



Reflecting

Annual report 2022-23



Chi Miigwetch!

Thank you to our Funders and Partners

Wabano exists from the support of our funders and meaningful partnerships.

We say *chi-miigwetch* (Ojibwe word for our highest appreciation) to each one of these partners for helping the Indigenous community in Ottawa live *Mino Bimaadiziwen* (Ojibwe word for health, literal translation is “the good life”).

- Bell Canada
- Canadian Heritage
- City of Ottawa
- Ontario Health East Region
- Indigenous Healing and Wellness Strategy
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Infrastructure Canada
- Johnson and Johnson
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care of Ontario
- Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
- Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services
- Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Sixties Scoop Healing Foundation

Did you know...

In 1996, 1% of people in Ottawa identified as Indigenous

As of 2022, 5% of the people in Ottawa are Indigenous.





Message from Our Executive Director

Where We've Been

In 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was formed to investigate a solution to repairing the relationship between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. Community consultations took place, and what was found was that assimilation was causing more damage than good. Report findings ultimately identified Indigenous community-led primary health care as a key pillar of vision for Ontario's future.

From there, the Aboriginal Health Policy for Ontario developed, followed by the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy, with the goal to improve Indigenous health, reduce family violence, and promote collaboration and integration of services and programs. The concept of Aboriginal Health Access Centres was born, modelled closely after community health centres.

By 1998, two Aboriginal Community Health Centres were fully functioning in Toronto and Timmins.

Their success led to the idea of creating the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in our nation's capital. This idea became reality when Wabano opened its doors in 1998 – a health centre created by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people.

Over the last 25 years, Wabano has had the privilege to serve the Ottawa Indigenous community, growing with them into the Centre we are today.

Let's look at the last 25 years together....



Wabano Through the Years



1998-2001

Timeline: 1998-2001

1995

Women around a coffee table: Valorie Whetung, Claudette-Dumont Smith, and Debbie Jette write a proposal for an Indigenous health care centre.



1998

Wabano opens its doors to the public.

1999

Wabano served 605 clients this year. Our clinic staff is comprised of Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, a Nurse, Medical Receptionists, and a Family Advocate Worker.

This is also the year that Wabano's Executive Director, Allison Fisher, joined us.



2000

FASD education and support – Wabano's longest running program and our longest standing employee Cindy Peltier!

Child and Family Art Therapy program – this program was made possible through a grant from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Its purpose was to help Residential School Survivors and their families heal and re-build healthy connections.

2001

HIV prevention "The Stories are my Teachers" – this program used animal wisdom to teach about healthy sexuality and HIV prevention. Over the years, this program evolved to include Puppetry, drama and traditional art-making.

The Perinatal Program was offered to new and expectant parents.



2002-2005

Timeline: 2002-2005

2002

Mental Health Program – started with 3 staff. Today, we have 12 staff and serve approximately 1,500 clients each year.

2004

Wabano offers diabetes education and prevention services to clients. Wabano uses traditional foods and ways of being to help people prevent or manage type 2 Diabetes.



2003

Eagle on the Moon HIV Program – this program used theatre to empower and educate the community about the connection between historical trauma and HIV.

Homeless Outreach Program – started a partnership with Sandy Hill CHC to offer a drop-in lunch program for Indigenous people living on the streets. One of Wabano's longest standing partnerships! When this program started, there were 4 staff. Today, Wabano's housing team has 21 staff and serves approximately 1,200 clients a year.

2005

Wabano now offers the following programs to community members:

- FASD education and support
- Counselling services
- HIV prevention
- Child and Family Art program
- Aging at Home program, with an intergenerational component

2006-2009



Timeline: 2006-2009

2006

Wabano hosted its first Igniting the Spirit Gala this year. Since then, Wabano has held 16 galas over the years, featuring themes such as 'A Celebration of the Strawberry Moon,' '13 Nokomis Moons,' and 'Songs to the Universe,' among many others.



2007

Wabano hosts its first **Culture is Treatment Symposium**. This year's theme was 'Honouring Our Families'. Other Symposiums over the years have included the following themes: '*Creating Tools for Healing and Wellness*', '*Closing the Circle: Youth and Families Journey to Wellness*', and '*The Land is Medicine*', among others.

The Women of Wabano win Best Debut Group of the Year at the Native American Music Awards. You can purchase their CD on our website!

2008

Additional programs included...

- Health Promotion
- Youth Diversion
- Expanded Mental Health services
- Tween program
- Housing Support

Wabano purchased two houses – 274 and 272 Bradley Ave – for new programming.



2009

On December 17, 2009, the governments of Canada and Ontario announced an investment in partnership with the Wabano Centre that will create a new cultural and community space. This \$4.6 million announcement will contribute to the multi-million dollar expansion which will help Wabano provide more programs and services.



2010-2013



Timeline: 2010-2013

2010

Our Parenting Bundle, an Indigenous cultural parenting program manual, is developed for clients.

Demolition of the houses next to Wabano to prepare for expansion!

2012

This year we wrapped up a multi-million dollar project to create a 25,000 square-foot centre of excellence in Aboriginal health that bridges traditional knowledge and culture with contemporary health care.

Wabano triumphantly achieved accreditation from the Canadian Centre for Accreditation during our inaugural process.

2011

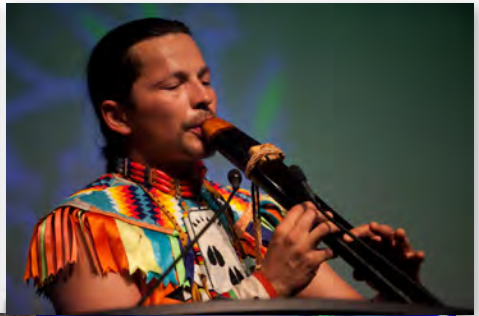
Wabano uproots itself from our home base at 299 Montreal Road as construction begins for the expansion. During this time, we relocated our primary care clinic to the Montfort Hospital. Our programs and administrative offices moved to the Hardini Community Center.

2013

On May 9th, 2013, the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health celebrated the grand opening of its new building on 299 Montreal Road. The new centre boasts a maternal and child wellness centre, social enterprise programming, expanded mental health services, and much more. Our re-imagined cultural gathering space is a place to reconnect, learn from the teachings of our Elders, and come together as a community.

Wabano updates their logo to depict the power of a sunrise. It takes its shape and meaning from the Ojibwe word Wabano—which in its simplest terms means the morning twilight; the dawning of a new day; a new beginning. For more details on our new logo, please see 'About Wabano' section.





2014-2017

Timeline: 2014-2017

2014

In May Wabano unveiled its own Residential School exhibit. The Wabano Residential Schools Exhibit is a permanent and accessible display for students and the community to learn about history through the eyes of Indigenous people. Made possible through funding from the Commemorative Initiative through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), then known as the NRC, the exhibit is a place of truth and reconciliation — a place where the stories of survivors and their families are honoured.



2017

Indigenous Cultural Safety Program launches at Wabano. Anti-racism training from an Indigenous perspective, this training is for service providers working with Indigenous people and is funded through Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). More information can be found on our website!

2015

Wabano's **Homeless Outreach Program** has developed and grown over the years. This year we officially open our **Housing First** department! This initiative provides case management supports and services to our community members who are experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness. Wabano assists clients in their transition from shelters to secured housing.

2016

On June 17th, the Tooth Fairy visited Wabano to celebrate the soft opening of the new dental clinic. The clinic is funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care through a partnership with Ottawa Public Health.

This year focused on community knowledge sharing and land-based activities. We welcomed special guests Brian Charles, Lee Maracle and Joe Pitawanakwat to engage with community.



2018-2022



Timeline: 2018-2021

2018

Wabano completes the rooftop healing garden. Accessible from the Sky Floor, the healing garden now includes a water feature, cedar trees and a seating area installed next to the gazebo.

Wabano develops an Indigenous Training program for service providers in health and other sectors. The training is called “Wabano-win – the Art of Seeing Clearly”.

Wabano’s Mental Wellness team greatly expanded this year, meaning more services available to our community members.

Wabano unveiled its Indigenous Health Equity Report, titled “Now Now Now,” during our annual symposium. Our esteemed keynote speakers featured Winona LaDuke, Papaarangi Reid, and Pamela Palmater.

To celebrate it’s 20th anniversary, Wabano hosted a special concert with renown artist, Buffy Sainte-Marie.



2019

This year we renovated the clinic lobby – designed to be welcoming and foster a sense of belonging, you will not feel like you are in a clinic waiting area. The 17-foot cedar front desk appears like a canoe on the water where the multicoloured tiles make you feel like you are on a river. The canoe, a traditional form of transportation, has connections to the past and the present, moving us forward with enthusiasm into the future.

Wabano purchases 275 Bradley Ave to expand its youth and healthy living programs.

2020

Wabano shows resiliency through the COVID-19 pandemic, and to date has administered **45,000** vaccines to community members in partnership with Ottawa Public Health.



2021

Wabano purchases suite 202 at 338 Montreal Road for the Housing Department.

Wabano also purchases 269 Bradley Avenue as additional space for Covid support.

Share You Story report is released. This comprehensive report highlights the anti-Indigenous racist experiences and eye-witness accounts of more than 200 Indigenous people who sought health care services across the Champlain region. The full report, and a summary version, are available on our website as wabano.com/sys



Where We Are



Wabano Services

The Clinic



3,703 clients served this year
182 well-child appointments
75 pre-natal clinic clients
264 pre-natal appointments
891 of prescriptions filled by phone
931 of dental clinic appointments total booked

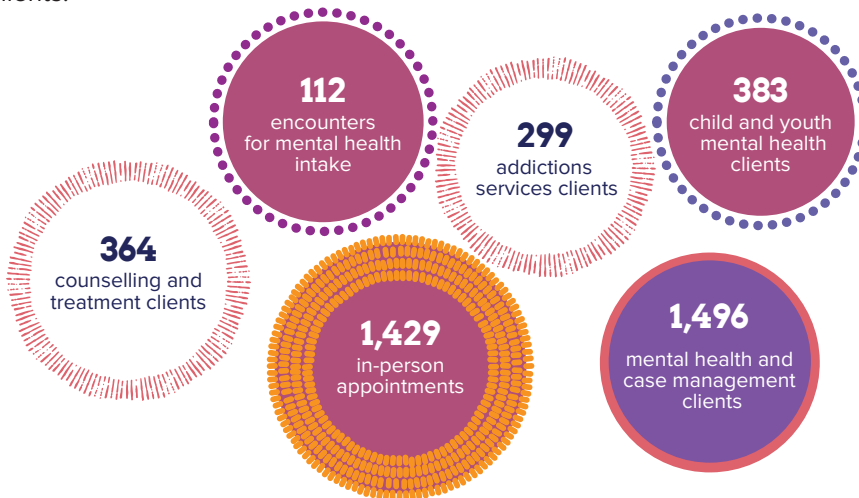
Mental Wellness

This year the Mental Wellness team served 1,496 mental health and case management clients with both in-person and virtual appointments. As we move towards resuming regular services again, we began phasing out some remote and virtual programming, including wellness checks and crisis phone supports.

We welcomed new staff and said farewell to others, and the team has come together to provide the best services and supports to our clients.

A total of 12 professional development sessions were held throughout the year and staff learned new methodologies for providing care, while ensuring culture was always at the centre of the learning.

The highlight of this year has been the establishment of new partnerships with the Royal Ottawa Hospital and providing support for clients experiencing more complex mental health issues.



Housing

Wabano's Housing Team has continued their important work with our Indigenous clients who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Through the Coordinated Access process, we have assisted clients in removing barriers, prioritizing needs and streamlining their movement through the system toward accessible housing.

The Housing Team has also participated in team building exercises throughout this year, creating a more supportive, understanding, and cohesive group of staff members. Through these exercises, staff can more easily engage and depend on each other in supporting all our clients that walk through our doors to access the housing supports they need.

We continue to recruit to find those candidates that will become staff members and complete our Housing Team.

2,251

households were provided with food insecurity support

3,014

referrals made by Housing Team to other resources such as mental health or medical clinic

672

referrals to Wabano's Housing Team from other internal departments

1,034

clients who accessed individual case management and outreach support

51

clients successfully housed

1,171

unique clients served

142

rent subsidies given out



Programs

Youth

Each year, Wabano organizes gatherings for Indigenous youth and families. Unlike other camps, our young people and parents get to explore traditional crafts, ceremonies and listen to knowledge keepers while connecting to the earth, water, wind and fire. Wabano staff pride themselves on offering a safe cultural space for Indigenous youth and parents to gather, experience and learn about traditions from across Turtle Island while promoting physical and mental health.

Summer Day Camp July 2022: This summer month-long camp offers youth to come together, reconnect with old friends and create new friendships. Youth learned about plant medicine identification, working on their physical and mental well-being through nature walks, medicine walks, traditional painting, and full moon and smudging ceremonies.



Youth Culture Camp August 2022:

This camp focused on cultural activities exclusively on the land. Youth learned about traditions through the exploration of nature, crafts, singing, and dancing.

Family Camp November 2022: This camp allows parents to join their children while they experience Indigenous traditions. Families also took part in nature walks, archery, high ropes, and child friendly crafting.

Youth Healing Camp 2022: A land-based specialty camp for at-risk-youth. Youth made their own drums and learned about water and sweat lodge teachings. Campers enjoyed traditional teas, made bannock on the stick and had bison stew. The specialty camp was supported by knowledge keepers Laurie and Perry McLeod-Shabogesic.

March Break Camp 2023: This offered a place of belonging for youth to enjoy cultural activities on the land and indoors. Campers learned about the 7 Grandfather teachings, First Nations and Inuit drumming, archery, team building and much more!



Wabano's youth programs place culture and connection at the centre of all activities, striving to help youth create a bright future. The following programs provided culturally relevant opportunities and tools for Indigenous youth to learn about and understand the importance of balancing their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health, uncover and consolidate their strengths, and connect with each other and community:

Wasa-Nabin: Youth were able to meet weekly in-person to get creative with crafts, including drawing, painting, sculpting, beading, and land-based activities.

Youth Drop-In: Youth got to connect with one another and participate in a variety of activities, including youth kitchen, movie nights, outings to laser-tag, trampoline parks and tubing.

Special Programming: In the Spring we offered Cricut and 3D printing programs to provide youth the opportunity to create modern Indigenous art using digital technologies.

61
campers
attended camp

53
virtual classes
and events
offered
for youth

102
in-person
classes and
events offered
for youth



Early Years

This year, our Early Years team worked on helping families build connections after 3 years of being in our pandemic “bubbles”. They relaunched programs such as Soup’s on Saturday and attendance has increased at their weekly programming. The outcome has been the creation of a community of parents and children who are supporting each other in these formative years.

Another key success has been the outings days where the Early Years team (small but mighty) has taken families out to pick berries and play with dinosaurs, as well as splash pads and family swim during the colder months. Their work is untangling the impacts of residential schools as they bring culture into parenting. They have monthly visits with Indigenous Story Teller Louise Profit-Leblanc, teachings with Cultural Grandmothers Sharon and Karen, and other amazing land-based activities.



Our team actively works with parents and the little ones to bring play-based learning and culture into all the work they are doing. They also support the Parenting Bundle, so families can participate and grow together.

Our Case Manager supports families when they need additional support. They have done amazing work that included hospital visits, advocacy for resources for families, assisting families who are facing financial hardships, and supporting families who are currently involved with CAS.

Chi-Miigwetch to the team and the families who are creating a place of belonging for new moms and dads.



Seniors

What an incredible year it has been with our senior community! The heartwarming sounds of their voices and laughter filled the Sky room on Mondays and Wednesdays, creating a welcoming atmosphere where they were once again able to reconnect with one another after being isolated for 2 years. Throughout the year, we introduced numerous enriching cultural teachings. Our seniors were overjoyed to resume their community outings, relishing trips to Pumpkin Inferno, Park Omega, where they had the pleasure of interacting with and feeding animals, and attending captivating shows at the comedy club or Shenkman Art Centre.

It felt like a return to our pre-COVID era, yet we remained committed to providing support and resources based on what was available at the time.

During the Christmas season, we revived the seniors' Winter Solstice Feast (Formerly known as Christmas dinner) after a prolonged hiatus and we even extended invitations to some youth to join in the festivities. The evening was filled with games, presents, and a delectable meal. Our Santa for this joyful occasion was none other than the Grinch, whose heart had miraculously grown three sizes.



57	In Program Sessions
25	Cultural Teaching Sessions
615	Participants in Programming
929	Social Supports
979	Transportation Supports Provided
2,823	CSW Visits





Culture is Medicine

Culture Nights

On January 30th, 2023 Wabano reopened its Grand Gathering Space to host our Monday Culture Night in person once again. The community responded by turning out in large numbers every Monday night. We've had the privilege of hosting some amazing guests, including Elders, knowledge keepers, artists and dancers.



Carl Beam



In honour of Truth & Reconciliation Day, Wabano hosted a special vernissage for Carl Beam, showcasing 21 limited edition prints that provided a unique and thought-provoking experience for all who attended.

David General's presentation on Carl Beam and his artistic legacy added a valuable layer of context and understanding to the evening. It's important to recognize the ongoing relevance of Carl Beam's art and how it continues to resonate with contemporary audiences. Carl Beam's ability to be ahead of his time in his artistic expression is a testament to his talent and vision.

The generous donation of art from Wayne McKinnon, one of Wabano's long-standing supporters, made this event possible, showing how important donor support is to hosting such events and initiatives.

Shortly after Christmas, we were saddened to hear of the sudden passing of Wayne McKinnon. He not only made this event possible, but for the last 7+ years, Wayne was a Secret Santa to our most vulnerable families. He will be missed and remembered.

Overall, this event was a meaningful way to honour Truth & Reconciliation Day and celebrate the legacy of Carl Beam.

Kim Tallbear

This spring we welcomed Dr. Kim Tallbear, Faculty of Native Studies professor at the University of Alberta for a workshop with our management team on the topic of self-Indigenization and what this means for our clients as well as the greater Indigenous community.



Wabano: The Light of Day

Last fall, we had a truly special and memorable event with Alanis Obomsawin, a renowned filmmaker from the Abenaki Nation. The premiere of her 56th film, “Wabano: The Light of Day,” was a momentous occasion. It was an honour for Alanis to chose to focus her storytelling on Wabano and its community members.

The event brought together staff, community members, and VIP guests to celebrate the film and recognize Alanis Obomsawin’s 90th birthday, which added an extra layer of significance to the evening. The opportunity to revisit and reflect on the history, progress, and the impact of Wabano over its 25-year journey was a deeply moving experience for all in attendance.

The event’s combination of film, a lively Q&A, and the celebration of the legendary filmmaker’s milestone birthday made it an unforgettable and heartwarming occasion. The memories and inspiration from that evening will continue to resonate with those who were fortunate enough to be a part of it for many years to come.



Wabano Knowledge Forum: Reclaiming Our Spaces

This year's symposium focused on Reclaiming our Spaces, as we explored the wisdom of traditional Indigenous spaces, and how we use them to reconnect to one another in a post-pandemic world.

Indigenous people have always known that our surroundings impact our health and well-being. From longhouses, to teepees, to sweat lodges, Indigenous people used various structures to connect to the land, ourselves, and each other.

Traditional Knowledge Keepers Jan Longboat, Tom Porter, Jerry & Jo-Ann Saddleback spoke to our guests, while Madeleine Dion Stout offered opening and closing remarks



Wabano Expansions

Land-based learning stands as a foundational pillar in Wabano's programs, yet the urban setting can pose challenges for its facilitation. However, following a successful funding application this past year, Wabano has acquired a parcel of land in Douglas, Ontario. Progress in its development for a range of programs, including camps, day outings, and healing activities, is now underway.

We have completed the landscaping and cleared out the brush and some of the trees; we have installed three beautiful yurts that can be used in all four seasons and two pavilions that are covered to protect from the elements.

With all these exciting developments, we are aiming to be up and running for programming by November 2023. We have been excitedly creating this space and are looking forward to welcoming the community to this beautiful Wabano land soon.

Earlier this year, Wabano purchased the building directly attached to us (295 Montreal Road). The space is currently under renovation, but once complete, will house many of our programs, allowing us to expand and service more community members.





Igniting the Spirit Gala

Wabano's Igniting the Spirit Gala has become one of Ottawa's most significant and sought-after social events of the year, bringing people together to celebrate National Indigenous People's Day as we raise funds for Wabano's essential services.

This year's gala theme was Our Stories come from the Stones. Canada's distinctiveness lies in the Canadian Shield, with its intricate network of precious metals. Indigenous communities hold this bedrock in deep reverence, regarding it as their relative. By showing respect and acknowledging these stones as our grandmothers and grandfathers, the stories they convey shape our very sense of identity.

Our 610 guests dined under a canopy of large silver orbs, while enjoying the rhythmic beat of the drum from our drumming group. The stage, situated in the center of the ballroom, came alive with hoop dancers, fancy dancers, jiggers and contemporary dancers in a breath-taking piece that left the crowd full of wonder.

Shelagh Rogers, veteran broadcast-journalist from CBC Radio, was once again our emcee; she has hosted the event for a decade now. Rogers' brother, John of CTV/Bellmedia, was our high-spirited live-auctioneer for the evening. A video featuring Mary Walsh, a dedicated longtime supporter of our gala, was shared with our guests. In the video, Walsh was surrounded by an array of gemstones and minerals within the Museum of Nature, extending her heartfelt wishes for another night of success for Wabano.











Wabano Stories



A Daring Vision

Valorie's Story on How Wabano Began

"It was the goodness and energy and motivation of everyone in the community to make this vision reality."

Wabano started because a group of community people dared to dream that healthcare for Indigenous people could be different.

Valorie Whetung was one of those visionaries.

Valorie was born and grew up on Curve Lake First Nation. Now retired, she's mother to two and a grandmother of one. In the time in between, she has been:

a teacher – she taught Grades 2 and 3 in a northern fly-in community,

a potter – her work is on display at the Canadian Museum of History, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, and the Royal Ontario Museum.

a behavioral therapist – she supported clients with complex issues

a civil servant – working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit community on a national level and

a health care leader.

In 1995, she helped build a new health centre in her home community of Curve Lake.

"I could write a book about all the hoops you have to jump through to build a health centre on reserve. But we got the funding. We did it," she recalls.

Little did she know that just two years later, those important lessons would be put to use in the community movement to create the new healthcare centre in our Nation's Capital.

A call for proposals had been sent out by the newly-formed Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (AHWS). Funding was available to build 10 Aboriginal Health Access Centres across Ontario – 5 on-reserve and 5 off-reserve. AHWS' call asked communities to outline their population's health challenges and propose how a healthcare centre could benefit their area.

Valorie got to work.



Valerie Whetung, Jan Longboat, Madeleine Dion Stout

An Indigenous steering committee of committed community members came together, conducting research on population needs and meeting with Indigenous groups to hear what was important to them. Their vision for the centre was captured through consultation, letters of support, and community buy-in.

“The concept of a health centre for all Indigenous people was really brilliant. It brought people from different groups and communities together to build something for all of us,” says Valorie.

Valorie put in offers on three different buildings and purchased one that had been a music store. The committee incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, renovated the building, hired staff, and in the fall of 1998, Wabano officially opened its doors.

The spirit of collaboration that happened in the late 90s is something Valorie says continues to this day at Wabano.

“Wabano has had ups and downs through the years, but that spirit of working together and doing good, of supporting one another and building community, is strongly embedded in the ideology of Wabano and has expanded and blossomed over time. It’s a welcoming, inclusive place. I was so lucky to come into that group of people at the beginning and be able to build Wabano.”

Today, even in retirement, Valorie still gives back to Wabano and her community, being an active member of the Wabano Board of Directors since 2008.

“When looking back over my involvement with Wabano, the overwhelming theme is that they’ve been able to maintain a positive, forward-thinking, open, honest approach to the work they do. That spirit pervades the organization.”

Valorie reflects on organizations she’s encountered where that hasn’t been the case.

“When there are problems, it’s really easy to go down the wrong path, but Wabano has consistently maintained that essence of good will and inclusiveness and taking a path of community-building,” she says. ***“Through COVID-19, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and residential school revelations, Wabano has continued to blossom. The board of directors, Allison Fisher’s outstanding leadership, and devoted staff have steered it in a good way. I’ve sat on many boards, but never one that has the success and energy of Wabano’s to keep growing and thriving.”***



Rediscovering Heritage

Family, and Identity at Wabano: Rebecca Brock's Journey

Rebecca Brock, known affectionately as Becky among her friends, brings boundless energy to the Sky Floor at Wabano every Monday and Wednesday. Her vibrant presence mirrors the sense of community that thrives within Wabano. Becky's journey to Wabano and her profound reconnection with her Indigenous heritage is a story of resilience and transformation.

However, Becky's remarkable journey began long before her involvement with Wabano's seniors.

At the tender age of six, tragedy struck as Becky lost her mother. Left in the care of her father, a troubled man battling substance abuse and abusive tendencies, she was placed for adoption shortly thereafter. By the age of seven, Becky embarked on a tumultuous decade of her life, characterized by constant relocations dictated by her adoptive father's ever-changing military assignments.

Life eventually led her to Ottawa, where she met her husband and started a family of her own. However, adversity struck one fateful night, manifesting as a devastating house fire. In the aftermath of this tragedy, Becky found herself seeking refuge and guidance through a shelter, which ultimately led her to Wabano, where she became a valued client.

"I was a client for many years before I started attending programs more regularly. It was then that I heard about a Wabano employee – Margo Walsh – who was helping clients find their families, so I made an appointment to meet her."

Six months later, Margo worked her magic and reunited Becky with her family.

"I found out that I'm Teet'it Gwich'in from Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories. After 52 years of being separated, I went home to meet my birth mom's family who welcomed me with open arms as if I had never left."

As Becky reconnected with her family, she heard heartwarming stories from her aunties, like the one about her love for cucumbers, a childhood comfort. To this day, she cherishes cucumbers, earning her the endearing nickname, "little cucumber".





Every family reunion introduced Becky to scores of relatives she never knew existed.

“I come from a huge family! Sometimes family members get to travel to Ottawa and they’ll bring someone I haven’t met yet. They’ll say, ‘I’m your cousin!’ and I say, ‘well who isn’t!’”

Becky’s eyes sparkle with pride when she shares stories of her grandmother, a resilient Gwich’in woman who lived a remarkable 107 years. Yet, her gaze dims when she speaks of her birth mother.

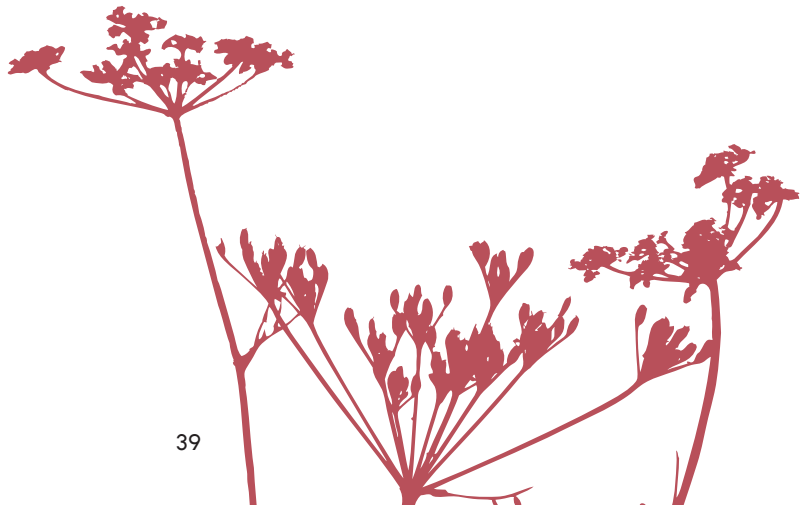
“I try to find out about my mom also.... I don’t have any memories of her. I was six when she passed. Apparently, she would talk to me in our language, and I would speak back. When she passed, I not only lost my family, but I lost my language.”

But Becky’s journey didn’t stop there. Her adoptive mother’s resistance to her Native identity gave way to a profound reconnection with her heritage upon her arrival at Wabano.

“I’m finding out so many different things through Wabano. I’m walking the red path and I’m proudly 22 years sober. Wabano has helped me a lot with finding my identity – who I am – as a person and as a Native woman in this world. Wabano gave me the strength to speak up and say, ‘I am here.’”

Becky has come full circle and officially registered with Fort McPherson, a heartfelt return to her roots.

“I’ve come complete circle now – I’m finally home.”



Where the Heart Finds a Home

Wabano

In the heart of Ottawa, a place of vibrant culture and profound connection has been nurtured for many years - the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. While it stands as a beacon of support and empowerment for Indigenous communities today, it wasn't always the grand establishment we know today. In this article, we will journey through the cherished memories of the dedicated staff who have witnessed the transformation of Wabano, a place they fondly call home.

Celebrating Unity

A Journey from Cramped Quarters to Grand Gatherings.

For years, Wabano's celebrations brought the community together in the coziest of spaces. The common area, the kitchen, the back room, the hallway, and even the basement were all crammed with people. The sense of unity was so strong that sometimes, you could feel the building itself sway with the collective energy.



Wabano's staff didn't let space constraints hinder their creativity. They once transformed their back parking lot into a winter wonderland for a carnival. With a DJ, bouncy castle, games, hot chocolate, beavertails, and popcorn, it was an outdoor extravaganza. This parking lot, once a simple space for cars, saw numerous transformations - from winter carnivals to Halloween parties, World Indigenous Peoples Day celebrations, staff BBQs, and even hosting visiting horses.

Wabano's resourcefulness was a testament to their dedication to making the most of what they had.





The Homecoming

Rediscovering Indigenous Identity.

“This is what our communities looked like when we were in charge of ourselves.” These powerful words, spoken by Métis Elder Maria Campbell, encapsulate the essence of Wabano’s mission.

Back in 2001, Wabano was not the expansive center it is today. It was a modest building, once a music store. For newcomers like the author, who arrived in Ottawa with no connections to the Indigenous community, Wabano became a lifeline.

The first visit was like stepping into a whirlwind of Indigenous culture. The big drum echoed, singers sang, people mingled, children played, and the room pulsated with life. In that moment, it felt like home, a feeling that countless staff members and clients have experienced over the years.

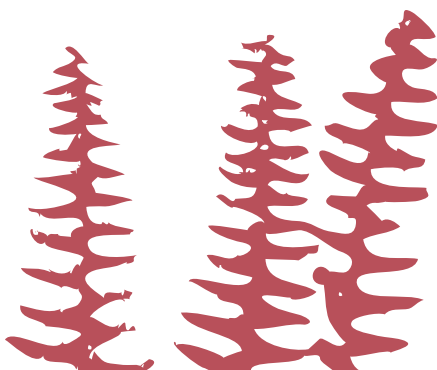
Holiday Magic

Beyond the Boundaries of Space

Wabano’s holiday celebrations were particularly special. The common area, with tables lining every available inch, became a hub of joy and togetherness. Smiles and laughter filled the air as families gathered for Christmas meals, received hampers, and unwrapped gifts donated by generous souls.

One poignant memory stands out - a father’s visit the day after receiving gifts for his children. He tearfully expressed gratitude for the Christmas Wabano provided, sparing him from the heart-wrenching decision of choosing which child would receive a gift. That family’s journey continued, with their children growing up into respectful teenagers, and a lasting bond formed between them and Wabano’s staff.

In the spirit of love, unity, and resilience, Wabano continues to be a beacon of hope and a home for all who seek solace, connection, and celebration in the heart of Ottawa.



My Journey

From Clinic Client to Community Champion: My Inspiring Journey with Wabano

As a child, I became a client of the clinic when it opened its doors. At that point, limited funding constrained our options, and the clinic was our sole source of support. It was a humble beginning, but it was the spark that ignited my connection with Wabano.

As time progressed and Wabano secured funding for its diverse programs, I eagerly transitioned to the youth program. It was a transformative experience, and it expanded my horizons beyond the clinic's walls.

In a remarkable turn of events, my involvement with Wabano deepened even further. After initially being a client, I embarked on a school co-op journey with the intergenerational program, where youth like me engaged with respected elders. This experience not only enriched my education but also broadened my perspective on life.

Upon the graduation of my school days, Wabano offered me an opportunity that changed my life forever. I was hired as a summer student, and that season of warmth and growth was just the beginning. After that unforgettable summer, I was invited to join Wabano as a full-time employee, a role I've held through various positions and programs.

Among the many cherished memories I've created at Wabano, one stands out: it was the day when Allison unveiled the new space for the very first time. A hushed awe descended upon the room as we gazed upon the impressive new facilities. There was a profound silence, and not a dry eye remained, as we collectively realized the tremendous growth and potential before us.

The story of Wabano is a testament to the relentless hard work of every individual who has played a part. It is a story of resilience, determination, and unwavering commitment. The strong leadership that has guided Wabano throughout its journey is a cornerstone of its success, evident in the remarkable growth it has achieved over the years.

To the youth seeking purpose and connection, I extend an earnest invitation. Volunteer at Wabano, regardless of your future career aspirations, for it is an opportunity to fortify your ties with the community. In every capacity, Wabano nurtures a profound sense of belonging and community, a foundation upon which incredible feats can be achieved.

In summary, my personal odyssey with Wabano has been nothing short of extraordinary. From a modest clinic client to a dedicated full-time employee, my journey mirrors the growth and impact of this remarkable organization. It is a testament to the transformative power of community, leadership, and the unwavering pursuit of empowerment. Wabano continues to shine as a beacon of hope and belonging, inspiring all who cross its path to achieve the incredible.

Wabano Fine Chocolates

Wabano Fine Chocolates began as a way to make cultural gifts for the volunteer program in 2014. In the beginning it was a small program doing fundraising sales now and then. In 2016, we received our first contract and in 2018, Wabano Fine Chocolate became a Social Enterprise. Now, in 2023, we ship our chocolates across Canada.

This social enterprise encourages and empowers the young artists in our community to be a vital part of Wabano Fine Chocolates. They are the reason this social enterprise was created. By donating their artwork for the chocolate wrappers, they are sharing their talents, stories and culture with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Many of our youth have come and trained with us, not necessarily to become chocolatier, but to learn entrepreneurial and life skills.



Today, Wabano Fine Chocolates is a social enterprise that makes and sells high quality, handmade artisanal chocolates with an Indigenous twist. Through chocolate, we share our culture and our stories. We are also a training program for Indigenous youth and we create employment opportunities for our community members. This year we upped our game by increasing our use of edible cocoa butter to paint our chocolates, as well as offering new unique molds to give our customers a wider-range of shapes and sizes. Throughout 2023, we offered opportunities for youth to join a chocolate-making workshop and channel their creativity into painting chocolates.



Chocolate strawberries



Chocolate bark

About Wabano

The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health is an award-winning and internationally recognized healthcare facility located in Ottawa, Ontario. Wabano's unique model of care emphasizes the importance of nurturing the mind, body and spirit through the provision of a full medical clinic, mental wellness and addictions services, community and cultural programs, and community outreach. The result has been the creation of a place of belonging where culture flourishes in support of more than 17,000 Indigenous people.

Our Board

Chair: John Francis

Vice-Chair: Alfred Linklater

Secretary: Jennifer Francis

Treasurer: Shaun Logue

Member-at-Large: Valorie Whetung

Member-at-Large: Louise Logue

Member-at-Large: Melissa Hammell

Member-at-Large: Bret Cardinal

Our Vision

We envision a world in which all Indigenous people have achieved full and equitable access to the conditions of health. This includes pride in ancestry, cultural reclamation, peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable environment, resources, social justice, and where the gifts and wisdom of our cultures are recognized as valuable, distinctive and beautiful.

We believe that good medicine is characterized by:

- Reclaiming culture as a pillar of healing;
- The teaching and healing practices of Indigenous people;
- A contemporary model of quality primary healthcare;
- Focusing on the individual in the context of their family and the community;
- Believing in the wisdom of Elders, traditional healers, and teachers; and,
- Believing in the importance of traditional ceremony and celebration.



Our Mission Statement

The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health is an urban health centre that:

- Provides quality, holistic, culturally-relevant health services to Ottawa's First Nation, Métis, and Inuit population;
- Engages in clinical, social, economic and cultural initiatives that promote the health of all Indigenous people;
- Promotes community-building through education and advocacy; and,
- Serves as a centre of excellence for urban Indigenous health.

Our Mandate

The main purpose of the Centre is to create and deliver services that will prevent ill health, treat illness and provide support and aftercare.

Services are offered in a culturally sensitive way that welcomes, accepts and represents all Indigenous people.

Become a Donor

Make a donation or have a commemorative pillar dedicated in the name of an individual or corporation. To give, please visit wabano.com.
Charitable # 873580690-RR0001

We appreciate donations of any amount, big and small. You can donate online to Wabano one-time, or by setting up recurring monthly donations.



Our Logo

The circular shape of the logo represents unity of all cultures and shows that we are all connected, all related. This circle concept is shared by First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures.

There are four parts to the logo, representing the four elements. The four elements are also the names of the four floors of Wabano's building.

- Earth: dark blue at the bottom of the logo (ground floor)
- Water: turquoise in the middle (maternal wellness and clinic floor)
- Fire: white sun burst (cultural gathering space)
- Sky: rainbow segments at the top of the logo (social enterprise, mental health and outreach)

The lines separating earth from sky and water represent the confluence of three rivers in the Ottawa area; the Rideau, the Gatineau and the Ottawa Rivers. The line that cuts between the turquoise and dark blue takes its shape from Métis infinity flag that represents the joining of cultures that will go on forever.

The shape of the turquoise, which represents water, emulates the undulating glass that hugs the outside of Wabano's building.

The negative or white space in the middle depicts a sunburst, and combined with the shifting colours above represents the northern lights and sky of our people to the North.

The thirteen points of the rising sun represent the thirteen Grandmother Moons.

The seven coloured segments that make up the top half of the logo represent the seven Grandfather Teachings: wisdom, truth, honesty, love, respect, humility and courage. From right to left they depict the shifting colour of the sky from a yellow sunrise in the east to a purple sundown in the west.

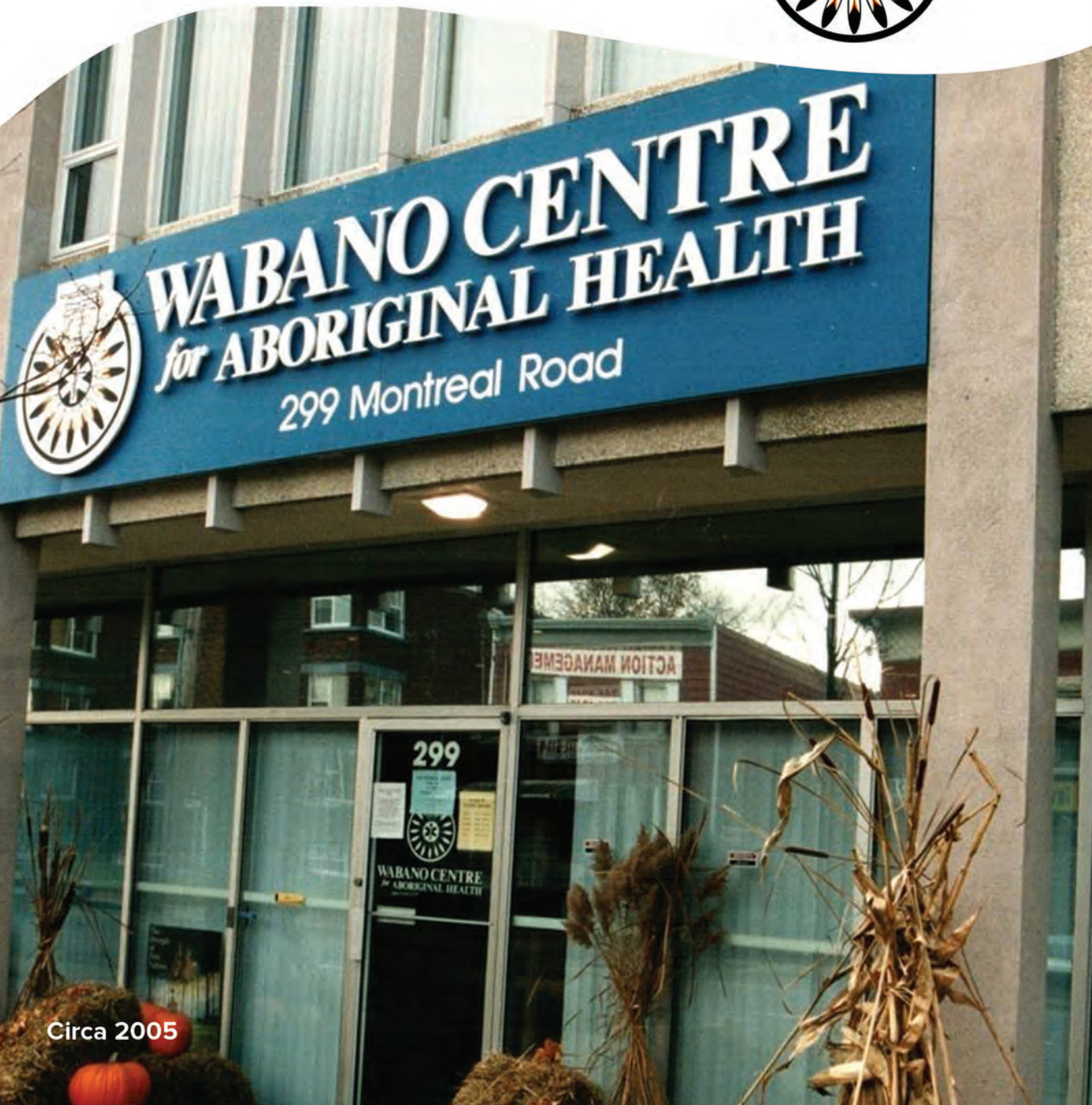
Host your next meeting at Wabano

After two long years, we are pleased to share that we are able to host events and meetings once again in our beautiful space. The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health is known to many as one of the most beautiful buildings in the National Capital Region. The building, designed by the celebrated Indigenous architect Douglas Cardinal, is inspired by the land it sits upon, and like the Rideau river nearby, the building reflects the movement of the water with smooth, curvilinear forms.

The well-appointed facility offers 10,000 square feet of meeting space that is ideal for corporate, government and not-for-profit meetings that require a combination of plenary and break-out spaces. Its flexibility is perfect for formal dinners, receptions, symposiums and training sessions. Indigenous-inspired cuisine is offered to make any event or meeting a one-of-a-kind experience.

Reserve your dates early at wabano.com/events





Circa 2005