

Oshki Nochmoowin Appreciative Inquiry Interim Report

Phase 1 – Discover and Dream (October 2023)



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Contents

I. Event Overview	3
II. Overall Strengths-Based Themes & Priorities	3
III. Specific Suggestions / Recommendations	4
Accessible, Holistic Supports for Healing.....	4
Support Youth Empowerment and Cultural Identity.....	4
Culturally Safe Approaches to Engagement and Healing.....	4
Strengths-Based and Anti-Oppressive Approaches to Healing	4
Community Involvement and Events	4
Deterring Drug Trafficking.....	5
Cultural Preservation and Knowledge Sharing.....	5
Action-Orientation, SMART Goals, and Meaningful Involvement of People with Lived Experience	5
IV. Parking Lot Issues	5
V. Samples of Participant Feedback	6
VI. Sample Visual Artifacts Generated at the Oshki Nochmoowin Conference	7
Graphic Recording of Anishinaabemowin Language Speaker Reflections	7
Key Internal Assets Word Cloud from Participant Interviews (Discover Phase).....	7
Sample Participant Drawings of Positive Visions for the Future (Dream Phase)	8
Sample Jack Pine Tree Poster Presentations	9
VII. Oshki Nochmoowin Event Page.....	9
https://www.nokiiwin.com/hope	9

I. Event Overview

On October 23-25, 2023, with funding from Ontario's Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG), Nokiiwin Tribal Council (NTC) supported the convening of member First Nations and local health and justice partners at the Italian Cultural Centre in Thunder Bay to discuss the regional substance use crisis using a strengths-based approach.

In all, more than 100 people actively participated in the "Oshki Nochmoowin" October conference ("*the October conference*"), including focused activities for Anishinaabemowin language speakers and youth, contributing hundreds of thoughts and ideas in the 200+ detailed visual and narrative records generated at the event.

Below is a summary of the key themes emerging from the "Discover" and "Dream" phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process launched at the October conference that was facilitated by Nokiiwin staff. "Design" and "Deploy" workshops are currently being planned to follow up with interested First Nation communities and local organizations, starting with a couple of 'early adopters' in December / January. A presentation of initial reflections on this process is planned for February 2024.

II. Overall Strengths-Based Themes & Priorities

On the last day of the October conference, participants were asked to present their top strengths-based ideas and takeaways from this event. In all, 12 posters were created by more than 60 participants working in 13 small groups over the course of three (3) days. The top five themes for action emerging from the poster presentations were:

- i) A focus on **cultural revitalization and connection**, emphasizing the development of self-worth, holistic aftercare with cultural identity at the core, and inclusive ceremonies;
- ii) A call for **systemic change and advocacy**, urging a decolonization approach, improved regional systems, and comprehensive consultation with Elders, survivors, and families.
- iii) A call to support **community empowerment and unity**, emphasizing youth leadership, leveraging community strengths, and fostering safe spaces.
- iv) A commitment to **land-based healing and education**, promoting healing through activities, ceremonies, and cultural practices.
- v) A need for **holistic and inclusive care services**, advocating for a full continuum of care, stable funding, family support, and accessible detox and treatment within communities.

These themes collectively underscore the need for comprehensive, culturally sensitive actions that address systemic issues and empower communities while nurturing cultural connections.

In addition, **fostering the growth, confidence and leadership of young people in the community** emerged as an important, cross-cutting theme, acknowledging their value as future

leaders, and supporting them with the tools and opportunities needed to contribute positively to their community.

Presentation contributions included suggestions to foster youth agency through leadership roles and other kinds of meaningful community involvement as well as by providing welcoming and inclusive spaces for youth to connect with their cultural heritage and identity. Participants also recommended youth have access to comprehensive wellness care, addressing physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, while encouraging expression and offering land-based educational opportunities for holistic development.

III. Specific Suggestions / Recommendations

Concrete suggestions in the small group presentations centered around the holistic well-being and empowerment of Indigenous youth and communities, with a focus on cultural identity, connection to land, and addressing the intersecting impacts of substance use. Key themes included:

Accessible, Holistic Supports for Healing

- Incentives for individuals to stay on a positive path
- Consistent and flexible working hours, availability, and support after hours
- Meeting basic needs such as housing, food, and health care

Support Youth Empowerment and Cultural Identity

- Empowering youth to be leaders with a focus on self-worth, self-esteem, and self-love
- Creating spaces that help with cultural identity and provide opportunities for voicing opinions and goals
- Connecting youth to their cultural heritage through ceremonies, traditional activities, and language

Culturally Safe Approaches to Engagement and Healing

- Fostering an inclusive environment that welcomes everyone and respects cultural diversity
- Uniting First Nations through clan systems and promoting healthy family support
- Utilizing traditional practices such as land-based activities, ceremonies, and teachings for healing and wellness

Strengths-Based and Anti-Oppressive Approaches to Healing

- More research on the impact of incarceration on Indigenous people
- Empowering individuals and communities to take charge of their own healing and detox
- Building on community strengths, skills, and experiences

Community Involvement and Events

- Regular community events like drumming, smudging, ceremonies, and gatherings

- Youth trips, awards for good attendance, and initiatives promoting physical activity
- Open communication, transparency, and accountability through laws and community engagement

Deterring Drug Trafficking

- Community-focused intervention for substance distributors
- Shifting community members toward positive teachings and values
- Consistent charges and sentencing to deter drug-related activities

Cultural Preservation and Knowledge Sharing

- Inventory of Knowledge Keepers and procedures / protocols to preserve cultural practices
- Land-based learning and activities to pass down traditional knowledge.
- Concrete buildings for detox and treatment within communities, with permanent funding for holistic care.

Action-Orientation, SMART Goals, and Meaningful Involvement of People with Lived Experience

- Moving from talk to action
- Setting SMART goals for community development
- Recognizing and valuing the gifts of people with lived experience in the decision-making process

IV. Parking Lot Issues

During the conference, participants were provided with placemat-style 'parking lots' to share thoughts or ideas not fully discussed in October. Six submissions were made, highlighting:

- **ongoing concerns related to the complex landscape of substance use impacts,**
- **access challenges,**
- **systemic issues,**
- **community collaboration,**
- **cultural healing, and**
- **the need for trust and social support.**

For example, concerns were raised about lethal drugs, limited detox beds, and long waitlists, emphasizing the [difficulties in accessing treatment, especially the lack of aftercare and treatment programs within First Nation communities.](#)

Structural problems, including [funding issues and systemic challenges in the medical system,](#) underscored the need for systemic change and improved oversight.

The theme of community collaboration and a regional approach emerged, emphasizing the importance of a united front in addressing substance-use-related issues.

Additionally, the importance of personal and cultural healing was emphasized, with references to aftercare programs, cultural teachings, and building awareness among youth. Trust and personal boundaries were identified as crucial, with trust issues within the system and the challenge of sharing personal experiences within close relationships being key concerns.

V. Samples of Participant Feedback



"I loved the group work and meeting people from all different professions to come up with a strategy to combat the current epidemic."

...

"[I enjoyed the] opportunity to work directly with community members, community leadership and Elders to understand their story and situation. [...] Enjoyed activities and producing a product with tangible options for support and healing. Productive. Felt the start of change."

...

"[I enjoyed] hearing and sharing of stories around the table, having 'suits' and decision makers at the table to make change."

...

"I was a part of the youth group, and I enjoyed the turtles very much. I left the conference feeling good and with a different mindset."

Sample Participant Drawings of Positive Visions for the Future (Dream Phase)



