



Sioux Lookout  
First Nations  
Health Authority

# OTIPACIMO Storyteller



## Community Sunlight: Gary Mamagesic

Empowering community members to move

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Message From

# BRIAN CALLEJA, Chief Financial Officer

For some, the Winter Solstice on December 21, which marks the official start of winter, is a time to reflect and a time to look ahead.

The solstice has traditionally been the time to reflect on the past, and the time to listen to Elders and each other's stories. It's a time to rest, recuperate, and renew our strength. It's a time to connect with loved ones, and a time to hope, dream, and set goals for the future.

Winter solstice marks the rebirth of the sun, a time people celebrate as we watch the sun strength once more.



In 2023, the SLFNHA continued our work supporting First Nation individuals, families, communities, and collaborating with partner organizations to achieve and enjoy health and wellness. Our ongoing delivery of programs and services has several areas of focus. In partnership with the communities and health partners, we continue to strongly advocate for and advance access to culturally safe services to better meet the needs of communities and individuals.

In 2023, good progress was made in support to improve and increase services. The purchase of another accommodations building supports unnecessary additional travelling while accessing health services. The ongoing deployment of Community Health Hubs to provide more space for the delivery of various client care in community. Cultural activity opportunities continue to expand in offerings at Onaman Ziibi. We also strive to improve on days of service in community in the many areas of health. These areas include primary care health, family physician visits, optometrist visits, mental and addiction health, developmental health, public prevention health, and oral health.

Most notably in 2023, the leadership torch was handed over from longstanding CEO & President James Morris to new CEO & President Sonia Isaac-Mann. Sonia brings a wealth of experience in First Nation health, which she is quickly putting to good measure with the Board of Directors, management, and staff of the organization to further advance health services and transformation of delivery of First Nations health.

As we move into 2024, through this Solstice season and our remaining months of this fiscal year, the organization will continue to work through our strategic planning in line with our vision, mission, and values. We will continue to advocate and dedicate our services to strengthen First Nations self determination within a strong, culturally focused health system.

In closing, Happy New Year/Winter Solstice 2024. Be Kind. Be Safe.

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OTIPACIMO is produced by the SLFNHA Communications Department.

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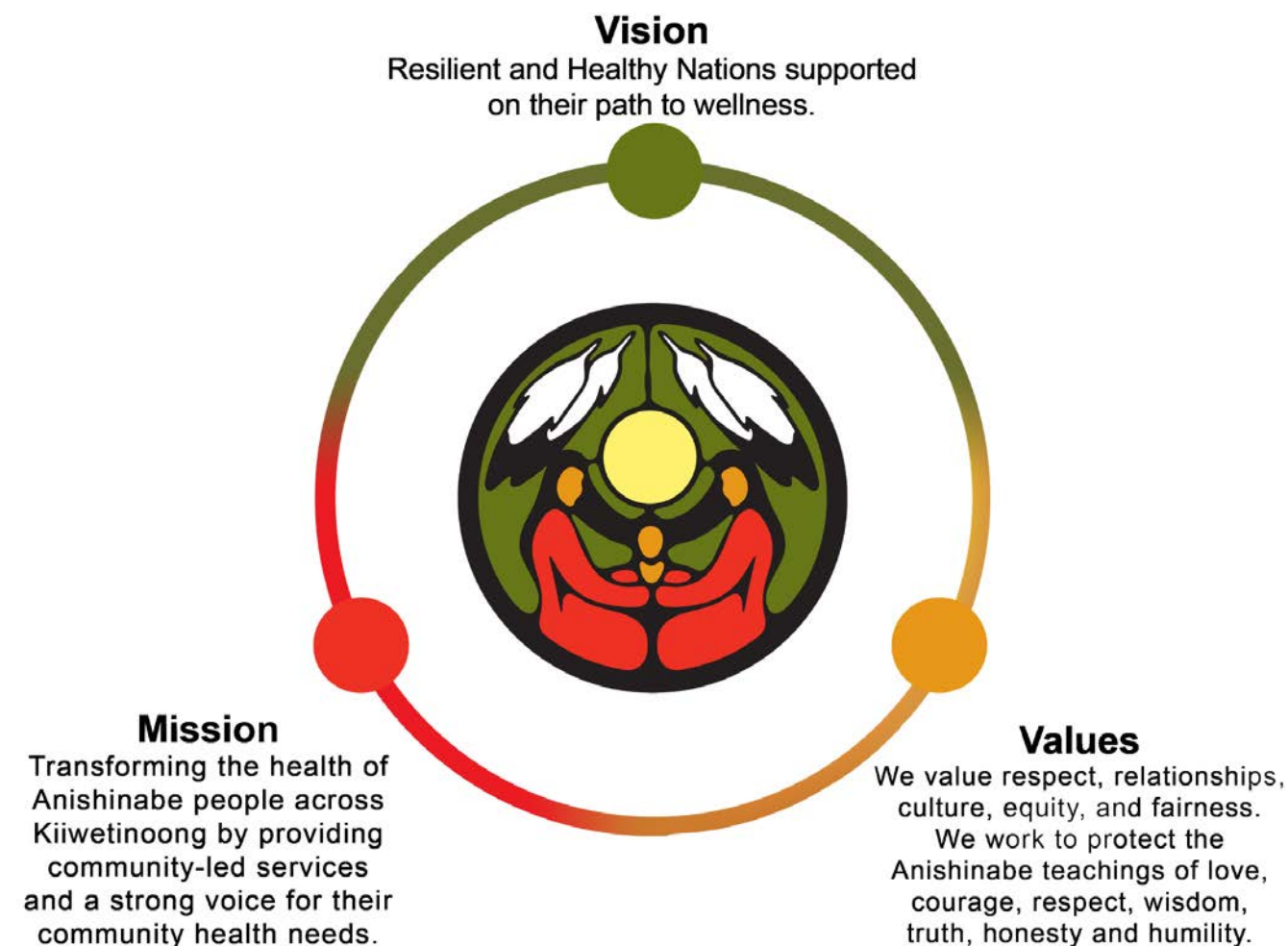


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# Community Sunlight

## Gary Mamagesic Sandy Lake First Nation

Gary Mamagesic has long been regarded as a pillar in the community of Sandy Lake First Nation. Especially when it comes to engaging youth, advocating for diabetes awareness, and facilitating community projects. What started his journey in promoting healthy lifestyles was looking for activities for his kids to participate in and his desire to avoid diabetes himself. This led to Gary running the Diabetes Prevention Program for over 10 years.

“The challenge was to offset the diabetes epidemic here in Sandy Lake over the 10 years I ran the program,” Gary says. “My motto was, ‘Eat Right, Be Active, and Think Positive’. I was encouraged to empower community members to keep moving. Diabetes is not a disease that takes you to the spirit world right away. You can live and manage diabetes throughout your life. But what’s most important is prevention because diabetes doesn’t rest.”

As much as this was community focused, Gary also knew that he was at risk of getting diabetes as he came from a family with a history of diabetes. During his time working for the Diabetes Prevention Program, he learned he was in the stages of early diagnosis of diabetes. Because of everything he had learned from developing programming and his own journey with his father that died from diabetes he knew prevention was important now.

“I went to my camp for three weeks. From there I learned not to eat processed food. I went walking, hiking, fishing, and went to bed early. It was our traditional lands that helped me heal and feel energized. Being in the natural world had all its



benefits. It made me think of the traditional ways versus the western concepts. I needed to be on the land to get my sugar back down.”

Gary’s work with the Diabetes Prevention Program always brought him back to the children. Knowing that many children had parents living with diabetes and that there was no awareness around diabetes he knew there were misconceptions to dispel. One of those misconceptions being there is nothing you can do if your blood sugar is not normal.

“Many young people think ‘my blood sugar is not normal; I am going to die’. I needed to change that perception and start educating. So, I started a radio show every week where I talked about diabetes prevention. I talked about physical activity, healthy eating, and diabetes prevention. Many parents reached out to me that they wanted their children

to learn more about this and that they wanted to participate in any activities I am doing.”

This was the start of community and youth engagement activities that promoted a true healthy lifestyle. Gary was known for running baseball, hockey, and broom ball leagues; he brought bikes to the community and upgraded walking trails. He also restarted a running club along with some of his larger projects, The Diabetes Camp for Kids and the gardening program, Backyard Gardens.

“The Diabetes Camp for Kids ran for five years under my direction. We learned about diabetes prevention and how to live on the land. We did net fishing and took the children across the lake to camp and learn. I wanted the youth to learn to make the right choices when it comes to their own health. From eating processed food, to harvesting off the land. We also started the gardening program called Backyard Gardens. I wanted youth to learn to eat well and know where their food came from. We had 19 active gardeners going at one time for many years! We grew carrots, corn, potatoes, onions, and beats. These are the foods we are accustomed to during the hunting feasts in the fall. The approach was to pass these skills on so they can do it, not me do it for them.”



Gary’s peers have acknowledged how he is resourceful and not wasteful, important qualities he wants to pass on to the next generation of youth and leaders in the communities. Especially since he sees so much of himself in the young people he helps everyday.

“My parents taught me about being active. I went to camp with my dad, I did what they did. When I got the opportunity to work in the community, I saw me inside these children growing up alone in town. It shouldn’t be like that. I grew up with a lot of non-native people and I was always alone trying to make friends. Coming to this community many years ago gave me the opportunity to build, build capacity... I love building. I’ll build a store they’ll come, I’ll build a high school they’ll come, I’ll build a baseball field they’ll come, I’ll build a sliding hill they’ll come. These are things I did. I always approached this community work with the motto, build it they will come. I want to give communities opportunities to try different activities.”

Gary’s advice to all communities that are inspired and want to promote healthy living in their own communities:

“Eat right, Be Active, and Think Positive.”



**Community Sunlight** is a recurring feature article in Optipacimo that highlights and celebrates work of SLFNHA staff and partners in communities across Kiiwetinoong.

To suggest a person to feature in Community Sunlight, please contact the Communications Department at [communications@slfnha.com](mailto:communications@slfnha.com)





## Jeannie's Way Awareness Walk

Howard Meshake and Jeannie Carpenter were running out of options when they decided they needed to hold an awareness walk. They called it Jeannie's Way and held two walks in October 2023, one from Sioux Lookout to Dryden and another in Thunder Bay.

Jeannie is a patient requiring 24-hour medical help due to her complex medical needs brought on by a stroke in 2018. She lives at home, in Sioux Lookout, with Howard who is the primary home care provider.

A message Howard wants to get across with Jeannie's Way are the complexities and inequities encountered being unable to access home care and other necessary health services in northern Ontario.

"We have been completely abandoned by the Ontario Home and Community Care system," says Howard. "Jeannie has not received any home care services since October 2022 and only had one hour of nursing care in total since June 2023. I will do everything in my power to prevent Jeannie from having to live in a hospital just because the home and community care system is broken. The reason for this walk is not only about how the system is failing my wife, but also to highlight that this occurs for so many others here in the North. It's time for the Provincial Government to recognize the lack of access to health care in Northern Ontario."

Beginning in October 2020, Howard shared publicly his family experience of being a caregiver to Jeannie

on a full-time basis. They have both faced the challenges with the health services that she requires; how the policies, authorities, jurisdictional ambiguity, and lack of health human resources and services close to home were constant barriers.

Jeannie also has a message she wants to personally share on these frustrations.

"I'm at the end of trying to rely on a system that has let me down over and over," Jeannie says. "Our son was murdered in 2019 and my husband and I have not been able to even grieve that horrible loss. Every single day is a challenge to figure out my care while also trying to make ends meet. I want to thank all the dedicated and compassionate front-line staff who have helped me while they try their best to work in a completely dysfunctional system."

During the last walk that took place in Thunder Bay on October 26, 2023 Howard and Jeannie were able to meet with the Northwest Home Community Care in-person.

Homecare is an issue that affects a large population of off-reserve members who come from the 33 communities served by SLFNHA. SLFNHA supports Howard and Jeannie's goal of creating awareness around barriers to health support in Northern Ontario and start creating concrete solutions for off-reserve members that need access to services to keep them home.

## SLFNHA, Bombers team up for Mental Health



Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority was happy to team up with the Sioux Lookout Bombers on February 3, 2024 to sponsor a fun evening of hockey while promoting Mental Health Awareness.

The night raised \$4,000, which was presented to the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre Foundation to support local mental health programs. The Bombers also came out victorious, beating the Red Lake Miners 2-1.

As the First Nations Communities and the people we serve grapple with a mental health crisis, SLFNHA is dedicated to providing programs and services that support those that are impacted.

Together, we're breaking the ice on important conversations!





# Service Excellence Awards 2023



Randi Kelly



Brendon Davidson



Laura Duncan



Vicky Reed



Christine Ostamus

## Service Excellence Winners

### Customer Service:

Randi Kelly, Medical Office Assistant, Northern Clinic

### Positive Attitude:

Elizabeth Shepherd, Preventing Chronic Disease Manager, Approaches to Community Wellbeing

### Quality Improvement:

Carlean Fiddler, Data Entry Clerk, Approaches to Community Wellbeing

### Moving Mountains:

Anna Marie Kakegamic, Director of Anishinaabewaadiziwin

### Extra Mile:

Brendon Davidson, Manager of Talent, Systems, & Projects, People and Culture

Laura Duncan, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Approaches to Community Wellbeing

### Innovation:

Vicky Reed, Health Promoter, Approaches to Community Wellbeing

### Cultural Promotion:

Christine Ostamus, Childrens Mental Health & Addiction Worker, Nodin Mental Health Services

### Outstanding Leadership:

Susan Chapman, Program Manager, Developmental Services

Stephanie Garrett, Clinical Manager, Developmental Services

Ursula Larsson, Director of Developmental Services

## Years of Service

### 5 Years:

Stephanie Abrunzo  
Marilyn Anderson  
Joavani Aranges  
Emerna Augustine  
Hana Beitzl  
Brian Calleja  
Ashley Cassidy  
Linda Chikane-Chapman  
Bobbi Christink  
Josh Collin  
Andrea Dziadek  
Janel Genge  
Sonia Link  
Stacey Lukye  
Elissa Lyon  
Beverly Mattinas  
Charles Meekis  
Harrison Mckay  
Shanna Neekan  
Trisha Ronstadt  
Ariel Root  
Larry Schultz  
Matthew Turner  
Katie Wantoro  
Tara Wiens  
Krista Williams

### 10 Years:

Graham Chisel  
Trish Hancharuk  
Lowell Legros  
Christine Ostamus  
Bertha Quissess  
Cathy Therriault  
Teyah Wren

### 15 Years:

Mary Ann Beardy  
April Derouin

### Retirees:

Christine Chisel  
Ronnie Elliott  
James Morris  
Denise Williams



Graham Chisel



Lowell Legros



Mary Ann Beardy



April Derouin

## Departmental Awards

Community Workers, Developmental Services  
(Glenda Adams, Carla Duncan, Seegwun Morris, Jolene Roundhead)

Onaman Ziibi Cultural Centre  
(Jeremy Mailloux, Stefanie Mamakeesic, Darryl Quedent, Marie Roundhead, Matthew Turner, Claire Flatt)

People and Culture  
(Lisa Brown-Douglas, Brendon Davidson, Brian Kanakakeesic, Matthew Lento, Robert Mamakeesic, Jason Marchand, Ian Rose, Melissa Salo, Krista Storey, Teyah Wren)



Developmental Services



Onaman Ziibi Cultural Centre



People and Culture



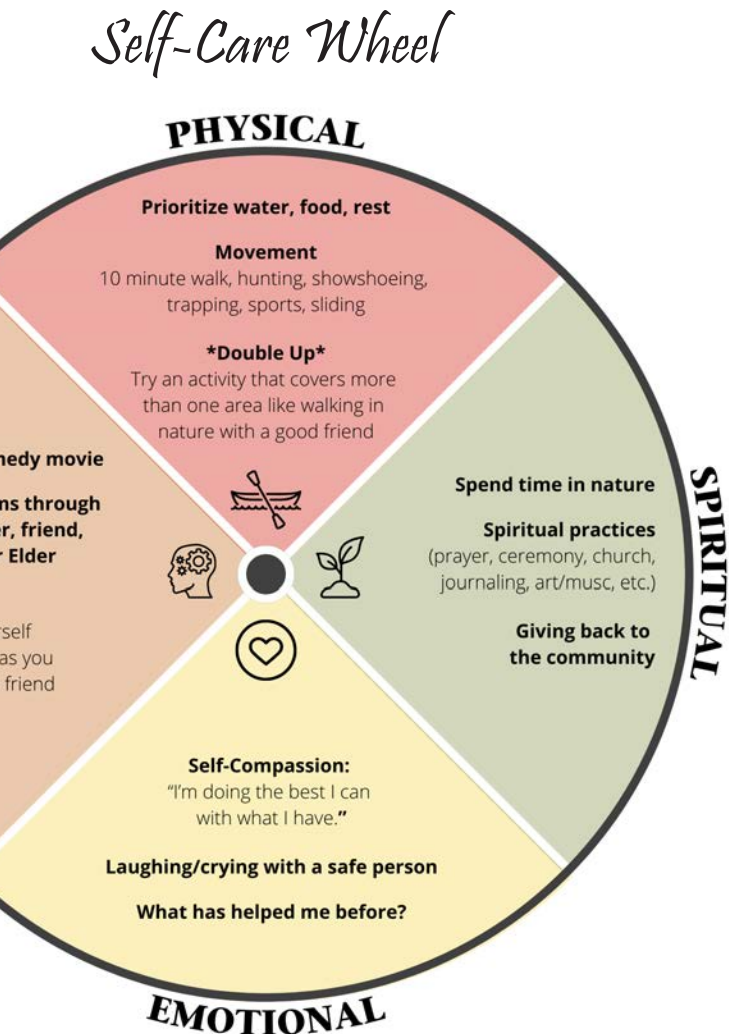
# Beat Those Winter Blues

Ashley Baum RP(Q) & Amber deRaaf RP

If the holidays are supposed to be “the most wonderful time of the year,” then just after the holidays could be seen as “the most difficult time of the year.” For some, the holidays come with cozy memories and relaxation, while for many of us, it can also trigger loneliness, grief, financial strife, difficult memories from childhood, remind us of painful anniversaries, and create high stress situations like navigating complex family dynamics. On top of this, the chilly weather might make us want to stay inside more, where the days are short, and the nights are long and dark. If you are feeling low, burnt out, a lack of motivation, please know that many around you are feeling it too. This is a season we all walk through together, and knowing that it doesn't last forever, can be a small sigh of relief on its own.

Winter blues can cause decrease in energy, lack of motivation and even depression-like symptoms such as increased feelings of sadness, lack of motivation and difficulty getting good rest. A lack of sunlight, changes in diet and routine and isolation are all contributing factors. It can be helpful to keep in mind that we all get winter blues from time to time, and these feelings can be a signal to tune into our unique needs for rest and activity. However, if your symptoms are more severe and/or last more than two weeks at a time, consider seeking professional help from a doctor, nurse practitioner, or mental health professional.

To support us through the winter season, it may be helpful to look at our mental health through a wholistic wellness lens. All this means is that we try



to achieve a balance between our mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional health. Finding activities in each of these categories can have a large impact on our wellbeing and help us through the winter months.

We have outlined some of these activities above in the wholistic self-care wheel. Finding support from others, safe spaces, music, art, rituals, and other actions can bring balance, strength, resolve, and steady us through the winter months, lessening the effects of the winter blues. Use our self-care wheel for some inspiration and consider making your own.

We wish you well on this journey into the next season as believe it or not, spring is just around the corner.

## Local and Regional Mental Health Supports and Services

### SUPPORT SERVICES IN SIOUX LOOKOUT

#### ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

(OFFERS TRADITIONAL COUNSELLING, HEALING CIRCLES, ACCESS TO ELDERS AND HEALERS, LAND-BASED THERAPY, AND REFERRALS)

PHONE: 1 - 800 - 667 - 0816

#### NODIN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

(MONDAY-FRIDAY, 8:30 AM-4:30PM)

PHONE: 807 - 737 - 4011  
TOLL FREE: 1-800-446-7863

\*PLEASE ASK FOR 'INTAKE' WHEN YOU CALL

#### TIKINAGAN CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

PHONE: 1 - 800 - 465 - 3624  
FOSTER PARENT HOTLINE:  
1- 800 - 465 - 3624

#### SLMHC MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS PROGRAM

(MONDAY-FRIDAY, 8:00 AM-4:00PM)

PHONE: 807 - 737 - 1275  
CRISIS RESPONSE: 1 - 866 - 888 - 8988

#### HOPE FOR WELLNESS

(OFFERS COUNSELLING AND CRISIS INTERVENTION SERVICES)

PHONE: 1 - 855 - 242 - 3310  
ONLINE CHAT:  
WWW.HOPEFORWELLNESS.CA

#### FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

SIOUX LOOKOUT: 807 - 737 -1903  
DRYDEN: 807 - 223 - 4180  
RED LAKE: 807 - 727 - 2847  
KENORA: 807 - 468 - 5440

### EMERGENCY SHELTERS IN SIOUX LOOKOUT

#### FIRST STEP WOMEN'S SHELTER

CRISIS: 807 - 737 - 1438  
TOLL FREE: 1 - 800 - 465 - 3623

#### NAHNAHDA-WEE-EE-WAYWIN SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

PHONE: 1 - 833 - 864 - 4848  
CRISIS RESPONSE: 1 - 807 - 737 - 4848  
CRISIS TEXT: 807 - 738 - 1535

#### SIOUX LOOKOUT EMERGENCY SHELTER

PHONE: 807 - 737 - 7499



# “What’s Up Cuz?”

TYRELL MONIAS, Youth Facilitator

I hope you all enjoyed the holidays off work and school. The holidays are a special time for me as I get to have time off and use that time to spend with friends and family. Last year, my family could not spend Christmas together because my brother was fighting off cancer through chemotherapy. It was a tough year for all of us and for him especially, being a young boy. It was nice to finally have that time together and not to have to worry about my brother and if he would get sick. That was a fear of ours and the COVID pandemic made it worse. However, he is as strong as ever. I am glad that he beat cancer and is doing well.



What happened in 2023? I took workshops, went on trips with friends, went to Saskatoon, hunted with my grandpa at his camp, shared my knowledge, and worked. But I had fun too. The year was a mental and emotional roller coaster: I grieved, I lost, I hurt, I loved, I forgave. All these things I did make me happy to know that I am doing something with my life. I think about what my purpose in life is. I have heard stories about creation and how we all have a purpose on this Earth. Before we are born, we are spiritual beings who choose our parents. We have all the gifts and traits that we use throughout our lifetime. When we are born, our gifts will be nurtured by our caregivers and those around us through life. People are born to bring their gifts to benefit themselves and the community. I admire the talents of creative people who bring art, music, films, and books to this world. They bring something that you can only find in nature. I wanted to share a quote that I found in a book. “Art is a harmony parallel with nature.” from Paul Cezanne. This quote captures that, living on Earth, we are the art created by the creator and we live in harmony with nature.

Moving into a new year, we make resolutions. People go for good health, good fortune, and new adventures. What is your New Year’s resolution? For myself, I cannot think of any change I would want to make because I am grateful for the people in my life. As the year has passed, we have a chance to reflect and learn from our experiences, we can move forward in a good way. We can make goals in the new year. For myself, rest is important, and I often neglect it. I need to recharge my battery to 100% and that is a goal of mine, to be mindful and rest. Throughout the year, there is negative news everywhere. It can be hard to break out of that negative cycle. We hear all stories on the news and social media. Negative news can be stressful and take a toll on our mental wellness. I look at what is happening in the world, and it is disheartening to see the devastation and loss of loved ones. Our spirits are strong and will endure the negative. That is why we have culture, language, and stories to help us be confident in who we are in this world full of adversity.

*Our spirits are strong and will endure the negative... we have culture and language and stories to help us be confident in who we are in this world full of adversity.*

In December, we had our darkest days. January and February will be increasingly lighter as we move around the sun. We also have each other; people bring light to our lives. We have friends who make us laugh, partners who make us feel loved, and family who make us feel valued. With everything going on in this world, we can focus on ourselves and those around us who matter most. I do not want to lose sight of who matters to me by trying to change the world around me. I look forward to what the new year brings. I can never be certain what will happen, but I know I am ready to face the new year with confidence.

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Cabin  
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**Love Your Language is provided by:**  
Anna Marie Kakegamic  
Director of Anishinaabewaadiziwin





Sioux Lookout  
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Health Authority

## Meno Weecheeaway Patient Navigators are available to serve you.

Please contact us if you require any of the following:

- ✓ Translation services in OjiCree, Cree, or Ojibway
- ✓ Advocacy and liaison services while accessing health care
- ✓ Support before, during, or after your medical appointments
- ✓ Assistance navigating through the Indigenous Services Canada Non-Insured Health Benefits Program
- ✓ If you have experienced any incidents or have concerns and complaints



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**Monday to Friday 6pm-10pm**

**Saturday and Sunday 8am-6pm**



Scan the QR code to find out how to contact a Patient Navigator.

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- Airport Interpreter
- Patient Navigator
- Team Leaders
- Hostel Support Worker
- Travelling Mental Health Counsellors
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Registered Nurses
- Registered Dietitian
- Real Property Cleaner
- Community Wellbeing Nurses

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WINTER 2024



Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority

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