

Respecting Women is Our Culture



Minwaashin Lodge

Strategic Plan 2023-2028



Our Commitment

Respecting women is our culture.

The board and staff of Minwaashin Lodge are committed to ensuring that Indigenous women and children in Ottawa have a safe place to begin and continue their healing journey

We acknowledge every Indigenous woman who entrusts us to support her and her children in any program. In all of our work we seek to celebrate and realize the unique cultural identity of all Indigenous peoples.



Acknowledgements

We do our work to honour all Indigenous women and always to honour our founding Elder, Lillian Pitawanakwat and founding member Irene Compton. We are guided by their wisdom and their example in the organization and in the world.



From the beginning, Grandmother Lillian tirelessly travelled to Minwaashin Lodge in Ottawa to see how we were progressing. Lillian believed in us! She believed in the work we were trying to do. She visited our lodge bringing guidance, healing, and support to our fledgling organization and to the small group of staff, who in the beginning, for the most part, were searching for their own identity and culture. Lillian continuously prayed for us and did many pipe ceremonies so that the Creator would help all of us to rebuild our strength.

Grandmother Irene had a dream with other Indigenous women in Ottawa. They wanted to see Indigenous women have a safe place to go when they experienced violence in the family that is meant to be the most sacred place.

Grandmother Irene, guided by Grandmother Lillian, has become a respected Elder in Ottawa, carrying on the responsibilities that Lillian cared for Minwaashin Lodge.

Grandmother has extended her gifts to the greater Ottawa community.

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Minwaashin Lodge Strategic Plan 2023-2028

A. Introduction

Minwaashin Lodge is an Indigenous Women's Support Centre that provides a range of programs and services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and children (regardless of status) who are survivors of domestic and other forms of gender-based violence. Often the women that Minwaashin supports are working through the negative legacy of the effects of the residential school system, the 60's scoop and other colonization policies that harmed Indigenous women and their families. When Minwaashin Lodge was founded in 1993 we were committed to providing a safe place where women could start on their healing journeys. By extension, that has meant that Indigenous women would have a safe place to reclaim their identity.

Minwaashin continue to be committed to these original aspirations – a safe place in Ottawa for Indigenous women. All programs and services in Minwaashin are provided in the context of cultural beliefs and values to ensure a holistic approach is used as part of the healing journey, using the lifecycle wheel.

Since the last strategic planning process in 2018, Minwaashin Lodge has continued to grow in response to the needs of Indigenous women and children in the community. As part of that work, Minwaashin has taken on the responsibility to establish a Family Healing Lodge that would support women on their recovery journey while also providing a safe space for each woman and her family to live and heal together. Minwaashin Lodge is also a key leader in establishing the first VAW Inuit Shelter in Ottawa – the first of its kind south of Inuit Nunangat.

Over the next five years, Minwaashin Lodge will seek to continue this work, expanding our culturally-based services and programs, establishing the Family Healing Lodge and VAW Inuit Shelter and strengthening our relationships within the organization and with partners in the community, all with a view to supporting Indigenous women and their families.

B. Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

We envision a world where all of creation, the earth, the air, the waters, animals and people are safe, honoured and respected; where children and elders are valued; where culture and diversity are celebrated.

Mission

The mission of Minwaashin Lodge is to provide prevention and intervention services and programs for grandmothers, women, children and youth who are survivors of family violence and the residential school system, including those impacted by intergenerational effects. A full range of violence prevention and intervention programs and services is provided in the context of reclaiming the wisdom of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural teachings.

Values

Minwaashin's work is guided by the teachings of the Indigenous people from across Canada who have come to make Ottawa their home. The teachings include:

- 13 Grandmother Moons
- Seven Grandfather Teachings
- Medicine teachings
- Lyfe Cycle teaching and the ceremonies that are part of the different stages of life
- Medicine Wheel teachings
- Teachings from Inuit and Métis cultures



C. The History of Minwaashin Lodge

The history of Minwaashin Lodge is a story of responding to the community and their needs. Minwaashin Lodge began as a support centre for Aboriginal women based in Ottawa. Established in 1994, it originally provided a range of holistic programs and services for grandmothers, women, children and youth impacted by domestic violence and trauma from residential schooling.

In the late 1990's, the women's shelter (Oshki Kizis) was established to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and children who were fleeing abuse.



In 2007, the staff of Minwaashin was asked what program(s) or service(s) were most urgently needed to support Aboriginal women in Ottawa. Their response at the time was unanimous: a residential addictions treatment centre for First Nations, Inuit and Métis women that would allow them to keep their children. This would allow victims and families to find safety from violence and exploitation. Treatments would be holistic and would be based on Indigenous culture and teachings. Equally important, these programs and services would be inclusive of the needs of the children.

Since 2008, Minwaashin has been working on realizing that dream through the development of a feasibility study and business plan. In 2018, Minwaashin came one step closer with the full support of the Local Health Integration Network for the Family Treatment Program, which is now called the Family Healing Lodge. That funding was denied but Minwaashin was undeterred.

In 2022 a new Business plan was developed and a funding application is being prepared for NICH. This new initiative will address recurring issues that women have identified when seeking treatment:



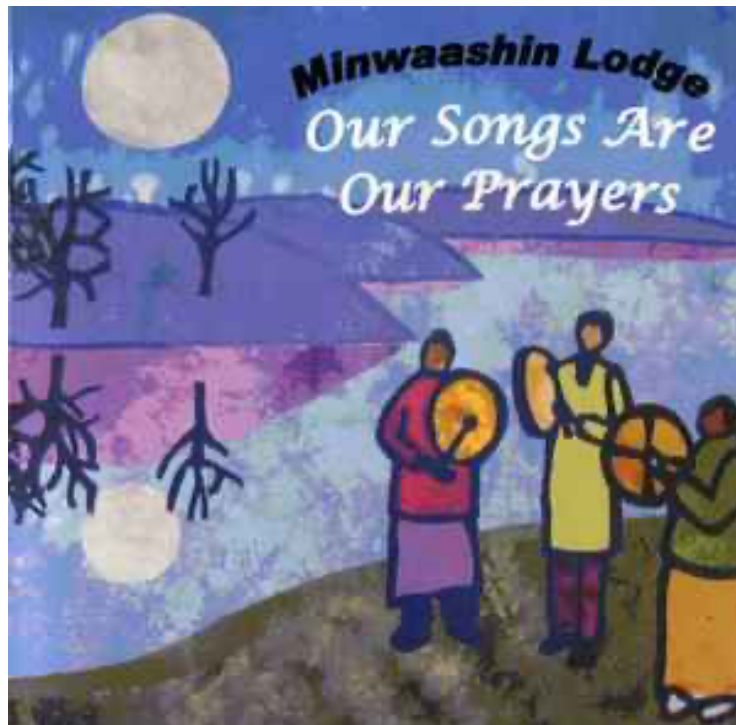
- Fear of losing their children to Children's Aid Society;
- Isolation;
- Inflexibility of mainstream treatment program requirements; and
- A lack of culturally safe programs and services.
- A lack of understanding of the type of trauma Indigenous women has experienced.

Minwaashin also stepped into a broader community leadership role in 2020, first by assuming the responsibilities of financial lead for the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition (OAC), and then in 2023 the Executive Director assumed the role of co-chair for the OAC. In these community leadership roles, Minwaashin Lodge has chaired the Indigenous Women's Safety Table since 2021, co-lead on the building of the VAW Inuit Shelter in Ottawa and ensured that Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls continue to be remembered through the annual Red Dress Day event on May 5th each year.



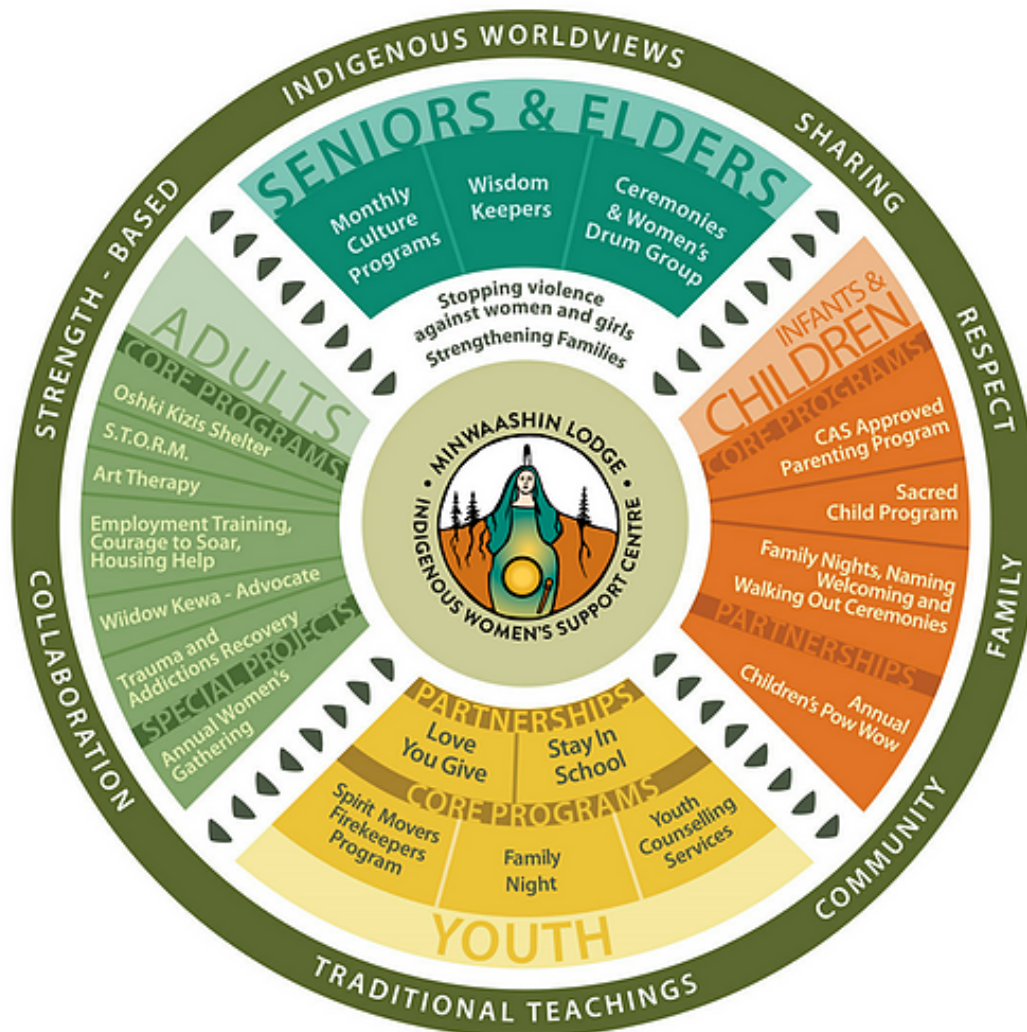
Since 2017 Minwaashin has used the term “Indigenous” instead of “Aboriginal.” This decision was not only done to support the direction of the federal government in recognizing First Nations, Inuit and Métis people as having a unique history and relationship to Canada, but also to recognize the many Indigenous women from around the world who access Minwaashin Lodge because it is a safe place. Minwaashin recognizes that the experience of colonization and loss of culture and identity is universal for all Indigenous people around the world.

Minwaashin Lodge remains committed to continuing to respond to the needs of Indigenous women and children in Ottawa as we move forward.



D. The Framework for our Work

Minwaashin Lodge works from a service model that includes all parts of the life cycle. We support all members of our community, either directly or indirectly through referrals or collaboration with other service providers in Ottawa. Below is a visual image of our service model.



MINWAASHIN LODGE: LIFE-CYCLE SERVICE MODEL

Respecting women is our culture

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E. Our Programs and Services

Culture Program

The Culture program continues to be the strong medicine wheel of our Centre. Women of all ages come to our lodge to learn about their culture and identity. Women are gathering teachings, sacred items, stories and songs to put in their medicine bundles.

Some of the activities out of the Culture Program are:

- Full Moon Ceremonies
- Traditional Elder Speakers
- Traditional Cooking
- Bannock Doll Making
- Legends and storytelling
- Tradition basket making
- Tee Pee Teachings
- Sweat Lodge Teachings
- Beading workshops
- Impacts of Addictions & Culture Paths to Living Addiction Free
- New Beginnings - An Experience Thru Art Therapy

Women of all ages come to our lodge to learn about their culture and identity. Many women are coming back to the circle and the drum. Women are gathering teachings, sacred items, stories and songs to put in their medicine bundles. It is our responsibility to keep the circle strong for our nations. We are the protectors of the water and Mother Earth. We are the life-givers and teachers for our next seven generations.



Mental Wellness Counselling Services

Minwaashin provides a range of individual and group counselling programs to support healing, recovery and resilience. Our approach to counselling is grounded in an understanding that traumatic experiences, resulting from direct or intergenerational impacts of the Indian Residential School System, 60s Scoop and other historic and ongoing colonial policies, are often at the root of mental health challenges, including substance use. Further, we understand

contemporary challenges relating to violence, including intimate partner violence and family violence, in First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities as being deeply connected to such policies. Counselling aims to support healing from such impacts by supporting clients to understand their experiences in the context of such events and supporting client to reclaim traditional practices to support wellness, including reconnection to culture and community.



Minwaashin's counselling team is comprised of a diverse team of registered psychotherapists, registered social workers, registered art therapists and recognized traditional healers. Counselling approaches include Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, Play Therapy, Sandtray Therapy, Art Therapy, and Land Based Healing Practices.

Programs are offered for children and youth from ages 4-29, as well as family counselling and land-based therapy. For women, supports include crisis/short term counselling, trauma counselling, mental wellness and substance counselling and a Strong Women's Group. Across all programs, counselling is grounded in traditional beliefs, values and practices, ensuring a holistic approach supports each individual's healing journey.

Sacred Child Program

Children, Youth and Family Program (also known as our **Sacred Child Program**) is a culturally-based program focusing on the holistic needs of children and youth. Our goal is to recognize, enhance and celebrate the value and importance of the family and the roles of children. We follow a calendar of teachings that are designed to enhance the lives of the children and families. Activities include medicine walks, drumming, regalia making, fun & games, ceremonies, feasts, visits from storytellers and Elders, and arts & crafts.

- **Spirit Mover and Fire Keepers**

This program is for First Nations, Inuit and Métis focused program for boys and girls aged 7-11 years old and youth 12-18 years. Activities are based on traditional cultural teachings. The youth gain knowledge of their Indigenous roots with age-appropriate discussions and activities. The core program is to promote and maintain healthy lifestyles, friendships and to offer Indigenous teachings and ceremonies.

- **Giiwitaashkode Youth Program**

The Giiwitaashkode Youth Program (Come Sit by the Fire) is for youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine years. We use a holistic well-being approach to strengthen and inform self-identity, decrease the risk factors that contribute to violence and victimization, including human-trafficking, and increase protective factors to build strengths, skills and resiliency in Indigenous youth and their families.



- **Parenting Program**

We run a weekly parenting program every Wednesday.

- **Family Dinner Night**

Our very popular Family Dinner Night runs every Tuesday evening from 4:30 to 6:30pm.

- **Indigenous Family System's Navigator**

Navigators bridge the gaps in family's access to care. This position is to help clients navigate complex systems such as mental wellness/physical health care, human/social services, and the criminal justice system which may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous focused.



Aunties on the Road (Doula Program)

Building on the traditional role of aunties in Indigenous communities, Indigenous doulas centers traditional and spiritual practices and beliefs associated with the full spectrum of pregnancy

experiences, including abortion, adoption, surrogacy, miscarriage and still birth. It also recognizes puberty and menstruation as times for support from our aunties.

Recognizing that Indigenous youth face multiple levels of oppression in accessing care associated with sexual and reproductive health, doulas also act as powerful advocates and allies, to ensure the rights and wishes of Indigenous youth are respected and honoured in these systems.

Aunties on the Road provides full-spectrum doula support to Indigenous youth (12-30) living on traditional Algonquin and Mohawk territories in Eastern Ontario. Each year we offer an Indigenous full-spectrum doula training.



Oshki Kizis Lodge – Our VAW Shelter

Oshki Kizis Lodge is a 25-bed shelter for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women & children who are fleeing abuse. By empowering women, we assist them on their healing path to a safe & healthy place. We support the family unit holistically by showing awareness and respect for individual and cultural beliefs, spirituality and diversity.

Services include

- Support and Advocacy: Residents receive assistance in accessing housing, financial, legal and medical resources.
- Cultural Teachings: We will help connect residents to Elders, traditional teachings, and crafts
- 24/7 Support: Staff provide around the clock support and care.
- Child Support: We provide support to residents' children, including counselling, child relief, and advocacy.

STORM and Outreach

The Street Team Out Reach Mobile (STORM) is available to assist women who are street involved with immediate harm reduction, safety planning, crisis interventions, and community referrals. STORM also serves women at-risk of becoming homeless and/or street involved. The STORM team provides:

- Emergency transportation to medical facilities, detox centers, homeless and VAW shelters, and other locations deemed appropriate.
- Crisis interventions, referrals and information to community supports (legal aid, soup kitchens, support groups, housing, walk-in clinics for medical and mental first aid, cultural programs).
- Basic harm reductions: brown bag lunches, hygiene products, clothing, condoms (male, female, dental dams), stems, needles, meth pipes, needle dispensaries, and basic first aid.
- Information and education on health issues (HIV/AIDS, STIs, party safe tips)

Anti-Human Trafficking

Our Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison worker is to support women who are at risk, being groomed, or looking to exit from exploitation, primarily through the STORM program, as well as through the weekly drop-in, every Monday at St Margarets Inuit Church on Montreal Road. The worker also educates service providers, community members, teachers, and students on Human Trafficking through an Indigenous perspective through presentations, movies, and discussions.

Drop-In

Everyone is welcome. The Drop In now operates every Monday evening from 6-8pm at St. Margarets Church in Vanier.

Youth Anti-Human Trafficking

This is a new initiative with the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA). This program provides supports and referrals to Youth who are currently trafficked as well as those who are at risk. This program takes an active role in our homeless drop in where many contacts are facilitated for youth at risk. We also provide Equine Therapy with Davalon Farm to youth impacted by trauma and human trafficking. This initiative and partnership have proven very popular with the youth we serve.



Transitional and Housing Support

Minwaashin provides Housing First Services to homeless Indigenous women. In addition to the services provided to homeless adults, we have a Youth Housing First worker who serves homeless Indigenous Youth. We also have Transitional Support workers who provide support and tend to the practical needs of women who have left the shelter and are housed. The program is designed to help with practical supports such as:

- Safety planning
- Finding and maintaining housing
- Advocating for your rights
- Accessing basic financial assistance
- Court support
- Accompaniment to appointments
- Connecting you and your children to community support services

Employment Programs



Courage to Soar

Courage to Soar is a 7-month Administrative Assistant program with a 90-day paid Federal Government Job placement.

Employment Readiness Program

The Employment Readiness Program (ERP) is modeled on the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. It is a traditional, Indigenous program to find meaningful work and/or training. This program is making a difference and continues to be one of Minwaashin's strongest programs. It runs four times a year.

Apatisiwin Program

The Apatisiwin Program matches eligible clients with potential employers. Partnerships with community colleges, local universities, private training institutes and businesses across the province provide training and employment opportunities for Ontario's urban Indigenous people.

Volunteerism

Volunteers are from all walks of life and work. Students, grassroots and professional women work together to make sure Minwaashin Lodge's programs and services are effortlessly delivered. Volunteers provided support in areas of event planning and delivery, care giving, clerical, fundraising activities, special events, education, mentorship and programming support.

Program Partners

Academy of Learning
Accenture Inc. – Management & Consulting
Adirondack and Maxsys
Algonquin College
Assembly of First Nations
Aboriginal Financial Officers Association
Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
Carleton University
Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
Circle of Care - Alternative Child Welfare
Restorative Justice Program
City Of Ottawa
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
Dress for Success
Eco Equitable
Employment Ontario
Gignul Non-Profit Housing
Herzing College
Immigrant Women Services Ottawa
Job Connect
Kagita Mikam
Kumik/Iskotew Elders Lodges
Makonsag Aboriginal Head Start
Métis Nation of Ontario
Native Women's Association of Canada
Youth Services Bureau

Odawa Native Friendship Centre
Ontario Best Start
Ontario Native Women's Association
Ontario Works Employment Centres
Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition
Ottawa Carleton District School Board
Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women
Ottawa First Words
Ottawa Food Bank
Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre
Ottawa Public Health
Ottawa Public Library
Ottawa School of Art
Salvation Army
St. Lawrence College
St. Nicholas Adult High School
Snowsuit Fund
Southern Ontario Diabetes Workers
Toy Mountain
United Way
UNITY Entertainment
University of Ottawa
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health
Women's Events Network of Ottawa
Willis College

7. The Context for our Strategic Plan

The strategic plan has been developed by taking into account a number of factors in the external and internal context that Minwaashin works in.

High rates of violence against First Nation, Inuit and Métis women continue to occur in our community. Sadly, the reality of violence against Indigenous women has not changed since we developed our last Strategic Plan, and women continue to experience domestic violence and the intergenerational impacts of residential schools at unacceptably high rates. We continue to see the great harm this causes to all aspects of women's lives and the lives of their children, including their health and well-being, their economic livelihoods, their social and cultural connections and anchors, and their place in the community.

Women must navigate a complex system, including dealing with CAS, Justice, health care, police, Ontario Works and Indigenous service providers, among many others. This continues to be a tremendous barrier to accessing services and to the effectiveness of the services provided. Greater collaboration is needed among services, and improvements to the systems themselves, including removing barriers, improving cultural competency and simplifying access.

Indigenous women are over-policed and under-protected. The systems that are supposed to exist to protect women so often fail Indigenous women. Instead, Indigenous women become the targets of racial profiling or intrusive and biased actions from the law enforcement system.

Racism and lack of cultural safety: In addition to all the barriers and challenges faced by all women dealing with violence, Indigenous women also must deal with the pain and setbacks caused by racism amongst the general population and in the services they access. For example, many women are afraid to go to the hospital to receive pre-natal care or even have their children because they fear that CAS will automatically apprehend their children.

The urban Indigenous community in Ottawa is complex and evolving. Each agency offers different supports and services, and these may change over time. There are also federal, provincial and municipal bodies with responsibilities that affect the lives of Indigenous people. Ottawa has the largest population of Inuit people south of Inuit Nunangat. Minwaashin sits on a number of coalitions and tables working to coordinate among these many entities.

Cultural healing is an essential support. Minwaashin as well as other local Indigenous organizations work to ensure women have opportunities to connect to Elders, traditional teachings, ceremonies and cultural practices to support healing in ways that are meaningful to them. Land-based cultural programs are an important part of this array of healing supports.

The women we work with have multiple and sometimes complex needs. These includes the need for second stage housing, safe health care, culturally based childcare, employment skills and entry level jobs, cultural programming, and cultural interpreters. There is not sufficient understanding and compassion in the community for women with mental health and addiction challenges, and significant improvements are needed in services for them.

COVID and its aftermath: The pandemic had a huge impact on Indigenous women in our community, and it affected their mental and physical well-being, including through the isolation, the closure of some Indigenous services during that period, the impact on access to housing, and many other aspects of their lives. Some of these impacts are still affecting the women we work with and affecting the staff that are part of Minwaashin.

Minwaashin Lodge has a strong team and an excellent reputation. Our work is based in cultural teachings and in what we have learned from the women. We pull together during difficult times and this was in evidence during the pandemic – there is a strong sisterhood among the staff. We collaborate well with partners in the community and work had to ensure good coordination and cooperation among the services working with the women.



G. Strategic Directions

Strategic Direction 1: The Family Healing Lodge is established

Vision for the Lodge: The Family Healing Lodge will be a land-based facility providing detox and full addictions treatment services, and aftercare. The Lodge would provide services for women and would include the whole family unit from 0 to 100 years, including pets. Indigenous teachings and practices will form the heart of all programming. The site will provide for spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being through elements such as:

- Spaces for self-care, grounding, exercise and play,
- Healthy, nourishing traditional and country food,
- Outdoor space for gardens, walking, relaxing in nature,
- Cultural and ceremonial space such as a Sacred Fire and medicine path,
- Programming and cultural space for counselling, beading, sewing, youth programs, etc.
- Childcare and children's counselling, play and activities,
- Presence of First Nation, Métis and Inuit culture, including through art, language, ceremonial space and cultural programming

Goals

- 1.1 Finalize the land transfer by the City by 2025.
- 1.2 Update the business plan, including the program framework, to support key application requirements.
- 1.3 Secure the necessary capital and program funding.
- 1.4 Work with the architects to design the building and grounds as imagined by Indigenous women and through a community development process where Indigenous women lead the process.
- 1.5 Secure the building, through lease, purchase or construction, and work with the planners architects and construction contractors to create or renovate the building in line with our vision.
- 1.6 Establish the programming framework.
- 1.7 Once the building is finalized, begin operations.



Strategic Direction 2: Minwaashin has expanded culturally based healing programming in Minwaashin and in Ottawa

Community Based Programming Vision: Minwaashin will expand and strengthen our services, within a long-term, 25-year vision that creates a village of more than one organization, where many services and facilities and housing models are made available to the Indigenous community in Ottawa.

Goals

- 2.1 Responding to community needs, expand programs as needed (e.g. systems navigators, mental health, children's programming, justice programs) and ensure strong integration of culturally based programming in all areas.
- 2.2 Working with partners create new housing for Indigenous women including transitional housing, supportive housing and affordable housing.
- 2.3 Working with partners establish space for land-based programming which might include a Teepee, Sacred Fire, Pow Wow grounds, fasting space, playground and community garden.
- 2.4 Enhance Oshki Kizis, including continued expansion of the number of beds and programming, maintain double-staffing as the operating norm and increase the presence of Grandmothers in the shelter.
- 2.5 Reestablish the Grandmothers program to support Grandmothers to prepare for their role as Elders in the community.



Strategic Direction 3: Minwaashin continue to build an organizational culture and workplace of health and wellness, cultural competency and collaboration that is rooted in Indigenous values and worldview.

Goals

- 3.1 Strengthen supports for staff well-being and self-care. Track illness and sick leave to monitor impact of these measures.
- 3.2 Implement, monitor and improve a comprehensive performance evaluation process for staff, including a 360 assessment and constructive feedback.
- 3.3 Continue to deepen the cultural understand and practices of all staff and integrate performance practices into performance measurements.
- 3.4 Enhance salaries and benefits when possible so that Minwaashin is competitive in the Ottawa market.
- 3.5 Ensure Minwaashin has an appropriate management and organizational structure.
- 3.6 Strengthen the communication (between and amongst staff, board and management) including enhancing staff meetings and gatherings.
- 3.7 Ensure the Board of Directors continues to grow into its strategic leadership role.

Strategic Direction 4: Minwaashin continue to be a leader organization in responding to Indigenous women in the City of Ottawa and continue to partner with community organizations and government partners.

Goals:

- 4.1 Continue to provide leadership at service and policy tables in Ottawa and provincially on the needs of Indigenous women and their families. (Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario and Ontario Native Women's Association)
- 4.2 Continue to provide leadership at the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition on key Minwaashin related priorities including: Family Healing Lodge, VAW Inuit Shelter, Indigenous Women's Safety Table and Red Dress Day.
- 4.3 Continue to enhance the cultural competency of service providers in Ottawa through conferences and provision of culturally appropriate resource materials to ensure the provision of respectful, non-racist services to Indigenous women, including through the IWST OPS Training.

- 4.4. Continue to work with CASO and the other Indigenous service organizations to find better service and systemic ways to respond to the needs of Indigenous women and their families that is the least intrusive and does not require CASO.
- 4.5 Enhance relationship with key community partners including school board and health providers to ensure Indigenous women receive appropriate services.

