supports and interventions and supported families in planning for child welfare reunification. Land-based therapy, expanded pathways for healthy growth and development, embracing new additions to the community, and delivering comprehensive support are integral components of the service goals, coordination, and program accessibility.

The IHBHC program delivers the Maamawi "All Together" Parenting program across the province. The program has successfully completed two 9-week group parenting sessions. The Maamawi "All Together" Parenting program delivers both traditional and contemporary style helping approaches that can be altered to fit different Indigenous teachings and communities. The program focuses on providing ceremonies, guiding children, responding to the needs and behaviours of children, ensuring safety and security within parenting, and managing stress. Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Helpers support the program with Indigenous teachings and guidance throughout the program.

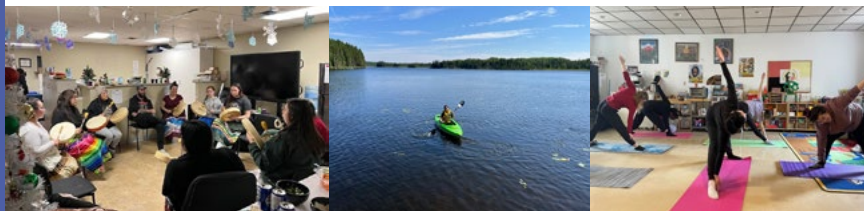
Maamawi "All Together" Parenting Program

In 2023-24 ONWA added a train-the-trainer component to the Maamawi "All Together Parenting" program training. ONWA provided resources, such as a Facilitator Manual and a Participant Manual, to support front-line staff and service providers' learning ONWA's planning tools and implementation plans to further expand the training to membership.

In response to, requests from child welfare organizations, ONWA adapted the Maamawi "All Together Parenting" program training to create a new Alternative Caregiver Training for non-Indigenous foster parents who are caring for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children. This cultural competency training was developed to align with new regulations (O. Reg. 156/18 under the CYFSA and Policy Directive: Residential Licensing 001-23: Training on the Provision of Foster Care) that came into effect in July 2023. ONWA created a "Caring for Our Children" information resource as a takeaway workbook for participants which provides key messages from the training and write-in sections where caregivers can develop their own parenting bundle and keep local resources.



"I am extremely grateful for the opportunity and experience of being able to attend this training in person and gain a greater knowledge and understanding of the Maamawi program and experience Thunder Bay and the ONWA environment. Chi Miigwetch ONWA <3."





"Thank you to the worker who knew what I had to do to advocate to CAS & get my kids back. More people need to know where to get help like this."

Child Welfare Advocate Program:

The Child Welfare Advocate program is part of the Breaking Free from Family Violence (BFFV) program. ONWA's Child Welfare Advocate program focuses on Indigenous women and their families involved in the child welfare system or women who have experienced family violence. The program assists Indigenous women and their families in navigating the complexities of the child welfare system and advocates for women to establish sustainable crisis management support for themselves and their families. The Child Welfare Advocate program focuses on prevention and stability which has resulted in 654 prevention services. The program facilitated 88 child welfare advocacy services with a strong emphasis on cultural integration, prevention, and early intervention strategies.

The Child Welfare Advocate program presented "Enough is Enough" to assist over 40 families to understand domestic violence and the effect it has on the family. A woman stated she is now able to recognize these unhealthy behaviours, and her goal is to make change towards wellness and safety for her family.

Membership Highlights

Many Chapters (Beendigen, SWAC, NCNW, NWRCT, GBNWA, HCNW, Biidajuwun, Minwaashin, ONWG) attended the Annual Worker Training and spoke of their appreciation

of the knowledge gained, cultural practices and ceremonies learned and their overall experience. Participants shared that it was great to meet and network in person and expand their bundle through the teachings and cultural activities provided by the Knowledge Holders and Elders. New friendships, partnerships and connections were made throughout this training.

Advocacy Highlights

Centering Indigenous Women and Children and Prevention Work in Child Welfare

ONWA continued to advocate for a reduction in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system through prevention-focused supports that restore Indigenous women's inherent rights and traditional roles as life givers. ONWA advocated for increased investments into Indigenous women's organizations who are leading prevention, early intervention, and reunification programs that integrate traditional healing practices to support families and communities. ONWA continued to participate in the provincial Métis, Inuit, Urban Indigenous Technical Table (MIUI) and influenced the development of forthcoming Prevention Focused Indigenous Service Provider (PFISP) regulations under the *Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)*. These regulations will assist Indigenous women and their children in receiving cultural supports and prevention services delivered by ONWA and other Indigenous women's organizations at the earliest opportunity.



Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering

ONWA produced a report titled *Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering: What we heard from Indigenous women on child welfare*. This report was informed by engagements with Indigenous women across the province about their experience with the child welfare system. Through these engagements, Indigenous women identified the need to increase dedicated supports for Indigenous mothers and caregivers, as well as Indigenous children and youth. They also identified the need to prioritize prevention by investing in Indigenous women’s healing, and to systematically transform the child welfare system. The report acknowledges that Indigenous women’s voices and experiences must be centred in all aspects of efforts to change the child welfare system.

Review of Ontario’s Child, Youth and Family Services Act

As part of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services’ five-year review of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, ONWA submitted our recommendations on how to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. ONWA highlighted the need to replace the section 125 (1) “duty to report a child in need of protection. with a “duty to refer” to prevention focused Indigenous service providers. ONWA also recommended that the system shift funding from child protection services to Indigenous-led prevention and early intervention services. This shift in funding is critical given that approximately 5% of Ontario’s transfer payment funding for children and youth at risk was invested in Indigenous community and prevention support in 2022-23, compared to approximately 84% invested in Indigenous and non-Indigenous child protection services.



3rd Annual Our Children, Our Way Conference

ONWA had the honour of presenting at the national forum for Indigenous Child and Well-Being. ONWA presented on its child welfare report, *Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering, What we heard from Indigenous Women on Child Welfare, June 2023*. The presentation highlighted what we learned from Indigenous women about child welfare and shared our strength-based engagement practices.



Human Trafficking

ONWA is a leader in culturally grounded anti-human trafficking supports. Our Courage for Change program is the largest Indigenous anti-human trafficking program in Canada. All Indigenous women have inherent gifts, and we are committed to walking with Indigenous women with living/lived experience as they navigate their healing journeys to foster empowerment and reclaim our roles.

"Thank you for being there and being ready to help me, without this help I never would have got out, thank you again, for my life."

Program Highlights

Courage for Change: Anti-Human Trafficking Program

The Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking program supports Indigenous women and youth to exit human trafficking (HT) or sexual exploitation. The program is offered in 11 locations within the province of Ontario through a network of services delivered by ONWA and ONWA members who provide immediate support services, exit strategies, and intensive case management. Program highlights in 2023-24, include:

- 751 Indigenous women supported to successfully exit human trafficking
- 626 Safety plans completed to assist Indigenous women to exit exploitation
- 941 Indigenous women supported with addiction supports
- 127 Indigenous women were provided housing support and services
- 42 Indigenous women were supported through criminal, sexual, and domestic judicial systems

Using a Living Model Approach, the program adapts to the changing needs and trends of the community, including support on how to navigate complex systems, connecting Indigenous women to culture, and increasing the overall safety for Indigenous women, youth, and community.

Courage for Change: Corrections Facility Human Trafficking Outreach

The Courage for Change - Anti-Human Trafficking program in Thunder Bay in collaboration with Thunder Bay Correctional Centre provided direct intakes for immediate and brief services to Indigenous women and youth exiting the facility. Supports included discharge planning, safety planning, and support to access safety upon discharge. Services provided were relocation to a community or place of safety, advocacy, and referrals to appropriate programs such as shelters and housing. The Courage Team provided Discharge Outreach Bags to Indigenous women and youth upon release. The Outreach Bags contain important information on how and where to access support and services, bus tickets, a meal voucher, a hygiene kit, and a few other essential items to assist in the transition to safety and stabilization.

Community Safety Liaison (Guns and Gangs) Program

In 2023-2024, the Community Safety Liaison program focused on increasing awareness surrounding the intersection of increasing personal safety, situational awareness, current trends in human trafficking and gang entrenchment, as well as prevention strategies rooted in culture.

The Community Safety Liaison program held training sessions and engaged with community members, new partners, and stakeholders. Community feedback will inform 2024-25 planning to bring in educational elements on the effects of patriarchy from an Indigenous perspective and how this connects to cultivating safety and unraveling our communities from exploitative patterns on all levels as a method of prevention at the individual, community and nation level.

Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Program (IHTL)

Mental Health and Addiction Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking presentations and trainings were provided across the province, including work with the Ontario Provincial Police, the Government of Canada, and other Indigenous organizations, reaching more than 1500 participants.

These presentations and training initiatives supported service providers and individuals in identifying, building, and connecting Indigenous Survivors of human trafficking to dedicated, culturally responsive mental health and addictions support. The IHTL Program has consistently been provided with feedback on the importance of this work from non Indigenous organizations who feel more equipped to provide culturally appropriate referrals to Indigenous trafficked Survivors.

ONWA created 79 new resources in 2023-24 resources to support capacity building of member organizations including infographics and videos.

Tribute to Late Elder Mona Hardy - Anti-Human Trafficking Day Event and Book Launch

ONWA organized a book launch to commemorate Indigenous author Mona Hardy and ShaeMichelle Watson's collaborative work, "Lost Between The Cracks," coinciding with National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Tragically, Mona Hardy passed away just shortly before the event took place. At the launch, ONWA celebrated Mona and her gifts she provided to Indigenous women in the anti-human trafficking and Two Spirit space. We also remembered her kindness, her lifelong advocacy, leadership and warrior spirit that has left a legacy, one we will not ever forget. Co-author ShaeMichelle Watson also conducted a live reading. ONWA presented valuable resources addressing topics such as Anti-Human Trafficking and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to the community members that attended.



Membership Highlights

Georgian Bay Native Women's Centre: Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking Program

The Georgian Bay Native Women's Centre continues to build formal and informal partnerships to support Indigenous women and youth to exit exploitation. Through cultural intervention, land-based programming, healing retreats, targeted workshops, and development of the "Red Road Recovery program" the Georgian Bay Native Women's Centre program expansion continues to thrive and support community.

The Georgian Bay Native Women's Centre organized a two-day retreat, "Healing Our Water Within," at Port Severn, creating a safe and nurturing environment. The team facilitated various sessions, and notably supported women who disclosed their trafficking experiences for the first time. The team at Georgian Bay Native Women's Centre demonstrated their commitment to empowering women to share their stories, speak their truths and walk with them on their leadership roles.

Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle: Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking Program

Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle (SWAC) supported Survivors of human trafficking through the Courage for Change program, which interweaves with SWAC's existing programs to provide immediate safety services, sexual assault supports, and housing/shelter within a remote community. SWAC's service models are unique

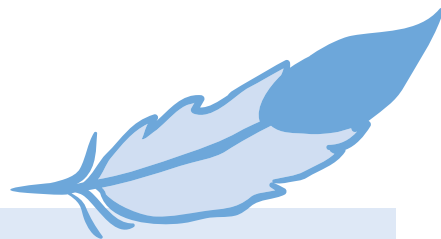
in order to respond to the complex needs of Indigenous women. SWAC continues to lead Indigenous services and supports within the Sioux Lookout area and has a strong commitment to supporting Indigenous women, youth, and community.

The SWAC team hosted a two-day Mental Health Retreat at the Pelican Peak Healing Lodge offering traditional activities, ceremonies, cultural foods, prayer, and presentations. Workshops focused on housing and mental health awareness. Highlights included strawberry harvesting, traditional teachings, making tea, and creating soaps and bath salts as part of self-care planning.

Hamilton Native Women's Centre: Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking Program

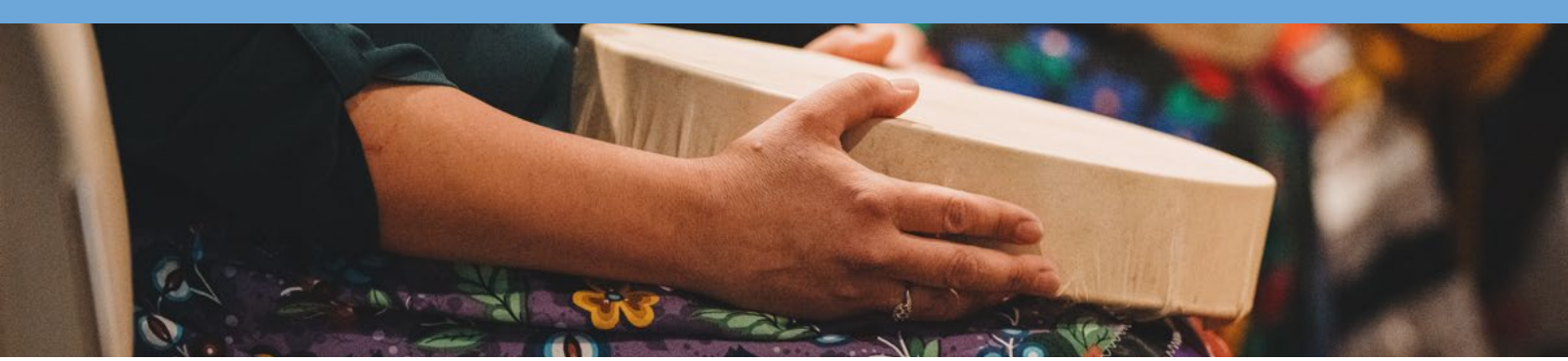
The Hamilton Native Women's Centre continues to provide wrap around supports and services through the Courage for Change program. The Chapter provides safety approaches, shelter and support for Survivors who are post-justice involved through the use of culture and with Indigenous ways of knowing and being to support healing and wellness within their community.

The Hamilton team organized a Drum Making Workshop for community members involved in the Courage for Change program. After the workshop, they held a Drum Birthing Ceremony and formed a drum group, giving participants a dedicated space to continue drumming and building community with other women.



Indigenous Legacy Gathering 2023

ONWA participated in an Indigenous Legacy Gathering in September 2023 in recognition of Truth and Reconciliation Day. The Gathering brought together service providers, government stakeholders, Indigenous organizations and community members to honour residential school survivors and commemorate Orange Shirt Day. ONWA hosted a booth and teepee, that 287 people engaged with for resources that highlighted the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous women and girls.



Niagara Chapter Native Women: Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking Program

The Niagara Chapter of Native Women provided anti human trafficking training, awareness and capacity building within the community, ensuring staff in all programs and services could identify the signs of human trafficking. The Chapter has learned how to intervene early and through culturally specific approaches to support healing and wellness. They have consistently elevated the voices of Indigenous women and their families, drawing on their lived experiences to guide their work within the community.

In response to systemic racism, NCNW proactively reached out to a local hospital and organized a presentation on “How to detect possible indicators of sex trafficking, and the importance of asking the right questions.” This training proved to be instrumental, as weeks later, the Hospital’s Indigenous Navigator informed NCNW that hospital staff had successfully applied what they had learned and identified a woman who was being trafficked. Learning opportunities prepare the community for changing the status quo.

Minwaashin Lodge: Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking Program

Minwaashin Lodge’s Courage for Change Anti-Human Trafficking Expansion program engaged with individuals through their existing “Storm program.” They supported community members with drop-in programming, awareness and training events, and supportive services. Minwaashin Lodge provides immediate support to community by prioritizing safety, culture, housing, sheltering, and health.

We “...held our annual Indigenous AHT Event in February this year. It was very successful this year and we had just over 90 people in attendance who came to learn more about the topic of Indigenous AHT and be a part of change!” – Minwaashin Lodge

Advocacy Highlights

Protecting Access to Justice for Survivors

ONWA submitted our concerns about Bill S-224 - *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code* (trafficking in persons) to the federal Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We argued that the proposed amendments will create further barriers to justice for Survivors and would not address the risk factors that render Indigenous women at greater risk. Nor would it create the safety within the policing and legal systems for Indigenous women to come forward. Our submission also highlighted our concerns that if passed, the Bill will eliminate recent advancements in case law.

Transportation and Indigenous Women’s Safety

ONWA engaged with multiple organizations from the transportation industry, including the Railway Association of Canada, Northland Ontario, and the Ministry of Transportation, to ensure Indigenous women’s safety is being prioritized within their planning and services. ONWA committed to continuing our engagements with the Ministry of Transportation as they review and update their Regional Transportation Plans to ensure the needs of Indigenous women are considered and reflected.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

ONWA honours the bravery, wisdom, and leadership of all survivors and family members impacted by violence. Their voices, strength, and tireless grassroots efforts drive our work to deliver programming that addresses Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and form the foundation of our advocacy to call for all levels of government action and hold governments accountable to keep Indigenous women and their families safe.

"Please continue to do what you are doing in the IVFL program. Such great support and there many more women like me that need this support just as much I did."

Program Highlights

Indigenous Victim and Family Liaison Program

The Indigenous Victim and Family Liaison (IVFL) program continues to provide service delivery across the province for Indigenous women, youth, and their families. The IVFL program specializes in wellness pathways, justice navigation, and specialized continuum of care planning. The IVFL program walks with Indigenous women and their families to ensure services are trauma-informed and culturally relevant within systems that are historically oppressive to Indigenous victims. The program focuses on creating stability so Indigenous women can begin their healing paths through culture and ceremony post-victimization. Through cultural intervention practices, the IVFL program assists Indigenous women and their families in healing and wellness in Thunder Bay, Timmins, Ottawa, and Kenora.

Medicine Lines of Womanhood

The Medicine Lines of Womanhood exhibit was launched on Red Dress Day, May 5, 2023, at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. The project brought together family members and loved ones of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to develop art pieces in commemoration. The artwork was undertaken with the support of Art Therapy Helpers, Grief Counsellors,

Knowledge Keepers, Elders and a network of family members who gathered during the project.

The project created a space of healing for those directly connected to the trauma of MMIWG and brought awareness to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls through stories and art pieces.

Annual MMIWG Pow-Wow

ONWA hosted our Annual MMIWG Pow-Wow in September 2023 in Thunder Bay. This powerful event brought the community together to honor the lives of Indigenous women and girls and celebrate their leadership, strength and resilience. The host drum was Grassy Narrows Women's Drum Group. The event welcomed almost 600 participants.

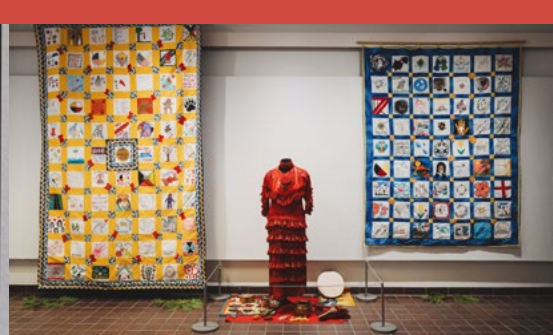
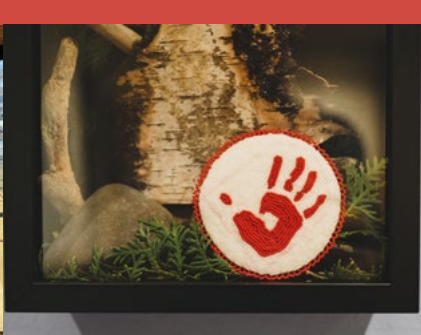
Sisters In Spirit Vigil

ONWA held the Sisters In Spirit (SIS) Vigil in October 2023. Sisters in Spirit Day reminds us of the disproportionate and continued violence Indigenous women continue to face.

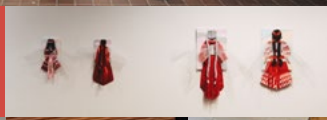
"When communities come together to create safe spaces and provide support, we can reduce the risks and improve the overall safety and well-being of Indigenous women and girls"
- Cora McGuire-Cyrette, SIS Vigil Speech

Membership Highlights

ONWA worked in partnership with 3 Chapters - Sunset Women's Aboriginal Council in Sioux Lookout, Kenora Anishinaabe-Kweg Aboriginal Women's Association in Kenora and Minwaashin Lodge in Ottawa - to share the Medicine Lines of Womanhood exhibit across the province.



"Miigwetch for your beautiful art! It touched my heart. I wish you peace. I wish you justice."

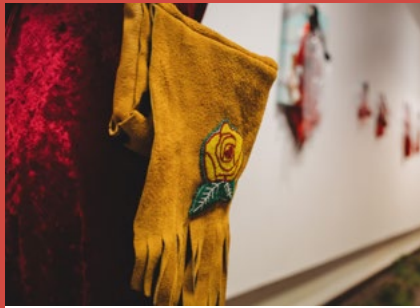


"Thank you for helping me see that 'I' was able to save myself and my daughter."



"I look forward to these marches and feasts every year to cry healing water and show support for other families who have lost their loved ones, like I did."





Advocacy Highlights

Advocacy on MMIWG Calls for Justice

In January 2023, Jennifer Moore Rattray was appointed as the Ministerial Special Representative to provide advice and recommendations, through engagement with survivors, families, and Indigenous organizations, on Call for Justice 1.7 to create an Indigenous and Human Rights Ombudsperson. ONWA provided substantial input into this engagement through meetings with the Special Ministerial Representative and a written submission. ONWA recommended an Ombudsperson/office that prioritizes Indigenous women's safety; applies an intersectional Indigenous gender-based analysis in their approach; is transparent and accountable to Indigenous women and their families; and incorporates traditional models of achieving justice. ONWA also identified the need for investments into programs and services designed to prevent human rights violations. ONWA was pleased to see that Ms. Rattray's final report and recommendations incorporated a great deal of ONWA's feedback. We remain committed to monitoring the progress on the MMIWG Calls for Justice and advocating for the full inclusion of the voices and perspectives of Indigenous women and girls within these national discussions.

Red Dress Alert

ONWA provided input into Canada's consideration of a Red Dress Alert system through consultations with the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations (CIRNAC) and written submissions to CIRNAC and the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. ONWA supported the implementation of a Red Dress Alert focused specifically on Indigenous women,

"ONWA services are needed especially for our First Nation people. I don't know what I would have done without this support."

girls, and two spirit people but also called on all levels of government to urgently increase investments in violence prevention. ONWA's submissions also identified the need for inter-agency coordination and response following an alert, and for law enforcement to collaborate with Indigenous communities, organizations, and families throughout the investigation.

MMIWG Oversight and Accountability

ONWA continued to advocate for the development and implementation of oversight accountability mechanisms for government commitments to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls. ONWA coordinated a national Indigenous Women's Accountability Table to monitor the implementation and outcomes of the MMIWG National Action Plan. We worked on the development of measures for Indigenous women's safety, and to assess the impacts of government investments on the lives of Indigenous women. ONWA participated in the second Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Roundtable on MMIWG and spoke to the need for measurable changes and immediate action to address Indigenous women's safety.

At the provincial level, ONWA remains the Co-Chair of the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council (IWAC), which continues to work collectively to improve the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls in Ontario and monitor the implementation of Ontario's Pathway to Safety Strategy.

Housing and Homelessness

Indigenous women still experience the greatest lack of access to safe shelters, affordable housing, and wholistic support. Housing is a critical foundation for Indigenous women’s safety, healing and empowerment. ONWA is a leader in culturally grounded housing supports.

Program Highlights

Nihdawin Housing and Provincial Housing Expansion

The Nihdawin Program assists Indigenous women and their families, who are at risk of homelessness, and/or experiencing homelessness. The Nihdawin Program supported individuals experiencing episodic or chronic homelessness, assisting Indigenous women and youth to navigate housing related systems across Ontario.

ONWA uses our Indigenous Women’s Housing First Model which prioritizes the safety of Indigenous women, youth, and families through cultural interventions and stabilization to address homelessness across the province. The Nihdawin program has significantly assisted in reducing barriers to access housing and in remaining housed.

“ONWA provides support to tenants in certain circumstances with a safe place and environment to live in. ONWA will make frequent visits to their home to check on the community members’ welfare and they ensure tenants’ rent is paid. For myself, ONWA has provided me with the assurance of tenants’ monthly rent paid on time. They will provide support if any issues arise with any of the community members.” – Landlord Testimonial Quote

“The Nihdawin addiction services support I have received has motivated me to live a healthy lifestyle and has encouraged me to live a better life for myself and for my children.”

“The Nihdawin program created a beautiful environment that makes you feel like home whenever we come to their office. They are very passionate people who care about helping people in need. My worker was able to help us get into a transitional housing unit together which is a nice stepping stone to permanent housing eventually. We are so happy that we don’t have to sleep on the streets anymore. This is something we greatly appreciate.”

“Living in my car, my children had to live with other relatives. Nihdawin was referred to me to offer support and helped me find secure, affordable housing. They also encouraged me to seek employment to better support my family.”





Membership Highlights

The Nihdawin program expanded last year to additional Chapters Sites and significantly supported families with arrears and in gaining/maintaining their housing. Families were enabled to remain together preventing child welfare involvement, justice involvement, substance misuse, and victimization. The Nihdawin program made a significant impact on Indigenous women, their families and others who are under housed.

Advocacy Highlights

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

ONWA continued to work collaboratively with the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS) and its direct member organizations to address off-reserve Indigenous housing policy capacity, issues, needs, and gaps in Ontario. ONWA continued as Chair of the OAHS Board of Directors. ONWA provided housing policy analysis and recommendations informed by an Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis to support Indigenous women and their children in securing safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing. ONWA and OAHS developed a collaborative position paper on Allyship, Partnership, and Co-development in the housing sector to clarify and comprehensively understand those positions from an Indigenous perspective.

Justice

ONWA continued to recognize the urgent need for drastic changes to the current colonial justice system. Indigenous women who sought protection are still facing racism, sexism, discrimination, and over/under-policing. ONWA's holistic approach helps to prevent negative justice involvement and provide essential wrap-around supports to Indigenous women and girls involved with the justice system.

Program Highlights

Gladue Writers, Bail and Aftercare Program

Gladue Writers produce Gladue Bail Letters, Gladue Letters, and Gladue Reports for Indigenous women and youth involved in the justice system leading to reduced sentencing durations and the dismissal of current and pending charges. The Gladue Aftercare Programs provides post incarceration support to Indigenous women and youth, offering safety planning, prevention-based services, aftercare, and systems navigation to mitigate the recidivism rates of Indigenous women and youth in Hamilton, Ottawa and Thunder Bay.

Referrals to the Gladue at Bail program continued to grow steadily last year. Gladue at Bail is the only Gladue specific program that designed to provide supports to Indigenous women and youth at point of accused. The program successfully supported community members to navigate the Justice system and provided support prior to court processes and/or convictions.

Membership Highlights

The Orillia Native Women's Group is the proud 2024 recipient of the Attorney General Awards of Victim Service Award of Distinction. The 2023-24 Attorney General's Victim Services Awards of Distinction recognize the dedication and achievements of individuals and organizations working to support people who have experienced victimization due to crime and to raise awareness of victims' issues in Ontario.



Kenora Anishinabe Kweg membership with Western Grandmother Catherine Everson

Advocacy Highlights

Monitoring Implementation of UNDRIP

ONWA continued to monitor Canada's implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). ONWA prepared a written submission to inform the third annual Progress Report on the implementation of Canada's United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA). ONWA reiterated our concerns about Canada's continued Nation-to-Nation/ Distinctions-Based policy to Indigenous relations, which excludes Indigenous women and their organizations from decision-making processes. This is in contravention to the rights enshrined in UNDRIP. ONWA highlighted the lack of progress on advancing Indigenous women's right to safety and insisted that Indigenous women, and our organizations are informed, involved, consulted and benefit from resources being allocated to address key issues of concern for Indigenous women and their families.

Thunder Bay Police Services

ONWA continued to participate on the Thunder Bay Police Services (TBPS) Board Governance Committee to ensure that Board governance decisions considered the unique safety needs of Indigenous women in Thunder Bay. Guidance was provided to the Board and Service to assist them in implementing recommendations from recent inquiries to foster systemic change, rebuild trust and strengthen relationships with

Indigenous women, communities, organizations and leadership. ONWA also joined the Thunder Bay Police Chief's new Indigenous Advisory Committee and will continue to advocate for improvements to Indigenous women's safety through transformed relationships with the police.

Indigenous Justice Strategy

ONWA hosted engagements with community members, membership and ONWA staff to support the development of a report on Centering Indigenous Women's Voices. This engagement report will reflect what Indigenous women shared with ONWA on what is needed for an Indigenous Justice Strategy. This work will support ONWA in recognizing areas of work that need development for women in community experiencing and navigating the justice system. The final paper will be published in 2024-2025.



Health

ONWA continued to recognize Indigenous women’s knowledge about wellness and how to heal themselves, their families, and communities. In 2023-2024, mainstream healthcare continued to fail the needs of Indigenous women and their families. Indigenous women’s health is best treated through culturally grounded programs that view health and healing holistically and that use traditions, ceremonies, and cultural practices in combination with western medicine.

Program Highlights

Mental Health and Wellness program (Day Treatment Program & After-care)

ONWA’s Mental Health and Wellness program delivered a range of cultural intervention strategies and practices to support Indigenous women experiencing mental health needs and/or substance misuse using a two-eyed seeing approach. The program provided an accessible day treatment model that supported Indigenous women to access pre-treatment, treatment, and aftercare through wrap around service delivery. In 2023-24, the Mental Health and Wellness program continued to meet the needs of the community through ceremony and Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and access to support for grief and loss, coping, addiction, healthy relationships, and codependency. Highlights for 2023-24, include:

- 367 Addiction treatment plans developed
- 11,128 Addiction supports and/or aftercare services were provided
- 177 Cultural Interventions provided
- 552 External additional referrals to mental health and addictions

Mindimooyenh Health Clinic

In 2023-24 ONWA continued to expand the scope of our Mindimooyenh Health Clinic to provide additional services like footcare, diabetes services, health system navigation, Indigenous Women’s Health Talks, community health outreach, broader health promotion, health preventative clinics, educational workshops and expanded Elder services.

A Community Member expressed gratitude for the Addictions Day Treatment Program, highlighting how it had enabled her to reconnect to her culture. She shared an experience while out on the land, where she heard a young eagle’s whistle by the lake, reaffirming she was on the right path. Empowered by her new strength, she has successfully graduated from the first cycle of ONWA’s Addiction Day Treatment program.

Youth Life Promotion (YLP)

The YLP program supported Indigenous youth provincially to take up leadership roles, learn culturally grounded skills and establish positive, safe relationships. The Movement encouraged youth to amplify their voices and take up their leadership roles within their communities.

ONWA also launched our Gender Journeys program. The program provides a series of workshops for Indigenous youth aged 13-25 focused on gender affirming care. The group creates a safe space to discuss gender and sexuality identity through ceremony, culture, community support and connection.

The YLP team hosted two Provincial Awareness Campaigns:

- The International Youth Day Event - “Celebrating Youth Success through Pow Wow & Healing through the Grandfather Drum” - highlighted Indigenous youth who shared their healing and successes through culture and pow wow. This event reached 550 participants.
- The Pink Shirt Virtual Kindness Webinar was also youth-led and spoke to the importance of kindness and our teachings to walk together in a good way. This event reached over 500 participants.



Aboriginal Responsible Gambling Program

The Responsible Gambling Awareness Program provided awareness and prevention programming to support Indigenous women and their families with referrals, navigation and culturally appropriate tools to address gambling addiction. This past year, the Gambling Awareness Program developed and spotlighted the Legends of the Fours Winds game within gambling workshops, campaigns and educational sessions. The Legends of the Four Winds Game incorporates traditional storytelling as a means of healing as a community. In addition, a Gambling Awareness campaign in March hosted Lamarr Oksasikewiyin “Revitalizing Our Spirits Through Traditional Gaming” was well attended with 1700 viewers.

“Time to relearn the old ways” Community member (Lamarr Oksasikewiyin Revitalizing our spirits through traditional gaming)

Membership Highlights

Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association and Niagara Chapter Native Women Inc. provided programming and Ska-Be services to community members, including home personal support services, food security, health navigation services and life enrichment activities.

“Miigwech for taking care of our beloved family elder and being available for her needs.”

Advocacy Highlights

ONWA continued to advocate for Indigenous women’s health priorities and greater investments for Indigenous women’s organizations through our participation in the provincial Urban Indigenous Health Table hosted by the Ministry of Health, the new Joint Ontario Indigenous Health Committee convened by Ontario Health, and the inter-ministerial relationship table organized by Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.



Building Our Organizational Capacity

Our Workforce

ONWA continues to attract and retain qualified Indigenous applicants through competitive recruitment. Our workforce represents the Community Members we serve with 65% of our workforce being Indigenous Peoples and 60% of these being Indigenous woman. This will continue to be our focus in 2024-25.

Our Recruitment

ONWA continued to concentrate our efforts on engaging Indigenous applicants through a diverse array of communication channels such as radio, newspapers, social media platforms, and provincial publications. Furthermore, last year we broadened our outreach by collaborating with additional Indigenous partners, organizations, and stakeholders, and actively participating in career fairs tailored specifically to Indigenous communities. Based on ONWA's recruitment efforts, there was an overall 19% increase in candidates applying to vacancies, with over 4600 candidates applying.

Our Wellness

The health and wellness of our workforce is paramount to ensuring our employees are balancing their work and their home lives. ONWA offered a very comprehensive benefits program which is inclusive of immediate online access to health care practitioners, mental health counsellors and an online pharmacy. Our benefits program worked to support our employees and their families, in their time of need. We provided immediate access to the Employee Assistance Program for all new hires with no waiting period.

Marketing and Communications Highlights



541,210,356
Overall Media Impact (approx.)



Website (onwa.ca)

127,221 impact
Sessions by device (approx.):
50% mobile
48% desktop
2% tablet



YouTube (@onwa_official)

66,660 impact
114 content items (videos)
1,190 followers
+906 from previous year
2,900 hours (approx.) of watch time



Facebook (@ONWA7)

5,950,000 impact
38% paid impressions
2,108 content items (posts)
19,683 followers
+2,749 from previous year



LinkedIn

444,800 impact
1,516 content items (posts)
7,525 followers
+2,181 from previous year



Instagram (@onwa_official)

371,100 impact
908 content items (posts)
3,794 followers
+919 from previous year



News

514,598,937 impact
2,278 media exposure (number of articles)



Twitter (@_ONWA_)

326,900 impact
1,396 content items (posts)
6,204 followers
+497 from previous year



Advertisement

18,710,296 impact



ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Empowering Indigenous Women Throughout Ontario

A Voice for Indigenous Women's Issues



Head Office: P.O. Box15-684 City Road · Fort William First Nation, ON P7J1K3

Toll Free: 1-800-667-0816 · **E-mail:** onwa@onwa.ca

(Left: onwa.ca/social)