





# Community



**Rick Garrick/Wawatay News**  
The Nishnawbe Aski Nation Orange Shirt Day walkers marched along Arthur St. to Vickers Park on Sept. 30 in Thunder Bay.

# Nishnawbe Aski Nation holds Orange Shirt Day walk

**Rick Garrick**  
Wawatay News

Nishnawbe Aski Nation's (NAN) Orange Shirt Day walk featured the residential school experiences of survivors Ida Ralph and Shirley Sutherland at Vickers Park on Sept. 30 in Thunder Bay. The walk began at the NAN office on Syndicate Ave. and followed Arthur St. to Vickers Park, where a sacred fire was lit at sunrise, speeches were delivered by dignitaries and a barbecue lunch and other activities were held.

“My little sister and I came from the Fort Hope (Eabametoong) area,” says Ralph, McIntosh and St. Mary’s residential school survivor. “My little sister was only two-years-old, I was four and I didn’t go to school until 1948 to attend classes. We were kept in the room upstairs, we never went out, they brought us food to eat. We each had a crib to sleep in. My little sister was in diapers and bottles so I managed to toi-

let train her myself.”

Ralph says they were taken to Winnipeg later that winter to be adopted out, but it did not work out and they were taken back to McIntosh.

“By then I was able to attend classes and my sister was kept upstairs, what we used to call the infirmary,” Ralph says. “I met some other friends my age and I don’t know how I learned how to read and write — it was forced into me, if I spoke my language then that teacher would ... hit us on the ear. Gradually I learned how to read and write and I felt sorry for people that were coming in that were older than me, 11 and 12, so I started helping them out to write their names. Just one of them is alive today that I know of, she must be in her 90s, I’m 81. My sister is no longer here, she was found murdered in Calgary in 1983.”

Sutherland, a St. Anne's residential school survivor, says Sept. 30 should not be the only day for Orange Shirt Day.

“Make it every day, we have grandchildren, our children have their children,” Sutherland says. “We are survivors and those who didn’t make it will always be remembered. I’ve lost a lot of friends to alcohol and drugs, some of them never even went for counselling. There were 10 of us in the family and all of us went to residential school. I was five-years-old when I was put in a floatplane, four of my siblings and four other children, we were just put in a floatplane. As I looked, crying, banging on the plane, I could see my parents getting smaller and smaller.”

Sutherland says she and her siblings were all separated in the residential school.

"I remember crying hard trying to grab my siblings, but then after that we hardly got to see each other even though we were there," Sutherland says. "We weren't allowed to hug each other. When we were in line, if I tried to go grab my (siblings), I got pulled back by

the back of my hair.”

Sutherland says her residential school experience doesn't stop, even though she went on her healing process.

"I still get triggered, especially when I hear a floatplane," Sutherland says.

Kyra Metatawabin, a youth from Fort Albany, also shared her perspective on Orange Shirt Day.

"I would like to acknowledge my grandmothers, granny Denise Metatawabin and my late nana Micheline Edwards, who both attended St. Anne's residential school that was housed in my home community of Fort Albany First Nation and suffered horrific acts," Metatawabin says. "They were taken away from their parents at a young age and were stripped of their names and provided a number, yes a number. They were not raised with parental knowledge or love."

Metatawabin says her parents experienced intergenerational trauma, noting that they both attended the same residential



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News  
Residential school survivor Ida Ralph speaks about her experiences

school, St. Anne's, which was transitioned into an Indian day school.

"They are both doing their best to raise me and my siblings in a loving, caring home, that sadly my grandmothers and great grandparents did not

receive,” Metatawabin says. “They all did the best they could with what they knew. I’m standing here today because of them, living a better life that they weren’t able to because of the institutions that Canada enforced.”

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# Community

## Shkoday hosts open house and micro job fair



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News  
Shkoday executive director Marilyn Junnila and Pathways to Education program supervisor Melinda Siemens held an open house at the Pathways to Education program location at 214 Red River Rd.

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

Shkoday held an open house and micro job fair at its Pathways to Education program location for high school students at 214 Red River Rd. on Oct. 5 in Thunder Bay.

“This our Pathways location, which is our newest program,” says Marilyn Junnila, executive director at Shkoday. “It’s for high school-aged students, Grades 9 through 12. It’s a bigger location, it’s right downtown, there’s buses that come to the area whereas at our John Street Rd. location there’s no buses, but we provide transportation for the children that come out there.”

Junnila says the Pathways to Education location opened this past January.

“This is the first full school year that we are having a Pathways program,” Junnila says. “Students are registering for

the program, they’re enjoying the cultural nights as well as the tutoring on Wednesday and Thursday evenings.”

Melinda Siemens, supervisor of the Pathways to Education program at Shkoday, says the road construction project in the area along Court St. has not affected the students’ access to the program.

“We’ve given them directions to re-route and a lot of our students take the bus and they are on foot,” Siemens says.

Siemens says the advantage of the location is it is close to the high schools in the area.

“So it’s easy for them to get dropped off,” Siemens says. “Also we’ve done some outings with them at the Marina Park.”

Siemens says they have MLC (Mentorship, Leadership and Cultural) programming from 4-5 p.m. on Tuesdays.

“That’s when we get our biggest turnout,” Siemens says. “Most of the students do come

in-person for the cultural aspect. Yesterday we did a sharing circle with a smudge. We do crafts, we have a medicine wheel teaching coming up with an Elder that will be present with us.”

Siemens says they also offer financial incentives for the students to participate in the programming.

“If you participate twice a week for two weeks you get a \$20 gift card,” Siemens says.

Junnila says Shkoday’s Aboriginal Head Start program, which is held at the Shkoday building on John Street Rd. started off with another successful school year at the beginning of September.

“All of our classrooms are super busy,” Junnila says.

Junnila says the Biwaase’aa program is located in eight schools with youth outreach workers.

“They provide one-on-one support with students, they also go into the classrooms and

teach some of the subjects that teachers may want some first-hand knowledge about or there are some subjects they may not feel so comfortable to talk about such as residential school and the impacts of that,” Junnila says. “We do bring in Elders as well for that in-school portion. We have a nutrition component so for each one of those schools we provide a nutritious lunch, and in the Biwaase’aa room there’s also available snacks for any of the children and youth that come into the program. We also have an after-school component that is in-person in each of the locations based on if we have enough staffing to be able to do that.”

Junnila says they also held a micro job fair at the Pathways to Education location.

“Because of our expansion, we are looking for staff as well as now with the after-school program being totally operational in the eight schools, we are looking for part-time staff — they could be college or university students that need part-time work, we’re open to having them come in, especially if they’re in the recreational or social work fields or in the teaching fields,” Junnila says. “We also have available a cook position, a family support and cultural worker position and with Pathways we have the SPSWs (student parent support workers) that we’re looking for as well.”



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# Community

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Shkoday executive director Marilyn Junnila and Pathways to Education program supervisor Melinda Siemens.

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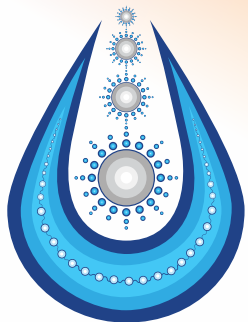
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# Community

# Wataynikaneyap Power connects Wawakapewin and North Caribou Lake to the power grid

**Rick Garrick**  
Wawatay News

Wawakapewin and North Caribou Lake recently celebrated their Aug. 16 and October 2022 connections to the provincial power grid through the Wataynikaneyap Power Transmission Line in September.

Wawakapewin held their celebration on Sept. 29 at the Valhalla Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay and on Anemki Wajiw (Mt. McKay) in Fort William, where they did a blessing of the connection grid to the community.

"It's very exciting, less worry for me," says Wawakapewin Chief Anne Marie Beardy, noting that the community used to struggle with keeping the diesel generators operating. "It's a big relief for me, I don't have to worry about so much anymore."

Beardy says one of her dreams is to see the citizens returning home to the community now that they are connected to the provincial power grid.

“Now we can start applying for getting new houses because (when we were) using generators there wasn’t enough power (for new) buildings,” Beardy says.

“Lack of reliable power meant not being able to grow. It limited the amount of com-

munity (citizens) who could stay in Wawakapewin all year long, instead of just seasonally. We are proud to majority own this power system on the homelands, bringing reliable power to First Nations.”

Beardy says other dreams are to build a school and a nursing station in the community.

“Now that we have a connection, hopefully we get a school going and people to come back home,” Beardy says. “Our Elders built that community, my grandpa, because they wanted us to live in that community and raise our children and grandchildren there.”

Margaret Kenequanash, CEO at Wataynikaneyap Power, says many people told her the connection of the communities to the provincial power grid would never happen.

"But here we are today celebrating," Kenequanash says. "I want to say congratulations to Chief Anne Marie as well as to the community (citizens), and I look forward to seeing community growth and continuing to work with you."

Eliezar McKay, First Nation LP board chair, says the power transmission line doesn't just bring light, it brings hope.

“Our youth can now think about what they can do for their community, their families, and for themselves – without power restrictions,” McKay says.



**Rick Garrick/Wawatay News**  
Wawakapewin Chief Anne Marie Beardy speaks about the advantages of being connected to the provincial power grid during her community's celebration.

Frank McKay, board chair for the Wataynikaneyap Power General Partnership, and David Hutchens, president and CEO, Fortis Inc., both offered congratulations on Wawakapewin's connection.

"I'm proud to be a part of this historical life changing initiative, directed by the people through mandate," Frank says. "It is great to celebrate the continued progress of this unprecedented project."

"The new connection to the Ontario electricity grid provides reliable, secure power to the people of Wawakapewin," Hutchens says. "Our team looks forward to additional Watayni-

kaneyap Power Project communities receiving reliable power in the coming months.”

North Caribou Lake held their celebration on Sept. 14 in the community following their annual Hunting Festival.

"Grid connection has been a long time coming," says North Caribou Lake Chief Cornelious Benson. "Diesel generation was unsafe, unreliable and inadequate to meet the needs of the growing community. Since connection, we have been able to connect a new school, police station, a number of housing and trailer units and many building upgrades."

Kenequanash says North

Caribou Lake had been in discussions since the mid-1990s to bring reliable energy to the community.

“We finally did it and congratulations,” Kenequanash says. “This is my home, and it is a very special day for me. We have travelled a long path that saw successes, learning opportunities and false starts to get us to this point. We are not done yet. Connecting all 17 First Nations and achieving the vision of 100 per cent ownership of this major infrastructure in our homeland is important for our future generations.”

Hutchens says North Caribou Lake First Nation has benefited from being connected to the provincial power grid for nearly a year.

"Having shut down its diesel engines, the community has reduced its carbon emissions and secured room for current and future growth," Hutchens says. "We are proud to partner with all 24 First Nations in building the transmission line throughout northwestern Ontario and look forward to project completion."

Kasabonika Lake plans to celebrate its connection to the provincial power grid on Oct. 14 at the Kasabonika Lake School Gym/Community Grounds, and the connections of 10 more communities will be celebrated throughout 2023-2024.



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# Education

## Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) celebrates opening of new facilities

**Rick Garrick**  
Wawatay News

The Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) celebrated the completion of a new gymnasium and other indoor spaces including a kitchen, classrooms and a Student Care Centre on Sept. 29 in Thunder Bay. The MECC was transformed from the former Grandview Lodge Home for the Aged, which the City of Thunder Bay transitioned to Matawa in 2017.

"This momentous occasion is one that will continue to impact Matawa First Nations youth, their communities and families for decades to come," says Sharon Nate, executive director at Matawa Education. "Students who must leave the support of their families and communities and (their) way of life behind to access high school now have a safe and reliable facility in Thunder Bay. With staff who are committed to youth's physical, cultural, mental and emotional well-being, students now have a place where they can access equal opportunity to education and mental wellness supports."

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Deputy Grand Chiefs Anna Betty Achneepineskum and Bobby Narcisse and Thunder Bay-Superior North MP Patty Hajdu, minister of Indigenous Services Canada, participated along with other dignitaries in the grand opening, which included a tour of the MECC.

“It was so great to be there — it was just incredible to witness how that old building, an old folks home, was transformed into this beautiful school in just a few short years,” Fiddler says. “For the students that will be attending that school, it’s more than just a school, it’s a community. And I know it’s a community that will love them and support them, that will speak to them in their language, that will teach them their culture, just what they need to become healthy and productive adults. And there’s residences as part of that building, which will go a long way in ensuring student safety for students that will be attending that school. It’s a beautiful safe space for our kids.”

Achneepineskum adds that she was grateful there was a residence for the students in the MECC.

"It's been quite difficult to find places for our students to be able to attend school," Achneepineskum says. "They deserve to have places such as that that will keep them safe and (where) they will be taken care of and they will also be able to have those other resources and services they need, and also that they get to be together. In Thunder Bay, we have lost many of our young people who came here to attend school and this is what we need to have is these kind of residences. If we are unable to have a high school in our community, then we should be able to have these

kind of residential services for our young people.”

Narcisse says they were honoured and proud to be part of the MECC grand opening.

"It's a state-of-the-art building and I think it will be opening up a lot of doors to many of our First Nation students across Matawa and NAN," Narcisse says. "It really shows the fact that our First Nation communities are taking hold of their dreams in terms of looking at developing an education system that is really reflective of their culture, their language and the Matawa new education resource centre is a step towards that. It's located by a nice wooded area — just to encourage a lot of the land-based education opportunities that are there."

Hajdu says it is exciting that “well over 100 students” will be able to use the residence at MECC.

“There’s emotional supports and cultural supports for students that are going to high school in the city,” Hajdu says. “It’s one of the Seven Fallen Feathers calls to action and the federal government contributed almost \$23 million towards the project. It’s really important that kids feel safe when they come to a city like Thunder Bay and Matawa is doing such an enormously huge job for all of us to make sure kids feel secure and supported and loved while they pursue their high school education.”

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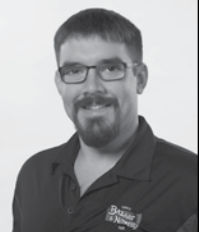


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# Education

# Pays Plat's Christopher Mushquash receives Gardiner award

**Rick Garrick**  
Wawatay News

Lakehead University and the Gairdner Foundation celebrated the

work of Pays Plat's Christopher Mushquash on Oct. 6 after he was recognized with the 2023 Canada Gairdner Momentum Award this past March.

Mushquash, vice-president of Research at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC), chief scientist at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Research Institute (TBRHRI), Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Mental

Health and Addiction, professor at Lakehead University and NOSM University and psychologist at Dilico Anishinabek Family Care, was honoured with the 2023 Canada Gairdner Momentum Award for his work in Indigenous-led mental health and substance-use research.

"It's really a pleasure and an honour to be here tonight to celebrate with you the work of Chris Mushquash," says Janet Rossant, president and scientific director at the Gairdner Foundation. "This is a new award for mid-career Canadian researchers whose research has already been transformative in their own fields."

Rossant says that of the more than 400 awards the Gairdner Foundation has made since 1957, 98 of the recipients have gone on to receive Nobel Prizes. The Gairdner Foundation will hold a gala at the end of October in Toronto where Mushquash will receive his award along with the other Gairdner Foundation award recipients.

Gillian Siddall, president and vice-chancellor at Lakehead University, says Mushquash's variety of leadership and researcher roles is "quite remarkable."

"In each of these roles Chris has cultivated a reputation as

a leader in Indigenous mental health in Canada, with some of his work influencing federal policy renewal," Siddall says, noting that his commitment to community-based participatory research is particularly noteworthy. "In partnership with communities, he weaves Indigenous knowledge and values into investigations into Indigenous mental health, substance use, trauma and mental wellness. The outcomes of his research has assisted leaders of these First Nation communities to make culturally and contextually appropriate decisions for their peoples, enhanced the quality of the delivery of mental health

care services to First Nation communities and influenced the national understandings of mental health and addictions.”

Siddall adds that as a researcher, Mushquash has secured more than \$65 million from Canadian institutes of health research and produced 93 peer-reviewed articles and six periodical book chapters and contributed to more than 60 other publications.

"That is remarkable," Siddal says. "And I will remind you he is still in the early stages of his career. It is breathtaking to understand Chris' achievements, and so I extend my sincerest congratulations to you Chris."

on receiving the prestigious Canada Gairdner Momentum Award.”

Mushquash says he was profoundly honoured and humbled to be a recipient of the Canada Gairdner Momentum Award.

"I certainly want to express my deep gratitude to the Gairdner Foundation and the selection committee for this incredible recognition," Mushquash says. "I know prizes are awarded to individuals, but in my case it's really the collective effort of a great many people that allowed for the volume of work that we all collaborate on. No individual could accomplish what we've all contributed to."

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## Environment Conference 2023



Rick Garrick/Wawatay Newsx\

Jessica Correa, founder of Random Acts of Green, delivered her Indigenous Voices Unleashed: How to Build an Online Community to Empower Climate Action keynote on the first day of the Northern Ontario First Nations Environment Conference 2023, held Sept. 26-27 at the Valhalla Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.



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