



Southwest Ontario
Aboriginal Health
Access Centre



Honouring 25 Years of Culturally-Aware Care

SOAHAC ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

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Changing Healthcare Approaches for Indigenous Peoples

Aanii, Shekoli, Kuwiinguneewal

HONOURING OUR HISTORY

In 2023, SOAHAC is celebrating 25 years of providing culturally-aware care to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people across Southwest Ontario. Since the beginning, we have strived to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into every aspect of our organization, from how we make decisions to how we deliver care, and have become a model for other organizations.

By hiring Indigenous staff members, learning from our Indigenous board members, incorporating the local Indigenous communities, and honouring our Indigenous Elders and their sharing of knowledge, SOAHAC has become a truly Indigenous-led organization. The lived and living experience of everyone who is part of our community helps us deliver better care and creates the connections that resonate with clients.

In the past year in particular, we've seen continued growth in the healthcare industry, and in our organization, both internally and in the community. With our team reaching close to 200 staff, we have been able to expand our high-quality, wholistic care with new clinics and new programs. We welcomed DookjiiKahn: A place to look for and to find answers, the new Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) program in Owen Sound, worked to address the issue of food security by implementing food security programs across our locations, and ensured Indigenous children have access to any services or supports they may need through Jordan's Principle. Our senior team advocated with government and other funders to secure funding that helps us fill existing healthcare gaps in our community, and to deliver more outreach services, bringing culturally-aware care closer to home for more people.



Looking to the future

As we look ahead to the next 25 years of SOAHAC, we're creating the foundation for greater awareness of the importance of culturally-aware care. Our team is training health professionals to work in Indigenous settings to ensure care is culturally safe for Indigenous clients.

We've invested in a refreshed SOAHAC brand that encompasses more cultural elements and celebrates our clients and staff by featuring them more often in our photography; this involves the development of additional creative tools to help our staff create more outreach materials as part of our commitment to better communicate with clients, partners and community. This new brand is most clearly displayed in our new website, which makes it easier for clients to understand our service offerings and find information about accessing care.

Finally, we are most excited for the Grand Opening of two new sites: one in Cambridge, supporting Waterloo and Wellington; and one in London that brings together a number of services and staff members in one central location. These new sites will help us provide our holistic health services to more clients, close to home.

Recognizing our Board President, Leo Hopkins

The SOAHAC team would like to recognize Leo Hopkins, our Board Chair for the past 15 years, as he steps down from his leadership role. Alongside his unwavering dedication to SOAHAC, Leo has been a tireless advocate for the professionalism and integrity of SOAHAC's operations and continually expressed his confidence and pride in the organization and our team. Leo always served as a reminder of our values and led SOAHAC's growth with respect and care for our clients at the core of every decision. Thank you Leo for all you have done to support SOAHAC during your board tenure; your leadership will be missed.



Remembering Miriam Racine

Miriam Racine, SOAHAC's Chiroprapist, passed away in May 2023. Miriam was a member of our team for over 10 years and was loved by clients and staff alike. Her warm smile, her compassionate care, and her presence at both our London and Chippewa sites will be greatly missed by all.



Chi-miigwetch, Yaw^ko, Anushiik, Thank you,

BRIAN DOKIS

Chief Executive Officer

Our Clients

Empowering Indigenous individuals
to connect to culturally-aware care.



Connecting to Clients: By the Numbers

CLIENT INTAKE: 630

- LONDON
- CHIPPEWA
- NEWBURY
- WATERLOO WELLINGTON
- OWEN SOUND
- OTHER



CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



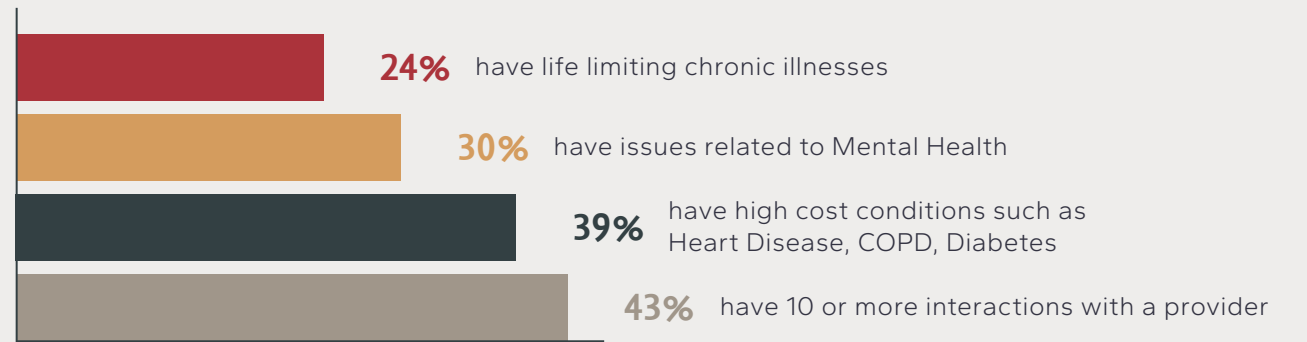
Indicators of Complexity:

NUMBER OF VISITS

On average, our team has 13 encounters per year with each client. 75% of visits are now in-person.

NUMBER OF VISITS	>100	50 - 99	40 - 49	30 - 39	20 - 29	10 - 19
NUMBER OF CLIENTS	16	161	109	224	451	973

CLIENTS WITH ONE OR MORE CHRONIC HIGH COST CONDITIONS



Our services

Blending Indigenous teachings and Western health practices to deliver high-quality, wholistic care.

SOAHAC Locations & Service Areas



FIRST NATIONS & FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

- 1 Aamjiwnaang First Nation
- 2 Caldwell First Nation
- 3 Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation (*Neyaashiinigmiing*)
- 4 Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (*Deshkan Zibiing*)
- 5 Delaware Nation at Moraviantown (*Eelünaapéewi Lahkéewiit*)
- 6 Kettle & Stony Point First Nation
- 7 Munsee-Delaware Nation
- 8 Oneida Nation of the Thames (*Onyota'a:ka*)
- 9 Saugeen First Nation (*Zaagiing*)
- 10 Walpole Island First Nation
- 11 CAN-AM Friendship Centre
- 12 M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre
- 13 N'Amerind Friendship Centre

SOAHAC SITES

- 14 Chippewa
- 15 London
- 16 Newbury
- 17 Owen Sound
- 18 Waterloo Wellington
- 19 Windsor



PRIMARY CARE

The Power of Team-Based Care

This past year, a key focus of our primary care teams has been on directly addressing health barriers and gaps experienced by Indigenous people accessing healthcare services. The Chippewa site has coordinated visiting health specialists to meet the needs of clients' health concerns all in one place, including a Gastroenterologist/Hepatologist; Rheumatologist; and Pediatrician. This means clients have received consultations and treatment with these dedicated specialists such as a FibroScan® of the liver, joint injections, and growth and development assessments, without having to travel outside their community.

With on-site, coordinated care, our clients have experienced increased access and opportunities to care, which has resulted in improved health outcomes while building and sustaining trusting relationships with healthcare providers. We hope to expand this approach to more sites and specialists in the future.

Another key focus, particularly for our London site, has been on weekly Quality Improvement meetings to continually adjust our approach to client-centred care. One strategy has been to develop process maps across different operations – like triaging calls and processing referrals – to ensure a consistent experience and to find efficiencies that allow us to spend more time directly with patients.

Finally, our primary care teams' additional focus has been deepening their connections to Indigenous cultures and traditional healing approaches, with the aim of creating a safer environment for our clients, their families, and communities. At the Chippewa site, this was done through the building of an outside pavilion. Land-based treatment and healing will be supported in this space with visiting healers, one-to-one client support, program delivery, and ceremony.

Our primary care teams' willingness to try new approaches, to work together, and to share ideas across sites helps SOAHAC to continually innovate and improve our culturally-aware, patient-centred care.



“We can get the most incredible things done because everyone has the same goal in mind and that is for the right care at the right time for the right person. That’s the power of team-based care.”

KELSEY YOUNG

Nurse Practitioner | Owen Sound

Clinical Services

46,148 Patient Encounters

Our clinical services team works together to provide the best possible wholistic healthcare for our 4,006 registered primary care clients, including the following encounters by provider:

42,150	PRIMARY CARE
2,436	DIABETES EDUCATION PROGRAM
1,243	NUTRITION SERVICES
319	PHYSIOTHERAPY

We also had **1,027 encounters** for **491 clients** through our dental clinic.

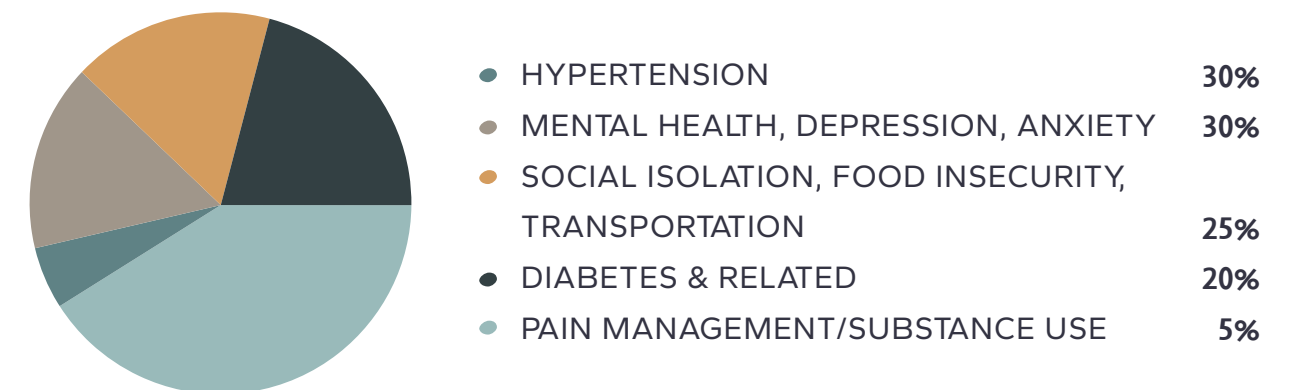
Wholistic Integrated Care

Integrated care is core to our care philosophy. Internal referrals and clients accessing multiple services helps create compassionate care for the whole person.

42% of referrals are internal, and 68% of our clients are accessing 3 or more service providers.

Top Concerns

The multidisciplinary team supports clients on healing paths through a range of health needs:



PREVENTING & MANAGING DISEASES

SOAHAC continues to monitor cancer screening and diabetic indicators to ensure clients can be in good health. We know that screenings were delayed or missed during the pandemic, and we are working to get our clients back on track. Through the efforts of our staff, we have seen improvements of 10-20% in the number of clients who have completed screening, depending on the type of screening.

74% **CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING RATE** for our eligible clients 20 – 69 who had a Papanicolaou (Pap) smear within the past three years.

67% **COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING RATE** for eligible clients 50 – 74 who had a fecal occult blood test within the past two years, sigmoidoscopy or barium enema within five years, or a colonoscopy within the past 10 years.

57% **CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS COMPLETED**



PHARMACY SERVICES

Integrating Pharmacy Care & Expertise

Pharmacy services are a newer feature for many of our SOAHAC sites; they help patients access more of their healthcare services in community with trusted providers who work with their care team to find the best approach.

Any practitioner at any SOAHAC site can inquire with our pharmacist about drug information questions - everything from what a specific prescription does to how it interacts with other medications.

A key part of the pharmacist's work is to conduct medication reviews – both reconciliation and optimization – to make sure that clients are on the right medications for them, that they're on the right dose, that they're being adequately treated for all their disease states, and that they aren't getting side effects. If there are issues, then they might make a change, whether that's adding something or taking something away or making an overall adjustment to their prescriptions.

Sometimes, when clients see multiple providers in the community, it can be challenging to understand what medications have been prescribed for what condition, and so the pharmacist can retrace the steps in a client's chart by talking to their care providers to understand previous care plans, and can then work with the providers to choose the best path forward.

Our pharmacy team also provides support for clients with Diabetes by helping coordinate their prescriptions, but also helping them with starting and maintaining insulin, which requires complex care. Diabetes treatment is advancing quickly, so staying on top of changes in prescribing and care advice is a key part of the role.

Finally, they also help advocate for drug coverage through various funding programs and can help coordinate coverage through multiple plans to ensure clients get the prescriptions they need, despite a complicated funding model.



“Because you’re working with the people who are prescribing the medicines, you can actually change the approach and be upstream of the problem, rather than downstream, and **help prevent problems before they start.**”

ADRIAN BUMSTEAD

Clinical Pharmacist | Chippewa of the Thames



INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

Strengthening Relations To Enable Indigenous Care in Indigenous Hands

Indigenous Relations had a renewed focus this year as a key pillar in our strategic plan. Our team worked to reinvigorate relationships with neighbouring First Nations and to expand our outreach services to more locations, including Newbury, Sarnia and Guelph, and to expand our services at our existing locations in Chippewa of the Thames and Cambridge.

The team also worked to build and strengthen its relationships with our funders, including with the City of London and the provincial and federal government, to better understand their budget processes and limitations, and provide feedback on how they could be adapted to better meet the needs and ways of working for Indigenous peoples. This resulted in increased funding and support for programs like Jordan's Principle, Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI) funding for dentistry; United Way for food security, Nshwaasnangong, and a City of London housing project. We worked to ensure that agreements had or will have the flexibility to provide services to Indigenous people in culturally-appropriate ways.

Our membership within the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council was invaluable as they continued to advocate for greater funding and support for Indigenous-led, culturally-aware healthcare in Ontario. We believe strongly in the sharing of best practices and strengthening of spirit that comes from working with other folks who are doing similar work. It continuously reminds us to uphold our values and ways of working, with a focus on approaching everything we do with an Indigenous lens.

In the coming year, we're focused on increasing recruitment, retention and education of Indigenous staff to ensure we can provide a high-standard of culturally-aware care across the organization. We're also investing in creating a renewed approach to cultural awareness for all employees to help create a culturally safe environment for clients, staff, partners and community.





TRADITIONAL HEALING

Ensuring Access, Stability and Longevity

The key focus of our traditional healing team this year was developing culturally appropriate programs and service standards. As members of the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, we attended a gathering with Traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers, program leads, academics, and others representing various Indigenous Primary Health Care Organizations (IPHCOs) that focused on the development of an accreditation model and mentorship program for traditional healing.

The intent of the program is to create infrastructure, not to freely share Indigenous knowledge in a way that could be harmful; it's about ensuring access, stability and longevity for this incredibly important work. At SOAHAC, our traditional healing liaisons have the opportunity to participate in a four-year Traditional Medicine Practitioner Program, which supports knowledge transfer for traditional healing liaisons to be able to prescribe Traditional Medicines with consultation from a healer. Upon completion of the program there is an opportunity for the participants to complete a four-year practicum program to be recognized as a Traditional Healer. This program helps develop their skills and knowledge, and creates greater access to this important healing work for clients.

With culture at the core of our work at SOAHAC, we aim to meet staff and clients where they are at with connection to culture, language, and identity. For staff, this includes providing an orientation of the Traditional Healing program to new staff; hosting Collaboration Circles to shed light on some knowledge gaps and increased understanding of how teachings can be incorporated into our work; and the creation of our Cultural Knowledge Resource Project where we ensure our sacred knowledge is protected, and proper protocols and disclaimers accompany the knowledge that we are sharing with staff and clients.

For clients, this means working with our traditional healers, who share their gifts for this healing work by honouring our natural ways of healing, by building relationships and creating a safe space for clients to connect, by working with the land and natural medicines with our clients, and by helping them connect to Spirit. This may be done through individual or group counselling that's grounded in restoring balance and in Indigenous teachings; looking at a person's development in seven stages, mirroring the Seven Grandfather Teachings, in collaboration with other healthcare providers; or by using the four directions of the medicine wheel to work towards the steps to change: identifying, feeling, understanding, and changing.

HIGHLIGHTS

Traditional Healing Services: 3,359 Encounters

Major Category of Engagement with Individuals

- 60% Spiritual Guidance, Counselling
- 37% Traditional Teaching
- 2% Traditional Ceremony

“SOAHAC is leading the way in providing a strong, culturally-safe traditional healing program. Securing funding that supports integrating traditional healing into primary care service and program delivery through our traditional healing liaisons is critical to delivering this much-needed care.”

MARISA KENNEDY

Traditional Healing Manager | Chippewa of the Thames

Across our sites, our traditional healing teams also develop additional programming for clients and for the community. In Windsor, that included cultural nights with singing and drumming; Medicine Wheel Teachings; Fire Keeper Teachings; Language bingo; and Men's and Women's Regalia making classes. In Chippewa of the Thames, we hosted pink shirt beading; ribbon skirt making classes; and an event to celebrate women's roles during International Women's Day. At our Cambridge site, we hosted women's and men's circles and regalia making; teachings on the 13 Grandmother Moons; cedar baths; events to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Orange Shirt Day; and a Tiknaagan (cradleboard) workshop to provide teachings and hand crafting of traditional baby carriers made of black ash along with a moss bag sewn to the board. These events, and more across all of our sites, help clients connect to culture and identity, and to share their learning with others. This is critical to healing, wellness and connection.



MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION

Supporting Mental Wellness and Wellbeing

This year was a busy one for the mental health teams across SOAHAC as they continued to respond to an increased need for mental health services arising from the pandemic.

We continued to offer a variety of programming to support our clients, including:

- Indigenous Teachings, Ceremonies, Medicines, and Building our Bundles workshops, in partnership with our Traditional Healing teams;
- Group programming including Wellness Circles for men and women, grandparents group, youth groups such as PhotoVoice, land-based activities, parenting classes and self-care workshops; and,
- Wellness Wednesdays via Facebook Live and other innovative workshops on our social media channels to reach more clients.

In addition to our regular programming and services, we also support our clients in completing significant applications for programs like Day School Claims and Water Claims, often acting as the guarantor; the Ontario Disability Support Program; band registration to obtain status cards; Non-Insured Health Benefits coverage, and more. We've also stepped in to help clients avoid evictions that go to the Landlord and Tenant tribunal and frequently help with appeals for insurance coverage for medication and medical devices. All of these advocacy efforts help clients remove barriers to access, relieve daily stressors, and help them feel mentally well when they know their housing and benefits are secure. The impact of this work cannot be understated.

CLIENT INTERACTIONS

6,578	INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING	1,577	CHILDREN & YOUTH	1,271	HARM REDUCTION
9,426	TOTAL CLIENT ENCOUNTERS	1,803	UNIQUE CLIENTS SERVED	3,786	GROUP PROGRAMS, COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVENTS



“Remembering the population that we serve is so important in keeping ourselves grounded and connected and remembering that people, no matter where and when and what stories they have, are primarily looking to heal [mental] wounds. And a lot of healing comes from very intentionally giving clients time and space and patience to build connections and trust with us.”

SHANNON ARMSTRONG
Mental Health Counsellor | Windsor



COMMUNITY HARM REDUCTION

Support Every Step of the Journey

Harm reduction means helping people stay safer while they use drugs, in order to help keep them alive and as well as possible. This might mean teaching people about the different risks involved with using, or it might be providing them with a Naloxone kit to stop overdose. It could also be providing clean drug equipment to stop the spread of diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

Harm reduction services are non-judgmental and focused on saving lives. Depending on the SOAHAC site, clients might see a Harm Reduction Outreach Worker, a Harm Reduction Nurse, or another member of the integrated care team to access these services. SOAHAC also works with partners in different communities, and with other members of the mental health team and SOAHAC staff as appropriate. SOAHAC supports clients' health and wellness whether or not they are ready to stop using drugs.

A key part of this work is to connect with clients and to build trust, so they feel comfortable continuing to access services. This means they might be more willing to access other healthcare services – or they might not. But the focus is walking beside each person on their journey, and being there to support their needs.

One example of walking beside people includes supporting clients as they are called home to the spirit world. In community, this looks like ensuring people are remembered, acknowledged, and loved through community fires. Clients' families and friends may join this time of remembrance to honour their lives. This practice started informally, but SOAHAC London now has a firepit, firewood and medicines to support people on their spirit journey. It's a beautiful acknowledgement of our clients' lives and their impact on the community.



“You know, it’s a lot easier to support somebody in the moment rather than find them, you know, years down the road when they’ve been experiencing a number of other challenges that may make it difficult. We can really get ahead of a lot of the things that people experience, which results in so much less suffering. And fewer preventable and unjust deaths.”

NANCY ANTONE

Community Harm Reduction Worker | London



FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS

Connections Through Food and Food Security

While SOAHAC continues to advocate for long-term, national solutions to eliminate food insecurity, we know that we need to act now to reduce the burden of food insecurity for our clients and their families. This challenge has a negative impact on the physical, mental and social health of our clients. Through farm fresh produce boxes, Harvest Bucks for local farmers’ markets, grocery gift cards, weekly food pickups and special events like holiday hampers or back to school snack bags, our SOAHAC teams have worked hard to meet clients’ needs.

It’s also about looking at food in a different way: as a connection to culture and belonging. In the fall of 2022 with the generous support of the London Community Foundation, SOAHAC London distributed 50-100 traditional food bags per month that included grains, maple syrup, honey and more, and also secured a regular supply of wild meats and fish. The team provided cooking classes for youth to get them interested in cooking with traditional foods and to grow their knowledge. But perhaps the greatest change is the sense of community that was created; people come to SOAHAC as a place for help and to engage with other services. **That’s the power of nutritious, culturally appropriate food.**

London’s 2022-2023 Food Security Totals:

- Grocery Gift Cards: **278**
- Food Hub: **1,492**
- Farm Box: **1,316**
- Harvest Bucks: **293**
- Traditional Food Bags: **594**

TOTAL: 3680

Ashamaawaso (S/He Feeds a Child) Food Security Program:

- People Accessing Good Food Boxes & Pantry: **3,000**
- Meals & Snacks Served Through Community Meals & Kids’ Lunches: **3,000**
- People Accessing Other Supports (Bus tickets, hygiene supplies, emergency diapers and wipes, and gift cards): **900**



“Not only are we seeing people’s overall nutrition increase or improve, but then we’re also seeing other parts of their health increasing and improving as well, including tangible changes in blood sugar results and in their mental wellbeing. Clients come for the food, but they stay for the connection and community.”

JOCELYN ZURBRIGG

Dietitian | London



CHILD AND YOUTH SERVICES

Protecting Children & Supporting Families

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

Jordan's Principle is a new federally-funded program for SOAHAC where we ensure urban Indigenous First Nations children in Southwestern Ontario can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them.

Some examples include funding for children in childcare at Nshwaasnangong; teeth cleaning; speech and language supports; and any additional medical assessments. The program is meant to fill funding gaps to protect the best interests of each child.

As this program grows at SOAHAC, we'll be developing an intake process that is consistent across all sites and ensures everyone is getting the same services and programs with proper training and support.

INDIGENOUS CHILD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

In partnership with the Region of Waterloo's Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) Program, SOAHAC Waterloo Wellington has created a new Indigenous Healthy Child Development program that is culturally safe, trauma-informed and provides wrap-around care for Indigenous families with young children in Waterloo Region.

The most critical time of human development is from before birth until age 6, and the support provided to a child during this time provides the foundation for lifelong health. This prevention-based program aims to support parents during this time, and encompasses consent-based screening, assessment and home visiting to support healthy early child development, parent-child attachment and positive parenting,

The program, developed in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action #5 - develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Indigenous families - is funded through the Reconciliation and Equity Fund.





NSHWAASNANGONG CHILD CARE & FAMILY CENTRE

Lifting Up Our Little Stars

At Nshwaasnangong, we hosted many unique events this year, including Powwow Dance Teachings, Spirits Journey, community meals, basket and regalia making, storytime in partnership with the London Public Library, field trips to London Children’s Museum and Ska-Nah-Doht, as well as our regular language classes and indoor and outdoor playgroups for kids of all ages.

The Nshwaasnangong team also had a focus on helping families who are part of our centre with the challenge of food insecurity. We partnered with local farmers for access to fresh fruits and vegetables, a local butcher for traditional meats and with local communities, who provided traditional grains. This meant we were able to provide food and supports in a number of ways, including an emergency food bank in our child care centre that included traditional foods; a baby food bank that also included diapers, wipes, bottles, soothers, formula; community meals to bring people together and teach them how to cook traditional foods; a clothing giveaway for back to school in September; bus tickets to help families get to Nshwaasnangong for programming and child care; and support for our gardening program, where we grew both food and medicines.

In the coming years, we aim to further develop more robust, integrated cultural and language programming in our child care centre that grows and develops with the children as they move through different stages.





**Southwest Ontario
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