

EVENT REPORT

MARCH 2024



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1ST INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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1ST INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

On March 8 and 9, 2024, the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA) hosted an inspiring and engaging event at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. This gathering brought together Indigenous women leaders, professionals, and community members from across Eeyou Istchee, Quebec, and Canada.

With the overarching goal of inspiring and empowering women, the event focused on themes of nation-to-nation building, reconciliation, and leadership development through team-building workshops, cultural activities, and thought-provoking panel discussions.

The event provided a vital platform for connection, learning, and dialogue—allowing participants to share lived experiences, strengthen leadership skills, and gain valuable insights from accomplished leaders in various sectors. Attendees had the opportunity to explore practical strategies for personal and professional growth while engaging in conversations that encouraged collaboration, healing, and a renewed commitment to collective progress.

Through a series of meaningful exchanges and interactive sessions, the gathering emphasized the importance of Indigenous women’s voices in shaping the future. It also served as a catalyst for mobilizing calls to action, building solidarity, and nurturing a common vision grounded in cultural strength, resilience, and unity.



THE GOVERNOR GENERAL • LA GOUVERNEURE GÉNÉRALE

Message from the Governor General on the occasion of the 1st Indigenous Women's Leadership Conference

I am pleased to send warm greetings to everyone gathered in Montréal for this event presented by the Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee.

Growing up as a proud Inuk in Nunavik, I was fortunate to have two powerful role models—my mother and grandmother—who taught me about Inuit culture, identity and traditions, how to survive off the land, and how to speak our language. I also learned how important it is to open yourself up to new ideas, to new people, and that it is possible to see the world through a different lens without giving up who you are.

Indigenous women have made so many advancements in representation, and so many of us are shaping and changing our world for the better. Today, we are celebrating our strength, unity and resilience. But we must also recognize the ongoing and unnecessary challenges still faced by Indigenous women and girls.

I would like to share a word with you in Inuktitut, one that is deeply rooted in Inuit culture: *ajuinnata*. In essence, it is a promise to never give up. It's committing oneself to action, no matter how daunting the challenge may be. The spirit of *ajuinnata* has guided me throughout my life, and it is my hope that it may inspire you as well.

As the fight for gender equality continues, your contributions, big and small, are essential to shaping our collective future. I encourage all of you to keep empowering yourselves and paving the way for generations to come.

I wish you a wonderful conference.

Mary Simon

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Master of Ceremonies

DAY 1



Kathy Shecapio

The 1st Indigenous Women Leadership Conference was hosted by Miss Kathy Shecapio as the Master of Ceremonies. A graduate in Industrial Relations from the University of Montreal, Kathy brings a wealth of experience in human resources and administration. She has held key leadership roles, including Director General of Niskamoon Corporation and Coordinator of Programs and Services for Cree Human Resources Development. Currently, she continues to champion cultural preservation and educational programming at the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute.

Opening Welcome



Elder Konwatsitsawi M. Meloche

Elder Konwatsitsawi M. Meloche opened the conference with the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén, a traditional Thanksgiving Address, acknowledging and recognizing the importance and relationship of all life forces in Creation. She underlined the vital connection to the natural world and the spiritual foundation of Indigenous leadership and diplomacy. She honored the contributions of the women who made the event possible by fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among those present. She offered a gentle reminder of the force and resilience of Indigenous women in shaping the wellbeing of our communities and nation by upholding the sacred duties and responsibilities that they carry in their everyday lives. Nia:wen.



Opening Remarks

GRAND CHIEF MANDY GULL-MASTY

Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty from the Cree Nation of Waswanipi opened the conference with a warm and inspiring address. As the first Cree woman elected Grand Chief, she brings a strong background in Political Science and over a decade of leadership experience, advocating for environmental protection, community development, and cultural preservation. Her vision includes self-determination, investment in language and culture, and a sustainable mixed economy for a healthy future in Eeyou Istchee.

She welcomed attendees and acknowledged the presence of the Cree, Innu, Mi'kmaq, and Algonquin Nations. With deep appreciation, she thanked the organizers, planning committee, and trainers for their efforts in making the event possible.

Highlighting the importance of women in leadership, she encouraged participants to explore their unique strengths in contributing to their families, communities, and nations. She recognized students as future leaders and paid tribute to those who influenced her journey, including Savannah McGregor and Grand Chief Kahsennénhawe Sky-Deer.

Her remarks emphasized connection, empowerment, and inclusion—fostering meaningful relationships among both new and experienced leaders. She concluded by acknowledging the contributions of CWEIA and its President, Charlotte, for their leadership and continued support.

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Everyone participating is in a leadership role, whether it's a new capacity, on council, or as Chiefs. I want to acknowledge that each person here is making valuable contributions to their family, community, and nation with their unique gifts.

Calls to Action

Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty encouraged the creation of concrete calls to action within the Cree Nation and among other Indigenous nations. These calls are intended to send a clear message to governments and organizations to support Indigenous women in leadership. By building networks, empowering future leaders, and fostering inclusive environments. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on how they can continue developing and sharing their unique knowledge, skills and vision for nation building.



■ Opening Remarks & Land Acknowledgment

GRAND CHIEF KAHSENNENHAWE SKY-DEER

Grand Chief Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer, of the Wolf Clan, welcomed participants by acknowledging the unceded territory of the Kahnawà:ke people—long recognized as a gathering place for trade, diplomacy, and community-building. Elected in July 2021 as the first two-spirit Grand Chief of Kahnawà:ke, she brings a deep commitment to nation-building, cultural identity, and external government relations, along with a background in psychology and professional sports.

In her opening remarks, she underscored the importance of cultivating spaces for inter-nation networking, friendships, and collaboration. She applauded the strides made in women’s leadership and governance, calling on women to uplift one another in facing ongoing challenges such as lateral violence, bullying, and chauvinism. She also emphasized the importance of language and culture in reinforcing identity and supporting the natural evolution of leadership among Indigenous women.

With a powerful message on International Women’s Day, Grand Chief Sky-Deer encouraged all present to serve as role models, lead by example, and contribute to positive change by fostering meaningful relationships across communities.

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Working together is vital because the work being done in one community may be exactly what another community needs. By sharing information and collaborating, we can help each other advance our objectives and goals.

Calls to Action

Grand Chief Sky-Deer called for the intentional creation of spaces that support sharing knowledge and experiences to address mutual challenges and accelerate progress. Women were urged to take the lead, stand together, and support one another in dismantling harmful colonial legacies. By centering language and culture in leadership, communities can strengthen their identity and foster the next generation of empowered women leaders.



Keynote Address

THE HONOURABLE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF QUEBEC MANON JEANNOTTE

The Honourable Manon Jeannotte, the first Indigenous person and second woman to serve as Quebec’s Lieutenant Governor, delivered a powerful keynote focused on leadership, reconciliation, and collective empowerment. Appointed in December 2023 and sworn in January 2024, Madame Jeannotte brings a wealth of experience as a former Chief of the Mi’kmaq Nation of Gespeg, Director of First Nations Executive Education at HEC, and holder of an EMBA from McGill–HEC Montréal.

She spoke of leadership not as a title but as a mindset highlighting that many community leaders contribute behind the scenes, shaping collective self-determination. Madame Jeannotte explored various leadership styles—democratic, autocratic, transformational, coaching, and more—encouraging participants to find and develop their own authentic leadership paths.

Her reflections emphasized authenticity, well being, and the importance of inspiring others. She introduced the concept of lateral benevolence—supporting one another with compassion—and urged leaders to be mindful of how their decisions affect future generations. She concluded with a call for reconciliation, healing, and adaptability in today’s evolving leadership landscape.

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We often discuss leadership in our communities, addressing our roles and governance within them. Governance is particularly significant to me because leadership involves promoting collective action, which in turn leads to the self-determination of all our nations.

Calls to Action

Madame Jeannotte called on participants to embrace and explore different leadership styles while staying grounded in community values. She emphasized the need for lateral benevolence, encouraging Indigenous women to lift each other up through kindness and mutual support. Leaders were urged to maintain mental balance, adapt to change, and focus on the long-term impact of their decisions. Above all, she highlighted leadership as a vehicle for healing, reconciliation, and lasting transformation.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Collaborations and Relationship Building

Panel Discussion on Collaboration, Relationship Building, and Women’s Leadership within Indigenous Communities. The discussion centered achieving common goals among women leaders.

Topics of Discussion

- » *Building professional networks*
- » *Collaboration in leadership*
- » *Mentorship and sponsorship*
- » *Conflict resolution*
- » *Celebrating successes together*

Panel Participants



Grand Chief
Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer



Grand Chief
Savannan McGregor



President of QNW
Marjolaine Etienne



Grand Chief
Mandy Gull-Masty

Building Professional Networks

Panelists emphasized the importance of early relationship-building through community involvement, education, and leadership programs. As their careers advanced, they expanded networks across nations and sectors, grounded in shared values and maintained through mutual support, leveraging technological innovations, and intentional outreach.

Collaboration in Leadership

Collaboration was described as a foundational practice in leadership—rooted in humility, shared responsibility, and trust. Leaders spoke about creating inclusive spaces where others can lead and emphasized that effective collaboration strengthens communities and amplifies impact.

Mentorship and Sponsorship

Mentorship played a critical role in shaping the panelists’ paths, with early guidance coming from family and elders. Many lacked female mentors and now prioritize supporting others, recognizing that visible leadership and advocacy can create opportunities and belonging for future generations.

Overcoming Collaboration Challenges

Panelists acknowledged challenges such as lateral violence, miscommunication, and navigating multiple expectations. Overcoming these required emotional intelligence, self-reflection, and cultural grounding—tools that helped them restore trust, address conflict, and keep collaborative efforts moving forward.

Conflict Resolution

Leaders shared that resolving conflict requires clarity, patience, and compassion. Drawing from traditional teachings, they emphasized listening, reflection, and creating space for others to express themselves. Conflict was reframed as an opportunity for growth, healing, and building stronger relationships.

Celebrating Success as a Team

Success was seen as a collective achievement, and panelists highlighted the importance of acknowledging everyone’s contributions. From informal thank-yous to public recognition, celebrations help build team spirit, morale, and a sense of shared purpose within leadership and community.



■ Panel Moderator



Christine Petawabano

Christine Petawabano, a respected community representative and journalist, served as the moderator for the panel discussions. With a background in various coordinator roles, she is deeply committed to supporting others and maintaining a strong connection to the traditional Cree way of life. Known for her clear communication, empathy, and cultural grounding, Christine brought a thoughtful and inclusive approach to moderating. Her ability to create space for honest dialogue helped panelists share their stories with confidence and encouraged meaningful engagement from participants throughout the event.





■ Keynote Address

NATIONAL CHIEF CINDY WOODHOUSE

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse, from the Anishinaabe community of Pinaymootang First Nation in Treaty 2 territory, Manitoba, comes from a long line of leaders, with her great-great-grandfather being one of the original signatories of Treaty 2. She has dedicated her career to serving First Nations, leading significant negotiations and lobbying efforts. Before being elected National Chief, she spearheaded negotiations for a historic settlement in a human rights class action regarding discrimination in the child welfare system.

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse began her keynote address by acknowledging the unceded territory of the Kahnawà:ke people and celebrating International Women’s Day. She shared personal anecdotes, including a humorous story about being inducted as an honorary fellow into the The Royal Canadian Geographical Society. Chief Woodhouse discussed the emotional impact of the Pope’s apology to residential school survivors, praising the strength and resilience of Indigenous people in overcoming historical trauma. She highlighted the role of education in breaking cycles of hardship within Indigenous communities.

She also spoke about her efforts in negotiating reforms in the child welfare system, emphasizing the importance of returning power to Indigenous people. Chief Woodhouse commended the increasing number of women in leadership roles and the need for ongoing support to continue making progress. She closed her speech by urging Indigenous leaders and communities to continue collaborating and supporting each other in addressing systemic issues and promoting reconciliation.

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I commend all of you and your leadership. You are all strong leaders who have come together to ensure that everyone is brought together in a positive way. I want to acknowledge the strength in this room and across the country. Our people are rising once again.

Calls to Action

To advance reconciliation, it’s essential to promote ongoing collaboration to address systemic issues, return child welfare decision-making to Indigenous communities, and close infrastructure gaps in housing, education, and healthcare by 2030. Supporting women in leadership, establishing formal reconciliation tables to ensure Indigenous representation on boards, and building strong relationships with political leaders are also key priorities.

WORKSHOPS



Women's Leadership

Facilitators:

Raymonde Levesque and Jolianne Ottawa
HEC Montréal First Nations Executive Education

This workshop focused on the historical and contemporary leadership roles of Indigenous women. Led by Raymonde Levesque and Jolianne Ottawa, it focused on the importance of reclaiming traditional matriarchal roles within Indigenous communities that were diminished by colonial policy.

The session opened with a historical overview of patriarchal systems introduced during colonization, contrasting them with pre-colonial Indigenous societies where women held significant power. Through group discussions, participants shared their visions for Indigenous women's leadership, touching on themes such as mentorship, cultural preservation, and integrating traditional values into modern leadership models.

The workshop concluded with reflections on healing and empowerment, encouraging collaboration between men and women and the importance of self-confidence in leadership.

Key Takeaways

- » *Historical Context: Indigenous societies were traditionally matriarchal; colonization disrupted these systems.*
- » *Resilience of Indigenous Women: Women continue to play vital roles as leaders, healers, and caretakers.*
- » *Vision Sharing: Participants emphasized mentorship, cultural preservation, and traditional values.*
- » *Healing Process: Restoring leadership roles includes healing and self-empowerment.*
- » *Gender Collaboration: Balanced leadership requires cooperation between men and women.*

WORKSHOPS



Communications and Media

Facilitator:

Shushan Bacon
Reporter for APTN

Shushan Bacon led a dynamic workshop highlighting the role of media and the importance of Indigenous voices in journalism. She encouraged participants to engage with journalists to shape public narratives, sharing her own journey and challenges as an Indigenous reporter.

Using an interactive, mock press conference format, Bacon demonstrated how journalists work and how participants could prepare for interviews. She emphasized the need for authenticity and emotional honesty and also discussed navigating different media landscapes in Quebec.

The session provided practical advice on how to interact with media effectively, underscoring that journalists can be allies in telling Indigenous stories.

Key Takeaways

- » *Engage the Media: Controlling the narrative is key to effective communication.*
- » *Indigenous Representation: APTN supports Indigenous journalists despite ongoing challenges.*
- » *Media Landscape: Know your audience—understand francophone vs. anglophone outlets.*
- » *Journalists as Allies: See the media as partners, not adversaries.*
- » *Authenticity Matters: Speak from the heart to build trust and connection.*
- » *Be Prepared: Understand the interview format and plan your message.*

WORKSHOPS



The Peace Medicine of a Leader

Facilitators:

Nicole Charron, Viviane Snowboy, and Vivianne Sheshamush
Cree Nation Government, Department of Justice and
Correctional Services

This deeply reflective and healing session invited participants to explore leadership through compassion, dignity, and emotional connection. Grounded in Indigenous traditions, the facilitators began with a circle, candle lighting, and prayer to set a peaceful tone.

Participants engaged in transformative listening exercises and shared personal experiences to rediscover kindness and unity. The facilitators spoke about the challenges Indigenous women face and the historical loss and contemporary recovery of leadership roles.

The session concluded with a symbolic “sisterhood bridge” activity that emphasized collective strength, support, and the spiritual dimension of leadership.

Key Takeaways

- » *Circle of Connection: Circles promote inclusivity and shared energy.*
- » *Grounding Rituals: Ceremony helps anchor peace and intention*
- » *Transformative Listening: Listening with compassion unlocks healing.*
- » *Leadership Challenges: Historical trauma impacts Indigenous women’s leadership roles.*
- » *Sisterhood and Empowerment: Unity and support are essential for strong, compassionate leadership.*



Pathways to Leadership

Panel discussion on the personal and professional journeys of Indigenous women leaders, exploring the experiences that have shaped their leadership paths. The discussion centered on the importance of mentorship, self-reflection, and the balance between cultural teachings and formal learning. Panelists shared insights on navigating challenges, reclaiming space in leadership, and empowering the next generation to step forward with confidence and clarity of purpose.

Topics of Discussion

- » *Roots of Leadership*
- » *Learning and Development*
- » *Navigating Challenges*
- » *Reflection on Younger Self*
- » *Addressing Gender Role Challenges*

Panel Participants



Grand Chief
Mandy Gull-Masty



Chairperson of CSB
Sarah Pash



President of CWEIA
Charlotte Ottereyes

Roots of Leadership

Panelists reflected on early influences that shaped their leadership journeys. Reading, elder teachings, family support, and community expectations played critical roles. Encouragement from mentors and personal experiences of overcoming isolation and uncertainty motivated them to pursue leadership, often without initially seeking it.

Learning and Development

Lifelong learning, humility, and openness to formal, cultural, and traditional education were emphasized. Panelists discussed overcoming personal insecurities, expanding skill sets, and staying accountable to their communities. Leadership growth was linked to challenging oneself continuously and drawing strength from mentors and life experiences.

Navigating Challenges

Leadership challenges included gender dynamics on male-dominated boards, balancing professional and personal life, managing imposter syndrome, and staying calm under pressure. Panelists highlighted the importance of teamwork, reflection, emotional resilience, and focusing on systemic change rather than individual disagreements.

Reflection on Younger Self

If given the chance, panelists would advise their younger selves to trust their voices, be patient, embrace mentorship, and resist fear. They emphasized the importance of rejecting societal expectations of silence for young women, cultivating self-worth, and staying grounded in cultural teachings.

Addressing Gender Role Challenges

Panelists openly discussed ongoing gender-based barriers in leadership and the efforts to legitimize women’s roles. They encouraged challenging outdated norms, creating space for women and gender-diverse individuals, and fostering acceptance and inclusivity. They celebrated the progress made by the younger generation in breaking through traditional biases.

International Women's Day

Evening Session

Celebration of International Women's Day

The evening session celebrating International Women's Day brought together community members to honour and recognize the strength, leadership, and contributions of Cree women and women from other Nations. The event combined ceremonial traditions, heartfelt speeches, and musical performances, creating a powerful atmosphere of reflection, appreciation, and celebration.



Special Address Jade Mukash

The event featured a special address by Jade Mukash, Miss Whapmagoostui and Miss Eeyou Istchee Princess, who spoke about her journey in embracing Cree traditions and language. Her message was complemented by a symbolic performance using a traditional baby rattle, representing the sacred bond between mother and child.



Keynote Address Matthew Mukash

A deeply personal and moving keynote was delivered by former Grand Chief Matthew Mukash, who spoke about his experiences with cancer, the healing power of spirituality, and the unwavering support from his family and community. His message emphasized the essential roles women play in nurturing and sustaining life.



Blanket Ceremony

To honour his contributions and journey, a Blanket Ceremony was held for Matthew and Danielle Mukash, led by the Kuuhkumnuuch Council. The ceremony, accompanied by prayers and blessings, symbolized love, respect, and collective strength.



Entertainment

The evening concluded with vibrant entertainment by talented Cree female performers, whose songs and music brought joy, strength, and inspiration—celebrating the voices of Indigenous women through art and culture.



TINA MARK OTTEREYES
Waswanipi



JOSSÉE BERNIER
Ouje-Bougoumou



KELLY COOPER
Ouje-Bougoumou



ANGEL BARIBEAU
Mistissini



Flora Weistche

My Grandmother's Garden

Flora Weistche was congratulated for receiving the Contemporary Arts Award of Eeyou Istchee in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Cree art and culture. Her caribou hide bead-work piece, The Grandmother's Garden, is currently on display at the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute.

During the event, Flora shared a short story titled The Grandmother's Garden, which beautifully illustrated the vital role of women in nurturing, storytelling, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Her work reflects deep cultural meaning and traditional craftsmanship, celebrating the strength and wisdom of Cree women through both visual and oral expression.

Honoring Local Women's Associations Presidents

As part of the evening's highlights, Local Women's Association Presidents from various communities were recognized for their leadership and commitment. Since not all local presidents were present, the members of their respective communities accepted the honour on their behalf.





Opening Remarks

DAY 2

CHARLOTTE OTTEREYES-RATT

PRESIDENT OF CREE WOMEN OF EYYOU ISTCHEE ASSOCIATIONS

The day began with opening remarks by Charlotte Ottereyes-Ratt, President of the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA), who delivered an inspiring message centered on the empowerment and independence of women. She emphasized the importance of supporting young women to pursue their passions, believe in themselves, and learn from the wisdom of their elders.

Drawing from her personal journey, Charlotte reflected on the values instilled in her by her parents—particularly independence, strength, and perseverance. These values, she noted, are ones she strives to pass on to her daughter and to the wider community. She also spoke about the value of acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses as a means of personal growth and self-awareness, a philosophy inspired by her late father's teachings on achievement and continuous improvement.

A key highlight of her speech was the announcement of the upcoming formation of a Men's Regional Association, underscoring the importance of collaboration between men and women to create a stronger, more unified community.

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Believe in yourself, keep your passion alive, and never stop pursuing your goals. Your strength comes from within — and from those who walked before you.

Calls to Action

Young women are encouraged to stay passionate, believe in their potential, and boldly pursue their goals. Taking full advantage of opportunities is a chance to ask questions, take risks, and grow in new directions. Empowerment comes not only from personal drive but also from building strong, supportive relationships, where women and men work together to uplift each other and strengthen the wider community.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Irene Bearskin House

CHISASIBI

Elder Irene Bearskin House led a heartfelt discussion on the role and values of women in Cree culture, centering her reflections on identity, peace, spiritual connection, and the enduring importance of intergenerational wisdom.

She began by sharing the story behind both her English and Cree names, each of which symbolizes peace, calmness, and tranquillity—qualities she embodies and aspires to pass on. She spoke with reverence about the grandmothers who could not be present, while honoring those in attendance, and introduced special guests, including grandmothers and Youth Chief Corrina Napash, whose teachings are deeply rooted in lived experience and cultural knowledge.

Her words were guided by a strong sense of spiritual presence, which she acknowledged as part of her process in sharing truth and wisdom. She also spoke tenderly about her relationship with her late husband, highlighting the profound value of understanding and unconditional love.

Throughout her address, she emphasized that sacred knowledge must be passed down to younger generations, and that this transmission must be grounded in truth, storytelling, and lived experience. Her reflections served as a gentle yet powerful call to honor the wisdom of elders and maintain strong spiritual and cultural connections.

”

Our sacred knowledge lives in the stories, the songs, and the ceremonies passed from grandmother to granddaughter. When we honour rites of passage—especially a young woman’s first moon—we honour the journey of becoming and the responsibilities that follow. Each teaching is a living thread in our circle.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Maria Kawapit

WHAPMAGOOSTUI

Elder Maria Kawapit, from Whapmagoostui, shared heartfelt reflections on her life and the enduring teachings she carries as a Cree woman and knowledge keeper.

She honoured the vital role of women in society, drawing deeply from her own experiences and the wisdom passed down by her late mother—her first and most important teacher.

She spoke about the lifelong responsibilities women carry, particularly in nurturing and caring for their families. Her words reflected both a deep reverence for these responsibilities and a profound gratitude for the opportunity to support and uplift other women.

She reminded participants that the contributions of women are not only foundational but also continuous and essential to the life of the community.

”

I carry the teachings of my parents and grandparents—about how to live, how to forgive, and how to walk with respect. When we speak our language and dance in ceremony, we are honouring not only our ancestors, but our role in healing the next generation.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Evadney Neeposh Meskino

NEMASKA

Elder Evadney Neeposh Meskino shared her powerful story, rooted in a lifetime of service, resilience, and deep care for her community.

A survivor of residential school, she has channeled her experiences into a long-standing commitment to conflict resolution and healing.

With 37 years at the Cree Health Board and 17 years as a Youth Protection Worker, she brings a wealth of knowledge, compassion, and leadership to her current role as an Elder Representative on the Nishiiyuu Council of Elders. Throughout her journey, she emphasized the grounding influence of her family—her husband and three children—who have been central to her purpose and strength.

Her reflections spoke to the interconnectedness of healing, family, and cultural identity, and the need to uplift and support one another, especially women navigating both personal and community challenges.

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I have seen the struggles women face, and I’ve lived through many myself. But through it all, we must support one another. Whether it’s through prayer, listening, or simply showing up, we carry the strength of our communities in everything we do.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Roseann Martin

MI’GMAQ NATION

Elder Roseann Martin shared a deeply moving account of her life as a residential school survivor, reflecting on her early struggles with language loss, identity, and disconnection from her roots.

Taken from her family at a young age, she described the pain of cultural erasure and the long, winding road she walked to find healing, strength, and purpose. Her turning point came through Indigenous spirituality, which helped her reclaim her cultural identity and reconnect with her community.

Now in her seventies, she is a respected spiritual teacher who leads ceremonies, shares traditional teachings, and uses social media to reach and inspire younger generations. Her message is clear: the time for hiding cultural practices is over.

She calls on others to embrace, protect, and pass on their traditions—not just for today, but for the benefit of the next seven generations.

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I lost my language in residential school, but I found my healing in ceremony—in the water, the moon, and the lodges. Today, I speak so our young ones know: you don’t need to hide anymore. Our ways are strong. Share your teachings, live your truth, and walk proud.

REFLECTIONS



Youth Chief Corinna Napash

YOUTH CHIEF OF CHISASIBI

Corinna Napash, the Youth Chief of Chisasibi, introduced herself with warmth and humility, sharing her Cree name and her role as a mother of five boys.

She expressed her honor in being invited to the conference, reflecting on her previous experience at a youth council summit.

Corinna spoke passionately about the significance of stepping out of her comfort zone, both for her personal growth and in her role advising the youth of her community. She expressed excitement for the opportunity to engage with the other participants and looks forward to learning from them and sharing her own experiences.

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As a young woman, stepping into a role of leadership means leaving my comfort zone—but I do it for the youth I serve. When we share space with our grandmothers and listen to their stories, we are reminded that leadership doesn’t begin with power—it begins with care.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Irene Bearskin House

CHISASIBI

Elder Irene B. House shared profound insights on the teachings of women, the significance of rites of passage, and the interconnectedness of various nations. She emphasized that everyone carries sacred knowledge, which is essential for both personal and communal healing.

One of the key points was the goose, recognized as a significant teacher of governance. The goose symbolizes shared leadership, mutual respect, and the importance of working together for the greater good. She also highlighted the role of the rites of passage, particularly for women, such as the first moon, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it.

Reflecting on the teachings passed down through generations, she stressed the crucial role of grandmothers in transmitting sacred ceremonies and knowledge. She also explained the universal medicine wheel, emphasizing the importance of achieving balance and fostering understanding across cultures.

She concluded with a call to address the spirit of violence within communities, advocating for the sharing of teachings that promote healing, understanding, and peace.

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Our grandmothers carried deep wisdom, and they taught us not just with words but with how they lived. They were healers, they were strong, and they never walked away from their responsibilities. These teachings are still with us today. When we talk about leadership, we must remember it is rooted in how we carry ourselves—in kindness, in humility, and in how we support one another, especially as women.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Evadney Neeposh Meskino

NEMASKA

Elder Evadney Neeposh Meskino discussed the significant roles and responsibilities of women within the community, emphasizing their crucial contributions to family and cultural strength.

She shed light on the many obstacles faced by mothers today, including challenges related to spirituality, youth suicide, and the impact of technology on family communication.

She pointed out the clash between Christianity and Indigenous spirituality, stressing the importance of allowing children to choose their beliefs. She also underscored the need for collective community efforts to address pressing issues such as substance abuse and drug trafficking, advocating for collaboration among all community members to create positive change.

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Our families face tough realities—spiritual confusion, youth suicide, and too many outside influences. But we can’t give up. We need to work together—mothers, fathers, leaders, and Elders. When we honour every voice, we start to heal as a whole.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Maria Kawapit

WHAPMAGOOSTUI

Elder Maria Kawapit shared her experiences and the teachings passed down through her family, highlighting the importance of traditional values and practices in her community.

She reflected on her Cree name and its meaning, connecting her identity to her grandfather’s teachings on respect and understanding. She discussed the seven grandmother-grandfather teachings, particularly the value of respect for elders and the importance of listening over speaking.

She highlighted the significance of forgiveness, emphasizing that loving everyone helps to avoid internal pain and negativity. She described how women in the community participate in traditional practices such as dancing and utilizing every part of the animals they hunt, demonstrating a deep respect for nature.

She noted the eagerness of young women to learn traditional knowledge and reaffirmed the role of elders in teaching skills like caribou tanning and baby bundling. She expressed pride in the use of traditional medicines and birthing practices within her community, advocating for a return to natural methods for health and childbirth.

”

Love is medicine. When you hold it in your heart, you can forgive and you can lead. I see young women eager to learn—how to bundle babies, how to prepare hides, how to use traditional medicine. Our role as Elders is to guide them gently, and help them remember who they are.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Irene Bearskin House

CHISASIBI

Elder Irene Bearskin House discussed the significance of women’s roles in cultural teachings and leadership, and emphasizing their connection to Mother Earth and the sacred teachings.

She explained that women have always played a vital role in leadership and cultural teachings, noting that the first treaty was made between a mother and her newborn, illustrating the deep-rooted connection between women and nurturing life — a crucial role for community and environmental stewardship.

She called on women to represent the voice of Mother Earth, particularly in addressing water and land issues. She stressed the importance of collective action to ensure the survival of future generations, highlighting the connection between women’s roles and broader environmental and political movements.

”

The first treaty was between a mother and her newborn—this is where leadership begins. Women carry the voice of Mother Earth, and it is our sacred duty to speak for the water, the land, and the generations yet to come.

REFLECTIONS



Elder Roseann Martin

MI’GMAQ NATION

Elder Roseann Martin shared profound teachings about the significance of the number seven, especially in relation to the moon and water ceremonies.

She emphasized gratitude toward the Creator, the sky, and Mother Earth, highlighting the sacredness of these elements in connecting with nature and passing down traditions to future generations.

She began her day with smudging, expressing gratitude to the Creator for life, the sky world for their daily journey, and Mother Earth for all living beings. She taught about the sacredness of water and discusses its essential role in ceremonies. She shared her monthly moon teachings, which include the seven colors of the rainbow and the seven grandfather teachings, traditionally performed in sweat lodges. She described the creation of seven bundles of tobacco tied with rainbow cloth, offered during ceremonies by the water.

She encouraged young people to participate in these ceremonies, teaching them their roles and responsibilities towards sacred water and cultural traditions. At the end of her talk, she emphasized the importance of transferring knowledge of ceremonies to the younger generations, ensuring the continuation of these traditions.

”

Water is sacred—it carries life, memory, and spirit. When we offer our gratitude each day and pass on our teachings, we ensure our ceremonies, our stories, and our strength live on through the next generations.

Message from Chief Daisy House



Chief Daisy House was unable to attend the First Indigenous Women’s Leadership Conference in Montreal, but she sent her heartfelt message through Emcee Kathy Shecapio. She celebrated the representation of women in leadership roles, highlighting the historical achievement of having seven women on the Chisasibi Council, marking the second time in history this has occurred. She stressed the importance of both mental and physical health, urging attendees to care for themselves and incorporate moments of joy, like dancing, into their routines.

She commended the strong work ethic of the Councilors and emphasized the need for love and forgiveness in overcoming challenges. Chief House concluded by congratulating Flora on her well-deserved award and encouraged everyone to continue learning from one another.



Gender-Based Violence Initiative Jade Mukash

Jade Mukash, Miss Whapmagoostui, shared her involvement in leading a formal initiative aimed at combating gender-based violence (GBV) in Eeyou Istchee through the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA).

The initiative includes a survey to gather community insights on GBV, with the goal of promoting awareness and prevention.

Jade discussed the overview of the project and her role in CWEIA’s efforts to end GBV. She emphasized the importance of traditional teachings in her advocacy work and shared her first contribution to the initiative: a promotional video for the project.

The survey, which will be launched soon, aims to assess the community’s understanding of gender-based violence, an issue often misunderstood. The results of the survey will help identify the types of workshops and awareness programs needed to address GBV effectively.

Jade encouraged community participation in the survey. Local women’s associations will be empowered to address specific aspects of GBV based on the unique needs of their communities.





Research Presentation

Linda L. Shecapio

MASTER'S CANDIDATE IN INDIGENOUS STUDIES AT UQAT

Linda L. Shecapio, a Master's Candidate in Indigenous Studies at UQAT, presented her research focused on the well-being and healing of Cree women. She began by acknowledging the traditional and ancestral land of the Mohawk people and introduced herself, emphasizing her Cree identity, community leadership, and academic background.

Her research centers on the importance of traditional teachings and the need to address gender-based violence within Cree communities. The study aims to:

- Document Cree gender roles
- Develop a gender-based care model
- Create educational materials focused on gender equality and healing

Linda's thesis explores the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary frameworks. She draws on Cree metaphors such as the canoe trip, tipi teachings, and the concept of two-eyed seeing, which blends both Indigenous and Western perspectives. This research is being conducted in collaboration with Dr. Ioana Radu. The presentation concluded with a work plan and a call to honor ancestral practices and values, advocating for the continued use of these teachings in modern-day solutions.



Research Presentation

Julie Ann Cooper

CREE WOMEN OF EYYOU ISTCHEE ASSOCIATION

Julianne Cooper delivered a formal research presentation focused on understanding and supporting Cree women in the areas of training, employment, leadership, and entrepreneurship. She outlined the project's goal: to identify the needs, expectations, strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and successes of Cree women by collecting data through questionnaires and focus groups.

This information will be used to develop tailored programs and support systems to empower women across Eeyou Istchee. The presentation highlighted the importance of community engagement in this research, stressing the value of organizing local events to connect with women at the grassroots level and ensure

their voices shape the outcomes of the project.

Julie Ann also acknowledged the collaborative efforts and support from various partners and sponsors, including UQAT (Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue) and Nemaska Lithium, who are helping make the project possible. This initiative reflects CWEIA's commitment to empowering Cree women through culturally informed, community-driven research and action.

WORKSHOPS



A Perfect Pitch: How to Weave a Compelling Narrative

Facilitators:

Gaëtan Namouric & Alexandra Ambroise
HEC - Montréal First Nations Executive Education

Facilitated by Gaëtan Namouric and Alexandra Ambroise, this interactive workshop explored how storytelling can enhance the impact of pitching ideas in leadership, business, and community settings. Participants reflected on the challenges of public speaking, while the facilitators emphasized a key insight: while audiences may not be immediately invested in an idea, they generally want the speaker to succeed.

The session was organized around three pillars—understanding the audience, persuasion, and conviction—highlighting the balance between emotional engagement and logical argument. Using vivid metaphors and real-world examples, the facilitators explained how empathy, preparation, and message clarity help connect with audiences and influence decisions.

The importance of storytelling as a natural tool for communication was underscored, especially when adapted to reflect First Nations values. Participants left with practical strategies to refine their pitches and communicate with authenticity, purpose, and impact.

Key Takeaways

- » *Connect with Your Audience: Assume they don't care—make them care.*
- » *Balance Emotion and Logic: Emotion draws people in; logic wins them over.*
- » *Understand Decision Stages: Tailor your message based on where your audience is in their thinking.*
- » *Lead with Empathy: Anticipate doubts and respond with understanding.*
- » *Use Story Strategically: Shape how your idea is remembered through intentional storytelling.*
- » *Stay Relevant: Align stories with current values and cultural context.*
- » *Prepare Thoughtfully: Customize your message and be ready for questions.*
- » *Build a Strong Pitch: Anchor your message in ambition, conviction, credibility, and a clear, repeatable core belief*

WORKSHOPS



The Peace Medicine of a Leader – A Compassionate Walk and Talk in Honouring the Dignity and Humanity of Our Nations

Facilitators:

Nicolas Charron, Viviane Snowboy, and Vivianne Sheshamus
Hosted by: Department of Justice and Correctional Services

Facilitated by Nicolas Charron, Viviane Snowboy, and Vivianne Sheshamus, this workshop offered a powerful space for reflection, dialogue, and connection rooted in Indigenous traditions and values. Centered on the theme of peace in leadership, the session guided participants through grounding exercises, storytelling, and small group discussions to explore how compassion and understanding can shape responses to conflict.

Participants reflected on their own roles in conflict—as both impacted and impacting—and were encouraged to lead with dignity, humility, and emotional awareness. Cultural elements, including prayer and song, created a respectful and healing environment that honored Indigenous ways of knowing. The workshop highlighted peace not just as a leadership strategy, but as a personal practice that strengthens communities.

Recognizing the depth of the conversations, facilitators extended the session, allowing participants more time to connect, share, and process. The experience reinforced that leading with heart and humanity is vital to resolving conflict and supporting collective healing.

Key Takeaways

- » *Peace Starts Within: Leadership grounded in self-awareness and inner peace can better navigate external conflict.*
- » *Compassion Over Reaction: Responding with understanding fosters resolution and strengthens relationships.*
- » *Dual Roles in Conflict: We are often both impacted by and contributors to conflict—recognizing this is key to healing.*
- » *Cultural Practices Matter: Indigenous traditions such as prayer, song, and storytelling are vital tools for connection and community-building.*
- » *Lead with Dignity and Humility: Heart-centered leadership rooted in humanity invites trust and shared responsibility.*
- » *Make Space for Dialogue: Vulnerable, open conversations are essential to growth, reconciliation, and stronger leadership pathways.*

WORKSHOPS



How to Defend Yourself

Facilitator:

Melissa Montour
Instructor from Kahnawake

Led by Melissa Montour of Kahnawake, this self-defence workshop empowered Indigenous women through practical training, cultural grounding, and community support. Focused on healing and resilience, the session equipped participants with tools for physical, verbal, and emotional safety.

Blending hands-on techniques with situational awareness and de-escalation strategies, the workshop emphasized trusting intuition, recognizing threats early, and setting clear boundaries. Rooted in Indigenous values, it also addressed the broader realities of violence against Indigenous women, creating space for reflection, conversation, and collective strength.

More than a physical training, the workshop promoted prevention, presence, and personal power—fostering solidarity and encouraging participants to support and protect one another in their communities.

Key Takeaways

- » *Confidence Through Practice: Participants built skills in physical and verbal self-defence, boosting their confidence.*
- » *Awareness and Prevention: Emphasis was placed on reading situations, setting boundaries, and de-escalating threats.*
- » *Cultural Strength: The session reinforced identity and resilience through an Indigenous lens.*
- » *Supportive Dialogue: Open conversations fostered healing, solidarity, and shared understanding.*
- » *Power and Presence: Self-defence was framed as an act of self-worth and leadership.*

WORKSHOPS



Networking Essentials

Facilitator:

Tina Mark-Ottereyeyes, Julie Ann Cooper, and Chantal Hamelin (CWEIA)
Guest Speaker: Ronnie Ottereyeyes

Hosted by the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA), this workshop empowered women entrepreneurs with practical networking tools to grow their businesses and build meaningful connections. Facilitated by Tina Mark-Ottereyeyes, Julie Ann Cooper, and Chantal Hamelin, with guest Ronnie Ottereyeyes, the session offered a supportive, hands-on environment to boost confidence and communication.

Participants explored strategies for initiating conversations, staying engaged, and making memorable impressions. A key activity was the elevator pitch exercise, helping participants craft impactful 30-second introductions. The workshop also covered active listening, nonverbal cues, and professional writing, highlighting how communication style builds trust and credibility.

The session concluded with reflections on different types of networking events and the value of in-person engagement. Participants were encouraged to follow up and treat networking as an ongoing investment in their personal and professional growth.

Key Takeaways

- » *Networking Matters: It creates pathways to opportunities, mentorship, and growth.*
- » *Effective Communication: Conversation starters, active listening, and body language build authentic connections.*
- » *Elevator Pitch Skills: Participants practiced concise, confident self-introductions.*
- » *Professionalism in Writing: Emails and messages should be clear, warm, and respectful.*
- » *In-Person Engagement: Attending events and following up helps build lasting relationships.*



Cultural Wisdom in Leadership: Balancing Tradition and Innovation

Panel discussion on how Cree women leaders integrate traditional knowledge and values into modern leadership practices. Panelists reflected on the role of cultural foundations, storytelling, and community engagement in shaping their approaches to leadership. The discussion emphasized the importance of staying rooted in Indigenous identity while navigating contemporary challenges and highlighted the need to empower future generations through mentorship, inclusivity, and culturally grounded decision-making.

Topics of Discussion

- » Cultural Foundations
- » Balancing Tradition and Innovation
- » Interweaving Cultural Wisdom
- » Storytelling in Leadership
- » Community Engagement
- » Empowering Future Generations

Panel Participants



Cree Nation of Wemindji
Chief Christina Gilpin



Cree Nation of Waskaganish
Chief Greta Cheechoo



Cree Nation of Washaw-Sibi
Chief Annie Mapachee-Salt

Cultural Foundations

Panelists shared how their Cree cultural roots deeply shaped their leadership styles. They honored the influence of elders, ancestral values like respect, humility, and kindness, and the central role of the Cree language. Community engagement, listening, and preserving cultural identity remain at the heart of their leadership.

Balancing Tradition and Innovation

Leaders discussed the challenge of maintaining cultural identity while navigating modern realities such as technology and social change. They highlighted the importance of staying grounded in traditional values, using the Cree language, and practicing inclusive decision-making while adapting to contemporary needs.

Interweaving Cultural Wisdom

Consulting elders, youth, and community members was seen as essential to informed leadership. Panelists stressed inclusivity, humility, and servant leadership, drawing strength from cultural teachings and recognizing the land’s importance in decision-making.

Storytelling in Leadership

Storytelling was celebrated as a powerful tool for preserving culture, teaching resilience, and inspiring future generations. Panelists shared personal family stories and community histories, emphasizing that storytelling strengthens identity, builds unity, and passes on vital lessons.

Community Engagement

Engagement with the community was identified as a leadership priority. Panelists underscored the importance of being present at events, hosting inclusive meetings, consulting widely, and valuing every voice—from elders to youth—to ensure leadership remains rooted in the people’s aspirations.

Empowering Future Generations

Panelists highlighted initiatives that involve youth and elders working together through formal structures like Youth Councils and Elders Councils. They stressed being role models, fostering leadership skills, and passing down Cree values to empower young people to lead with confidence and cultural pride.



Closing Remarks

Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty

Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty expressed heartfelt gratitude to participants, facilitators, and sponsors, highlighting the emotional resonance of the event and the safe space it provided for women to lead, speak, and be heard. She acknowledged key contributors and noted how the conference itself was shaped by the encouraging words of a young girl who reminded her to embrace leadership with strength.

Looking ahead, Grand Chief Gull-Masty announced a forthcoming debriefing session to evaluate the event’s impact and to inform future planning. She emphasized the importance of including men as allies in the journey toward inclusive leadership, inviting Regional Chief Picard to offer a closing blessing.



Regional Chief Ghislain Picard AFNQL

Regional Chief Ghislain Picard delivered a deeply personal and reflective message about leadership, relationships, and reconciliation. Speaking from the heart, he recalled a recent visit to his home community of Pessamit, where connections to land, family, and culture reaffirmed the spiritual and emotional strength of Indigenous identity.

He spoke of unity between the Cree and Innu Nations, his meeting with Grand Chief Gull-Masty, and the symbolic and sustenance-based role of the caribou in Indigenous life. Picard acknowledged the growing role of women in leadership, celebrated the work of Quebec Native Women, and emphasized the importance of core values—respect, love, and humility—as the compass for strong and compassionate leadership.

Closing Remarks and Reflections

Foundational Values, Unity, and Women in Leadership



As the event came to a close, Emcee Kathy Shecapio reflected on the powerful insights shared throughout the gathering. She emphasized the importance of foundational cultural values in shaping Cree women’s leadership and overcoming barriers. Unity and mutual support among women emerged as essential for building strength across generations.

Leadership panels featuring Grand Chiefs and Chiefs shared personal stories, highlighting the courage it takes to step into leadership roles and the importance of creating space for others to do the same. Speakers called on youth to stay grounded in culture, seek wisdom through books and teachings, and embrace mentorship as a path to meaningful leadership



Charlotte Ottereyes-Ratt

President, CWEIA

Charlotte Ottereyes-Ratt, President of CWEIA, delivered an impassioned speech focused on the empowerment of young women, especially those in leadership or emerging roles within the Youth Council. She stressed the need for continued encouragement, support, and visibility for young women stepping into their power, ending with:

“As a woman achieves power, the barriers will fall.”



QUOTES



As women, we don't wait for the invitation—we create the table, we set the agenda, and we open the door for others to walk through.

Grand Chief Mandy Gull-Masty



When we create space for each other—across nations, cultures, and generations—we build the kind of leadership that lasts.

Grand Chief Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer



Leadership is not defined by a title—it is defined by the ability to inspire, to stay authentic, and to uplift those around you.

Honourable Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, Manon Jeannotte



We need to keep saying yes to leadership—yes to our voices, our stories, and our rightful place in shaping this country.

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak



Empowerment starts when we believe in ourselves—and help the next-generation believe in themselves too.

President of CWEIA, Charlotte Ottereyes

Sponsors & Acknowledgments

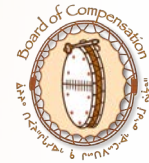
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Thank you to the staff of CWEIA and CNG for your outstanding work and dedication in making the event a success. Your teamwork, commitment, and attention to detail made a significant difference!

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1ST INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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