

NIIGAANSHKAAWIN FORUM

SUMMARY REPORT



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NIIGAANSHKAAWIN | BREAKING TRAIL

NIIGAANSHKAAWIN.ORG

FOUNDING VISION, 1984

“A child loves everybody first.”

The Creator has entrusted us with the sacred responsibility for protecting our children, developing and sustaining strong families, and building healthy communities. The future of our communities is our children who need to be nurtured within their families and communities.

Tikinagan Child and Family Services was created by the Chiefs of Nishnawbe Aski Nation to strengthen our children, our families, and our communities. Community responsibility for child protection is an essential aspect of Indigenous self-government.”

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Niigaanshkaawin Chiefs Committee

- Chief Donny Morris**
- Chief Delores Kakegamic**
- Chief Lorraine Crane**
- Chief Clifford Bull**
- Councillor Louie Sugarhead**
- Former Chief Chris Kakegamic**
- Board Representative Sonny Gagnon**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FROM THE

NIIGAANSHKAAWIN PROJECT MANAGERS

When our people would get ready to harvest, set out on the trap lines, or break trail, they would rely on the teachings passed down from our parents, family, and community. They have instilled knowledge and wisdom about the land and our way of life which we have practised since time immemorial.

This was the same approach we took for the Niigaanshkaawin Forum, held in Thunder Bay on February 14-16, 2023 – one of many steps on our journey with you to envision the future of child and family services in Tikinagan's 30 First Nations.

At Niigaanshkaawin, it was important for us to host this Forum to remember our communities' early traditions and look at current perspectives, so we can begin dreaming of a brighter future for generations to come. This work needed to come from our people for it make an impact on our children, youth, and families.

The Forum, which was based on suggestions received from Chiefs, delegates and observers at Tikinagan's Annual Chiefs Assembly in October 2022, had a strong focus on bringing light to the communities, helping us see new possibilities, and new ways of caring for our families.

All our conversations, workshop sessions, and networking began moving us toward a renewed vision of child welfare.

We are thankful for our participants who attended in-person and virtually, especially those who travelled long distances and were away from their families for three or more days. We were also honoured to host Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, who are the first of our 30 First Nations to have their family law (“Dibenjikewin Onaakonikewin”) formally passed. A special thank you to Tikinagan Child and Family Services, dedicated forum planners, the Chiefs’ Committee, and the Niigaanshkaawin project team for their exceptional efforts in organizing the three-day forum.

Niigaanshkaawin was developed to honour the original vision of those who came before us. With the support of the Bill C92, Niigaanshkaawin gives us the opportunity to develop and govern our own child welfare laws. The next steps on this Niigaanshkaawin trail include additional follow up and outreach to our First Nations and community partners. We are still crossing the first few checkpoints of the project and we still need to hear your ideas, your stories.

We don’t know what the future of child welfare will look like in five, 10, 15 years for not just your community, but all our 30 First Nations. In the meantime, we want to collaborate with First Nations to ensure that all children, youth, and families are supported; and our team at Tikinagan and our Chiefs Committee are looking forward to the journey, as well as the destination.

Meegwetch,

Esther McKay and Robin Bunting, Niigaanshkaawin Project Managers
May 2023



BACKGROUND

Before 1984, child welfare services in 30 First Nation communities now served by Tikinagan Child and Family Services, were provided by non-Indigenous children's aid societies. Their mainstream approach was rooted in a colonial history that neglected the rich culture, traditions, and input of Indigenous peoples. A gathering of Chiefs in the summer of 1984, at what was then known as Big Trout Lake (now Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation), were determined to change that.

A Memorandum of Agreement that would devolve child welfare services to an Indigenous child welfare agency was signed by Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Ministry of Community and Social Services on August 22, 1984. That same summer, Chief Harvey Yesno of Eabametoong First Nation, had a dream for a name about the yet-to-be-developed Indigenous child and family services agency. The name was "Tikinagan" – a Cree term for the traditional cradle board that continues to be used today by many Indigenous families, and that symbolizes the care and protection provided to children in their earliest years.

Between October 1984 and April 1, 1987, the founding Chiefs' dream became a reality when Tikinagan became the first Indigenous-controlled child protection agency in Canada to have jurisdiction over all child and family services within its geographical boundaries – both on and off reserve.

Tikinagan was founded on two basic principles, as handed down by the founding Chiefs: first, "that no more children be lost from our communities," and second, "that a child and family service agency be created that would work with the people for the people, while respecting culture, heritage, and the concepts of the extended family."

Tikinagan is guided by its service delivery model, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, based on those basic principles and traditional customary care practices. Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin means "everyone working together to raise our children." It is a system of protecting and caring for children and supporting families that has been designed by and is delivered by First Nations people. Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin integrates the vision, goal and principles established by the founding Chiefs.

The face of Indigenous child welfare at the provincial, federal and First Nation levels has changed dramatically since 1984. One of several precipitators to these changes was Federal Legislation passed on 21 June 2019, and specifically, Bill C-92, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. Bill C-92 affirms the inherent right of Indigenous people to self-governance and jurisdictional authority in relation to child and family services including the right to create laws for their own child and family services.

Bill C-92 was preceded by an overhaul of Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (CYFSA) in 2017 and the provincial government's commitment to work with Indigenous people to redesign child and family services that recognize First Nation authority and jurisdiction.

One factor that led to Bill C-92 was the January 2016 ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT). Another factor that contributed to the development of Bill C-92 was the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. The CHRT concluded that there had been and continued to be, gross disparities between child and family services provided to First Nation child, youth and families living on reserve and those services provided to the children, youth and families living off reserve. The CHRT ordered that Canada cease discriminatory practices.



"I THINK BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN OUR CHIEFS SPOKE AND DECIDED THAT THEY MUST HAVE THE RIGHT TO ESTABLISH AND DIRECT THEIR OWN CHILDCARE SERVICES. THE ELDERS HAD A VISION OF WHAT MUST BE. THE CHIEFS HAD A DREAM. WE HAVE ALL SHARED IN THAT VISION AND THAT DREAM."

- WALLY MCKAY

At Tikinagan's Annual Chiefs' Assembly held in October 2021, it was determined that the rapidly changing landscape of child and family services should consider how Tikinagan can continue to support the aspirations of First Nation affiliates as each considers the implications, the challenges, and the opportunities inherent in Bill C-92. To this end, a Chiefs' Committee was struck to oversee a project that is focused on reimagining the role of Tikinagan going forward. The project, aptly named Niigaanshkaawin (Breaking Trail), has embarked upon a comprehensive engagement and consultation process that will shape the future of Tikinagan and reinforce the inherent right of each First Nation to determine their own path for child and family services .

Niigaanshkaawin – Breaking Trail honours the original vision of Tikinagan's forefathers and has as its primary objective to support First Nation affiliates of Tikinagan in the development of their First Nation Representative programs and the development and implementation of child welfare laws.

NIIGAANSHKAAWIN'S VISION:

To see each First Nation determine their path for child and family services.

NIIGAANSHKAAWIN'S MISSION:

To support our First Nations in the development and implementation of First Nation representation programs and First Nation child welfare laws.

FORUM SUMMARY

Niigaanshkaawin Project Team

The Chiefs' Committee is resourced by Robin Bunting and Ester McKay, Niigaanshkaawin Project Managers. The Project Managers have embarked upon an extensive information gathering and consultation process, a component of which included bringing together key informants and key stakeholders at the three-day Forum in February 2023.

Purpose of the Forum

The purpose of the Forum was to engage participants in a process that reimagined child and family services in First Nations affiliated with Tikinagan, and to consider how Tikinagan can best assist First Nations to achieve their aspirations.

Purpose of This Report

The purpose of this report is to summarize Forum proceedings and highlight key themes that emerged during the course of the three-day forum. It is anticipated that key themes emerging from the Forum will help to inform the direction of the Niigaanshkaawin project team moving forward.

Overview of the 3-day Forum

The Niigaanshkaawin Forum brought together representatives from Tikinagan Child and Family Services, and representatives from 29 affiliate First Nation communities. Subject experts both internal and external to Tikinagan made presentations, and facilitated a series of workshops and structured discussions. There were more than 140 participants.



The Forum format was designed to maximize participant engagement through imparting or sharing information, focusing on topics related the child welfare law development. Pivotal to the discussions that unfolded was an enhanced understanding about what communities envision for their future and what they believe Tikinagan’s role should be as each community strives to achieve its aspirations.

Seven workshops were held over the course of the three-day forum. Each workshop was delivered in three simultaneous sessions, which allowed for smaller group discussions. Participants remained in the same group for the duration of the Forum.



Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
OPENING/INTRODUCTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drumming • Prayer • Welcome • Forum Objectives • Intro to Chiefs' Committee • Intro to Niigaanshkaawin Project 	OPENING REMARKS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of Day One & Intro to Day Two • NAN Update on Social Services 	OPENING REMARKS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of Day Two & Intro to Day Three • Building Thriving Communities - A brighter future for families
Workshop #1 Mamow Obiki-Ahwahsoowin	Workshop #4 Bill C-92	Workshop #7 What does a brighter future look like?
Workshop #2 First Nation Representative Programs	Workshop #5 First Nation Law Making Process (Discussion Groups)	Workshop #8 What Services do communities and families need to thrive?
Workshop #3 KIDO	Workshop #6 First Nation Law Service Delivery Options	Workshop #9 What is Tikinagan's role in the future?
Closing Remarks & Prayer	Closing Remarks & Prayer	Group Presentations from Workshop Discussions
Networking Opportunity	Networking Opportunity	Next Steps in the Niigaanshkaawin Journey
		Closing Ceremony

Documentation of Forum Proceedings

From the outset of the Forum and until its conclusion, Tikinagan engaged a number of individuals to record highlights from large and small group discussions. Snapshots of documentation appear in this document. Significant among these are vibrant murals that capture conversations, presentations, and group discussions, and reflect the energy and enthusiasm of Forum participants.

Day One (Workshops 1, 2, & 3)

Following the opening ceremonies, the objectives and format of the Forum were reviewed, followed by an introduction and overview of the Niigaanshkaawin project by Chiefs' Committee and the Niigaanshkaawin Project Managers.

Workshop # 1: Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin

Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin is a philosophy of service and a service model upon which Tikinagan was founded; it underlies everything that Tikinagan does on a day-to-day basis. It was therefore essential that participants have a shared understanding of Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin in order to frame their discussions for the duration of the Forum.



Workshop # 2: First Nation Representative Programs

First Nations Representatives, formerly referred to as "Band Reps," have historically represented the voice of the First Nation in child welfare matters. The federal government ceased funding of this position several decades ago. Funding has recently been restored and First Nations have an opportunity to redefine the role and responsibilities of their First Nation Representatives and to explore how these positions can help to evolve First Nation child welfare laws.

Workshop # 3: Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Dibenjikewin Onaakonikewin (KIDO)

The community of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) spent more than a decade developing it's child welfare law before it was ratified by Chief and Council in November 2019. As the first Tikinagan affiliate First Nation to develop and ratify its own community-specific child welfare law, participants had a unique opportunity to hear firsthand how the process evolved and the requisites for community ratification. Representatives from KI emphasized its miinikozowin (inherent rights) to self-govern and the ways in which KI is revitalizing values, principles, customs, language, and kayaash egwa mina ahchaako kikinohamaakewinan (traditional and spiritual teachings) through its Maamao Dibenjikewin Kanawaabajikewin service model.



Day Two (Workshops 4, 5, & 6)

Following an overview of the previous day's proceedings, participants listened to welcoming remarks by Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), Deputy Grand Chief Victor Linklater.

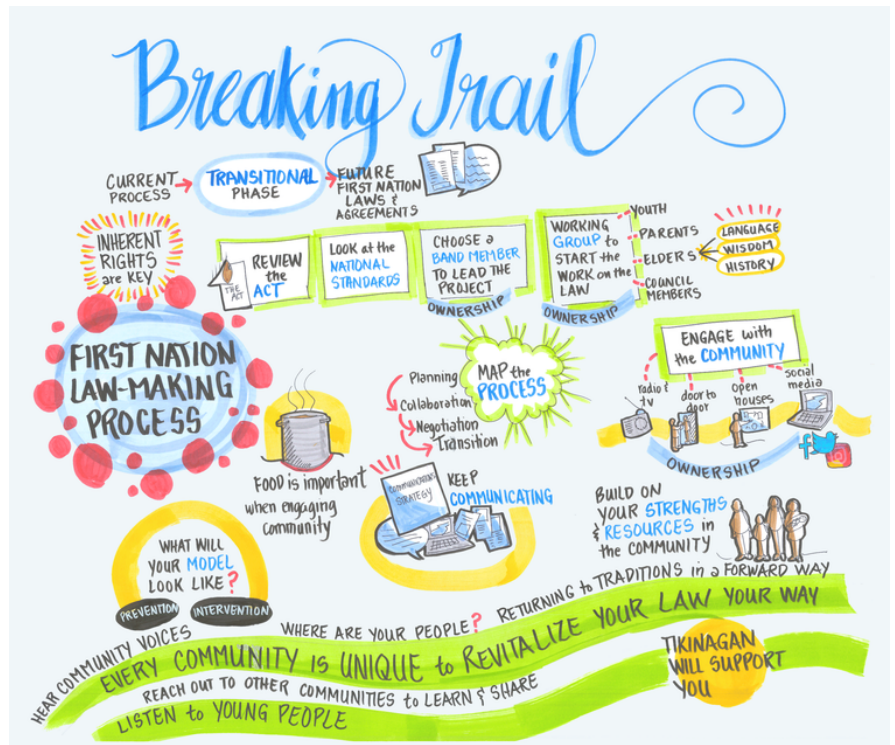
Workshop # 4: Bill C-92

Bill C-92, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* came into force on January 1, 2020. This legislation recognizes, affirms, and enshrines in law what Indigenous peoples across Canada have asked of governments for decades: to affirm and recognize their jurisdiction over child and family services. This workshop provided an opportunity for participants to better understand what Bill C-92 means for their communities, and how this legislation can support each First Nation's development and implementation of laws that are uniquely their own.



Workshop # 5: First Nation Law Making Practices

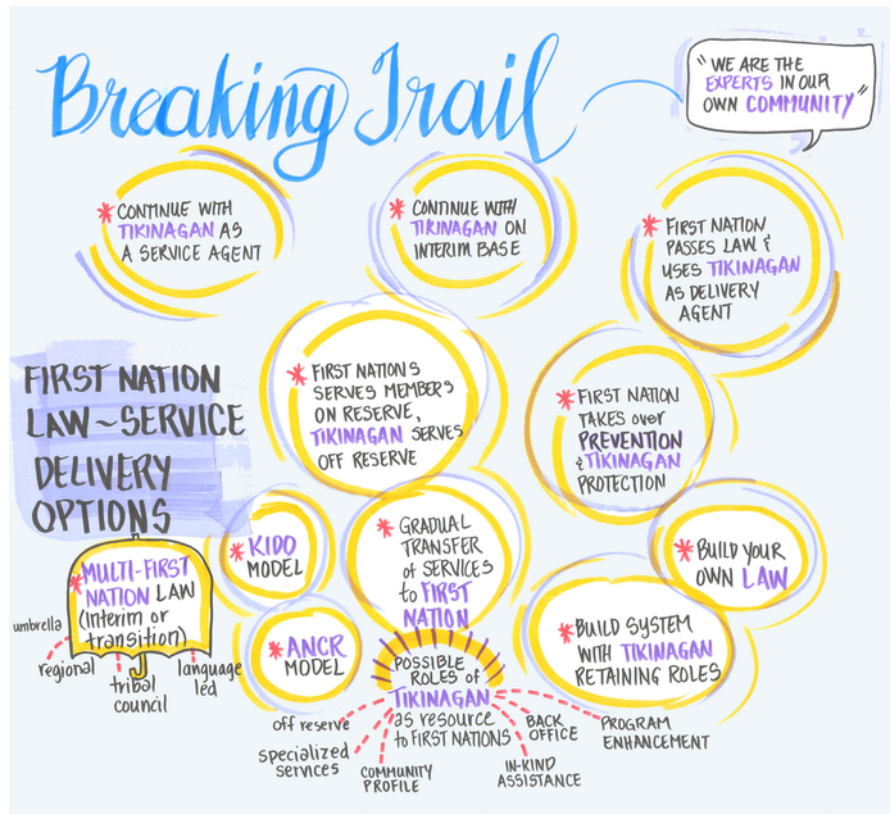
This workshop provided an opportunity for participants to examine more fully the step-by-step processes, practices and procedures that are entailed in the development of community-specific child welfare laws.



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Workshop # 6: First Nation Law Service Delivery Options

This workshop encouraged participants to discuss ways in which various service providers could best support child, family and community wellbeing. Emphasis was placed on identifying and respecting the unique needs of each community.





Workshop # 8: What Services Do Communities and Families Need to Thrive ?

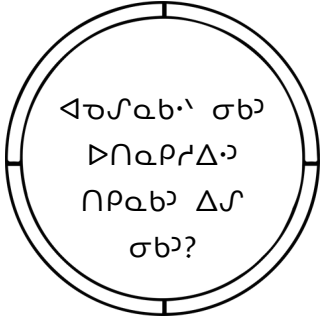
The Oji-Cree term for "Living the Good Life" is Mino-pimaatisiwin. To 'Thrive' means to "have a life of personal healing, learning, and growth."

Participants agreed that the ingredients needed for mino-pimaatisiwin to be achieved include the following:

- A healthy, safe, collaborative community environment
- Healthy families
- Positive parenting
- Education / opportunities to learn
- Accessible, available, supportive resources – contemporary and traditional
- Restoration of culture, language, traditions
- Transitional supports
- Opportunities for children, youth and adults to prosper, learn, grow, dream, to imagine a positive and productive future

Workshop # 9: What is Tikinagan’s Role in the Future?

Reimagining the role of Tikinagan Child and Family Services in supporting the aspirations of affiliate First Nations generated a discussion about the Chiefs’ original vision for Tikinagan, and the organizations unwavering commitment to service excellence, capacity building, and community empowerment.



Participants envisioned Tikinagan as a long-term partner on an on-needed-basis to First Nation aspirations that includes:

- advocacy for and with
- provision of clinical support
- provision of technical support
- a commitment to ongoing capacity building
- Hold fast to the founding vision and principles upon which Tikinagan was built



NEXT STEPS ON THE NIIGAANSHKAAWIN JOURNEY

The conversations that happened at the Niigaanshkaawin Forum were only the beginning and there's more that needs to happen for our communities to return to our traditional teachings.

These sentiments were expressed both by Thelma Morris, Executive Director, Tikinagan Child and Family Services, and Chief Donny Morris, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation, in their closing comments at the conclusion of Day 3 of the Forum.

Thelma thanked the participants for the direction they provided the Niigaanshkaawin project, and recognized this isn't the end, but the beginning. She said next steps includes sitting with First Nation leadership, supporting those who are raising our children, and acknowledging our traditional family teachings.

“ WE WILL DO OUR PART AND LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE'S DIRECTION WHEN IT COMES TO AWASHEW-PIIMOOCHIKEWIN, CHILD WELFARE. LET US LOOK AT WHAT HAS BEEN WORKING IN OUR FAMILIES AND FOLLOW THEIR LEAD.
- **THELMA MORRIS, TIKINAGAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Chief Morris, speaking on behalf of the Niigaanshkaawin Chiefs Committee, expressed his gratitude and thanked everyone for attending.

Having led his community in the development of its own family law, he explained this work of caring for our families is heavy to carry and difficult to do. He added that with the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug family law development, his community is not leaving Tikinagan behind.



WHEN KI TOOK ON OUR FAMILY LAW DEVELOPMENT IN 2007, IT DIDN'T JUST COME FROM CHIEF OR LEADERSHIP. IT WAS FROM THE PEOPLE, THE PEOPLE OF KITCHENUHMAYKOOSIB INNINUWUG. - **CHIEF MORRIS**

Chief Morris further explained how Niigaanshkaawin has been created for the people. He said the Niigaanshkaawin team can come to you and work with you in your community.



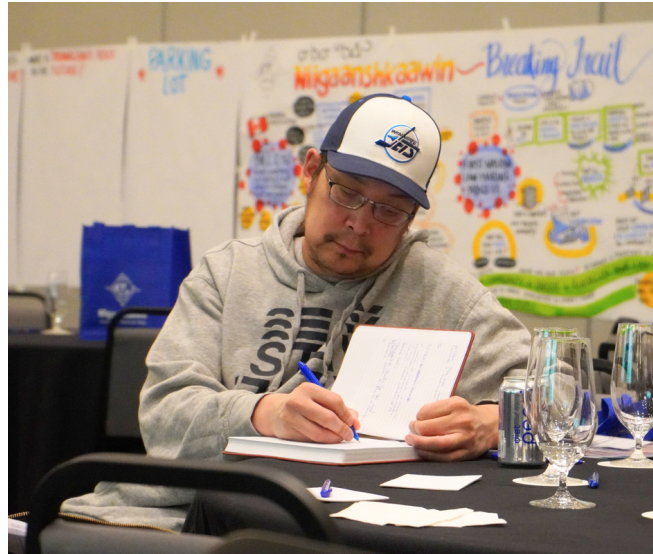
WE HAVE TO LOOK AT WHAT WE CAN DO FOR OUR CHILDREN. THE TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS OF HAVING INNER STRENGTH AND SELF-DISCIPLINE ARE IMPORTANT.. RIGHT NOW, WE ARE BREAKING TRAIL, EVERYTHING PARTICIPANTS HAVE SHARED, THIS WILL HELP CARRY US IN HOW/WHERE TO GO TO SUPPORT THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

- **CHIEF MORRIS**



FORUM FEEDBACK

At the conclusion of the three-day Forum, participants were sent a link to an on-line evaluation and asked to provide feedback about their experience at the Forum. Here is a sampling of participant feedback:



Niigaanshkaawin is an initiative that aims to support each of Tikinagan Child and Family Services' 30 First Nation communities to decide and implement the right path for their Child Welfare systems.

Our Vision

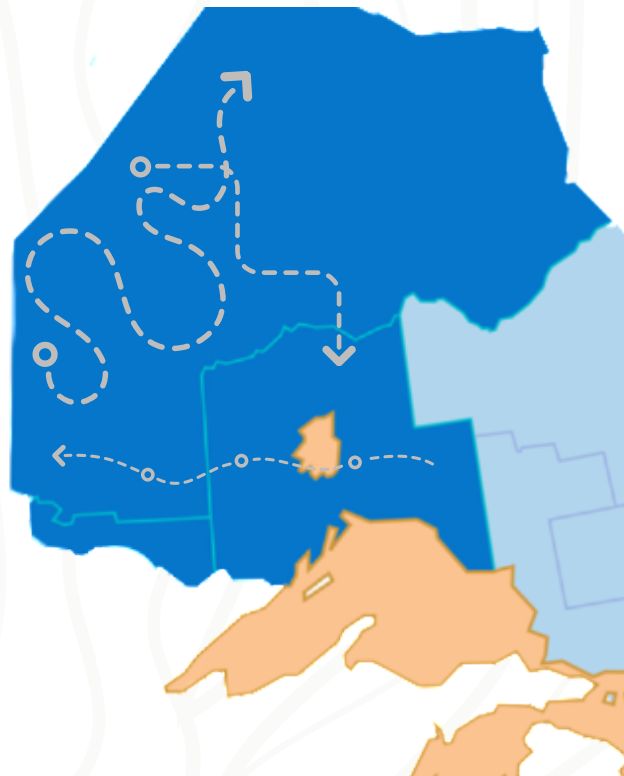
To see each First Nation determine their path for child and family services.

Our Mission

To support our First Nations in the development and implementation of First Nation representation programs and First Nation child welfare laws.

Our Outcome

To reimagine the role Tikinagan will have in supporting our First Nations' child and family services.





Niigaanshkaawin

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Follow the Path

www.niigaanshkaawin.org



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