

Building Our Future Together

2026 – 2031

Strategic Plan

Dryden Native
Friendship Centre

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“This is a place of power because they show us our power!”

- Larry



Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the City of Dryden was built on the traditional lands of Eagle Lake and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway First Nations. Dryden is also a traditional Metis community and a hub for Indigenous peoples in Treaty 3 as well as Treaty 9.

President of the Board's Message

In the last Strat plan our goals were to continue to build relationships with neighbouring communities and partners. To build on programs we had running and acquired new programs as we grew as an organization. Parker Point was bought and renovated to accommodate all abilities. This allowed for room for more crafts and land based learning for our seniors, youth and those searching for their cultural roots.

People in Dryden know the DNFC for the many events we participate in: Pride, Indigenous Peoples Day, Tim Hortons Campaign, DHS PowWow, Christmas Feasts, MMIW campaign, Every Child Matters walk and PowWow. We have gained many allies who also volunteer and support these endeavours.

Homeward Bound was supported and utilized by area young moms and children.

The board of directors is made up of strong individuals who strive to continue to make DNFC a great work place and a gathering place where people of all races can bring their gifts to share.

Moving forward to the new Strat plan, I believe many of our goals remain the same, with emphasis on our youth. We need to give them a strong base through land-based teaching, pride in their language, and teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers. We need strong youth to be able to help themselves and their peers stay away from drugs and unhealthy relationships . Giving them the tools they need to self-regulate and build skills that will help them in everyday situations. Mental health and addictions can be prevented through healthy lifestyles, healing mind, body and spirit . We need a mental health worker on site, someone who the youth and vulnerable clients trust and respect.

We have a great team right now, but there is always room to excel with exceptional workers who can walk the walk, not just talk the talk, we can make that happen.

Arlene Williams
Board President
Dryden Native Friendship Centre





“The Dryden Native Friendship Centre is good at mixing everyone together, celebrating culture, life, friendship and Ojibway traditions.”

- Volunteer



“DNFC is very good at providing effective programming to those in need.”

- Client

Executive Director's Message

Boozhoo, Aanii Ojawaskwa Mingacoate n'dishnikaaz. Mahengun dodem. My Spirit name is Blue Cloud, from the Wolf Clan. My given name is Karen Smith. I am a proud Red River Métis, born on Treaty One territory and registered with the Métis Nation of Ontario. For the past 20 years, my husband and I have lived on Treaty Three territory, where we've raised our two children.

My journey with the Dryden Native Friendship Centre (DNFC) began six years ago as an Administrative Assistant while completing my BA in Psychology. Since then, I've had the privilege to serve in several roles including Homeward Bound Navigator, Intergenerational Trauma Coordinator, and Team Lead, and now as Executive Director.

Over the past five years, DNFC has made great strides in expanding culturally grounded programming and community partnerships. As we move forward, our new Strategic Plan will guide us in deepening our impact in key areas, most importantly in addiction and mental health support.

These priorities reflect what we've heard from the community: the urgent need for holistic, accessible, and culturally safe approaches to healing and wellness. Our plan also strengthens our commitment to communication and transparency. We will be sharing more frequent updates on our projects, achievements, and community success stories. We will be celebrating the progress that we make together. By keeping our community informed and engaged, we ensure that every step we take reflects shared goals and collective vision.

Through collaboration with partners such as the City of Dryden, OPP, OAHS, KDSB, and other community organizations, we will continue building wraparound supports rooted in Indigenous culture and connection.

Chi Miigwetch to our staff, Board, and community members for your continued trust, support, and dedication as we enter this exciting new chapter together.

Miigwetch,
Sincerely,

Karen Smith
Executive Director
Dryden Native Friendship Centre



Mayor’s Message

“The Dryden Native Friendship Centre has long been a cornerstone of connection, inclusion and building wellness in our community. As they chart their path forward with this Strategic Plan, the City of Dryden is proud to stand alongside them in building a stronger, more united future for everyone.”

Mayor Jack Harrison
City of Dryden



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Executive Summary

The Dryden Native Friendship Centre (DNFC) has completed the 2026-2031 strategic planning process and will identify their vision and goals for the future of not only the centre but the Urban Indigenous Community in and around the Dryden region.

The foundation of this entire process has been rooted in our cultural traditions, values and practices. With a medicine wheel and Grandfather Teachings perspective, we took a look back to see where we started from to gain insights as to where we need to go.

The mandate of Friendship Centre movement remains:

"To improve the quality of life for Indigenous people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian society and which respects Indigenous cultural distinctiveness."





From humble beginnings in a garage, to a 2 storey building in the centre of the Dryden and Urban Indigenous community, (DNFC) is the friendship centre that could. Apparently it's the best kept secret of Dryden.

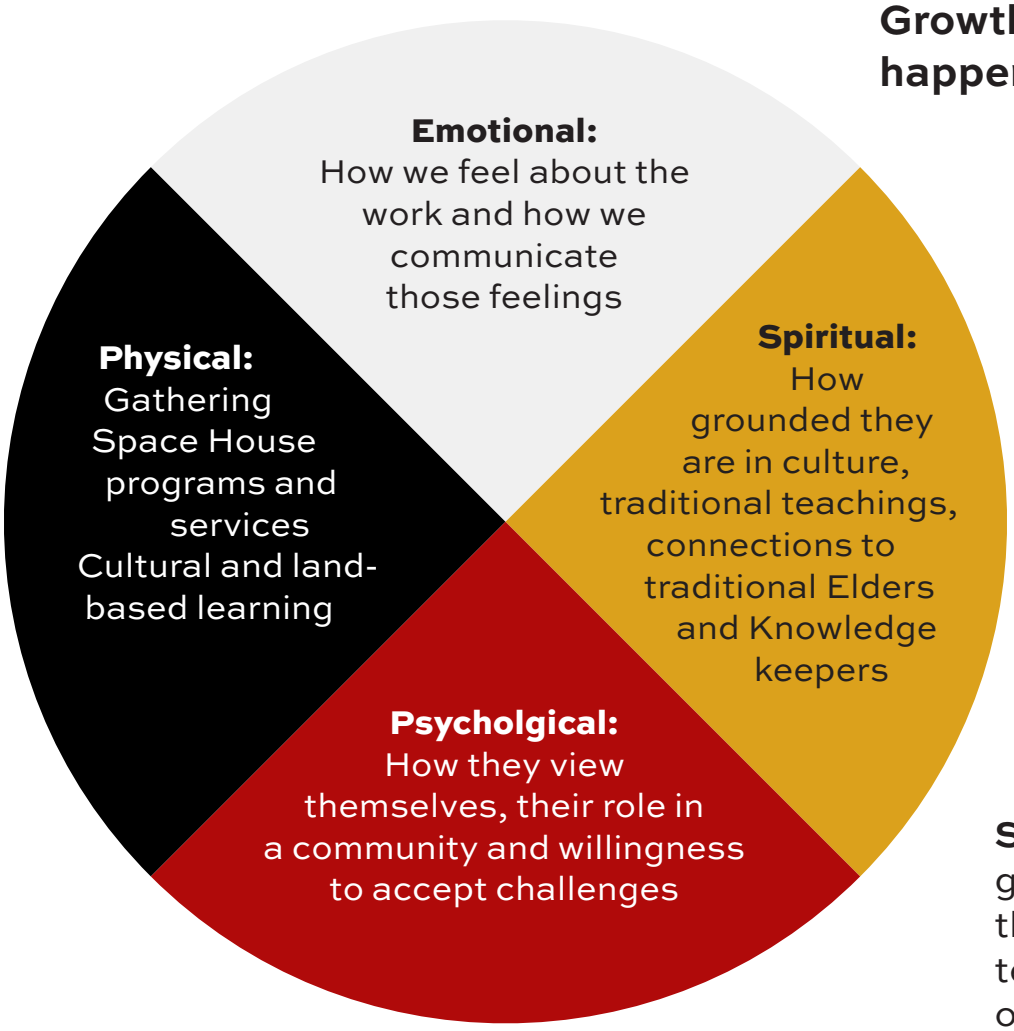
They have a staff of over 40 people, an operating budget of $5,000,000 and offer 40 programs and services that impact all ages and aspects of life.

They have proudly accomplished all aspects of the 2020-2025 strategic plan. Centred around their accomplishments was the motto of "family and friends coming together to help each other." That has been truly evident over the past 5 years.



With so many accomplishments to their credit, it was only natural to ask, "Where do we go from here?".

Growth of an Organization



Growth for an organization happens in many ways.

Physically in where they gather and house their programs and services.

Emotionally in how they feel and communicate about the work and services they provide.

Spiritually in how grounded they are in the culture, traditional teachings and seeking on-going learnings.

Psychologically in how they view themselves, their role in the community and their ability to accept challenges that, on the surface, may look too large for one organization to take on.

We are talking about the **Dryden Native Friendship Centre** - there is nothing too large or impossible for this organization to work towards achieving.

Information Gathering Methodology

Information to complete an Environmental Scan, SWOT and to create the plan itself was gathered traditionally (visiting), paper surveys, conversations and non-traditionally via on-line surveys, telephone conversations and literature reviews. From all of the data gathered, **this strategic plan will:**

- **Identify past accomplishments**
- **Environmental Scan**
- **Include a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis**
- **Needs Analysis**
- **Identify strategic goals for the next 5 years**
- **Summary of staff survey and community survey**

“Thank you for providing access to Elders, helping people and finding ways to keep me sane.”

- Client

Past Accomplishments

These were the strategic goals as identified in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan:

1. Provide and Encourage Culture and Social Enrichment: Support for creation of a safe space for a diversity of Indigenous events both at DNFC and other locations; teachings that support all Indigenous groups in the community.

- With over 40 programs for everyone from children, youth, adults and elders/seniors
- Breakfast and lunch provided Monday - Friday - everyone welcome
- Everyone, regardless of ethnicity is welcome
- Partnerships with local schools and service agencies to host a variety of learning, celebrating and culturally significant events
- A strong and vital volunteer group comprising of Indigenous and non-indigenous participants

2. Lead cultural Revitalization and Competency Training: Support land based training; increase exposure and access across age groups; cross cultural training

- Parker Point was acquired to facilitate land-based training, cross cultural experiences, encourage interaction between all age groups
- Cultural teachers, Elders and Knowledge Keepers are utilized throughout the year for a variety of staff, client and community education
- In a recent on-line survey, staff identified that they were encouraged to work at DNFC for the learning opportunities
- Travel opportunities for Elders and Youth on an on-going basis

“What does the Friendship Centre do? They provided me with all of my winter clothes last year. I couldn’t afford to pay for what they gave me!”

- Client

3. Increase Indigenous Youth Engagement: Support increased representation and engagement at all levels; Leadership/Mentorship

- Youth representative on the Board
- A variety of programs designed to engage the youth throughout the year
- Celebrations (i.e. Pride week) to support and assist youth who identify as 2SLGBTQI+
- Land based and cross age gatherings with Elders and seniors
- Volunteering opportunities

4. Develop External Partnerships that support DNFC’s Mandate and Vision: Support a collaborative approach for larger community projects

- Partnerships have been developed with the City of Dryden, numerous urban service, justice and educational providers as well as several First Nation communities
- Partnerships with local businesses and for-profit organizations is also beginning to happen

Environmental Scan

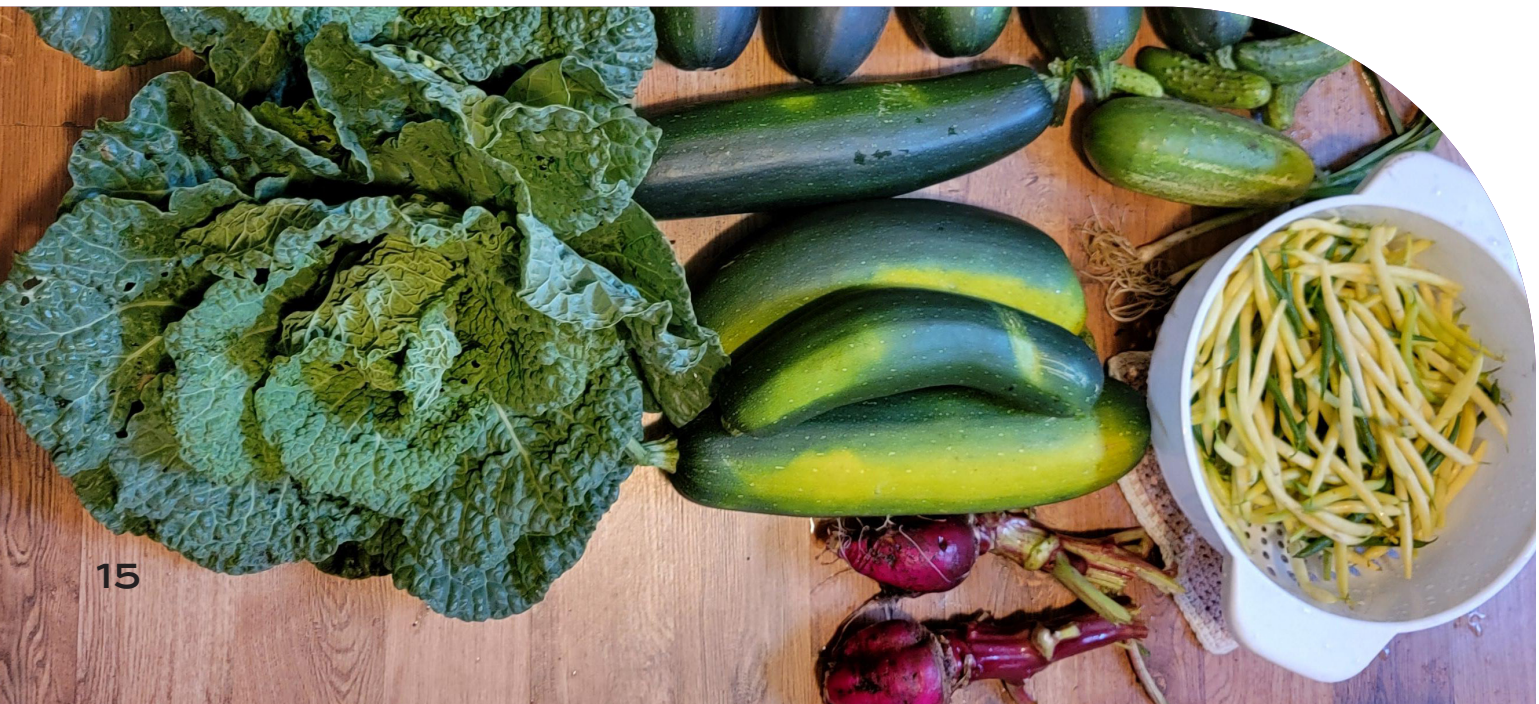
Political Landscape

Provincially, the Conservative government has a majority with MPP Greg Rickford representing the region. In recent months, the government has signalled its desire to have minerals from the Ring of Fire (Treaty 9 territory) extracted as quickly as possible. They have a strong focus on employment readiness as well as policing and mental health support. On September 14, 2025, they released $716,000.00 over two years to support the mobile crisis response team led by the Dryden OPP, Kenora OPP and Rainy River OPP.

They have also recently released 1 year funding for organizations to apply for to support or create mental health initiatives.

Socio-economic Factors

With a population of just under 7500 in the city of Dryden, the community has experienced a slight drop in its population. **The Indigenous population makes up 19.5%**. The average age of the non-indigenous community is 47.5, where **the average age of the Indigenous community is 34 years old**. The employment rate is 53% and the unemployment rate is 8.5% **but youth aged 15-24 experience a 16% unemployment rate**. As there are a significant number of Indigenous youth in this age bracket than non-Indigenous youth, this statistic has a greater impact on Indigenous youth. (2021 Canada Census)





Cost of Living

The cost of living is estimated to be $1883 per month for a single renter with average rents around $1688. The lack of affordable housing has seen an increase in the homelessness population. (2021 Canada Census)

Mental Health and Addictions

In all conversations with the Board, leadership, staff, community members and partners including the Ontario Provincial Police and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway First Nation, the most significant issue facing the City of Dryden and the surrounding area is mental health and addictions. Although calls to the OPP for violent crimes and property crime have seen a slight decline from 2023 -2024, trafficking and drug use remains a major concern for the community. As the community is located on Hwy 17, the flow of illicit drugs from the east and west is difficult to control.

Generational and personal trauma has a tremendous impact on Indigenous people and because of these factors, we generally experience higher rates of poverty, isolation, racism, mental health and addiction issues.

The Dryden Regional Health Centre is the largest mental health and addiction service provider. Unfortunately, given the historical experiences of Indigenous people with health care, especially mental health care, they are hesitant and in some cases, outright refuse to seek support from this agency. This creates a large number (no statistical information available to capture the exact numbers) of urban Indigenous peoples without service.

SWOT Analysis of the DNFC

Strengths

- A highly functioning board
- Effective and engaged leadership
- Strong cultural heritage and connection to traditions and teachings
- A culture of continuous learning and development
- The ability to recognize community needs and adapt quickly to provide supports
- Assets including the main building, Parker Point, transportation (land and water), garage and other assets
- Partnerships with the City of Dryden, other service providers, First Nation Communities and businesses
- Leader in community events such as Pride, MMIWG2S, seasonal feasts, National Truth and Reconciliation Day
- Daycare provider
- Homeward Bound Program
- Seen as a reliable agency to host program initiatives





Weaknesses

- Salaries - difficult to attract and retain qualified staff
- Turn-over - at present the majority of the staff have less than 1 year with the organization
- The main building on Queen Street will quickly run out of space if more programming is introduced
- Hours of operation (not accessible for people who work during the day)
- Internal conflict resolution process
- Internal and external communications (staff survey indicates that not all staff are receiving the same information)
- Gap in services for men aged 25-50
- Many of the same people participating in programming - may not be reaching the broader community
- Reputation within the community that DNFC is ONLY for Indigenous people

“Having people in the same room, laughing and enjoying each others’ company.”

- Client



Opportunities

- Rebrand DNFC so it is no longer the “best kept secret”
- Improve external communications (in progress) as to what the centre offers and what they don’t provide
- Improve outreach to encourage a broader cross-section of the community
- Review certain programs to determine the present and future need or uptake of the program (ie. Early Years)
- Ensure all programs communicate how the program addresses the issue of mental health and addictions
- Provide staff with on-going trauma recovery services and supports
- Create formalized partnerships with local and regional businesses
- Explore opportunities to expand DNFC by acquiring available land or available buildings to create a centre focused on mental health and addictions

Threats

- Salaries - an in-depth pay equity study would identify where salaries can and need to be adjusted
- Turn-over - this interrupts programming availability and trust of the clients with program facilitator
- Lack of affordable housing (although an external threat - it will affect DNFC's ability to recruit qualified staff)
- Availability and cost of temporary accommodations (although an external threat, this reality will impact DNFC's ability to bring in external professionals to provide specific services or supports)
- Not maximizing Parker Point - a negative community perception will develop as to how Indigenous organizations are spending tax-payers dollars

"DNFC is very good at offering friendship, teachings and creating a very welcoming space. They are always looking for ways to help."

- Volunteer



Needs Analysis

Input has been received from 230 responses to a written survey, on-line survey, direct interviews and conversations with clients, community members and partners. That input was used to create this word cloud.

This word clouds provides a strong visual to the voices that helped identify the needs of the community and surrounding area.




inclusive
transportation
expansion
communication
men
gathering
youth activities
status
indigenous
staff
expanded
training
hours
addictions
healing
input
teachings
health
housing
client
children
trauma
daycare
affordable
programs

Strategic Plan 2026-2031

Building Our Future Together

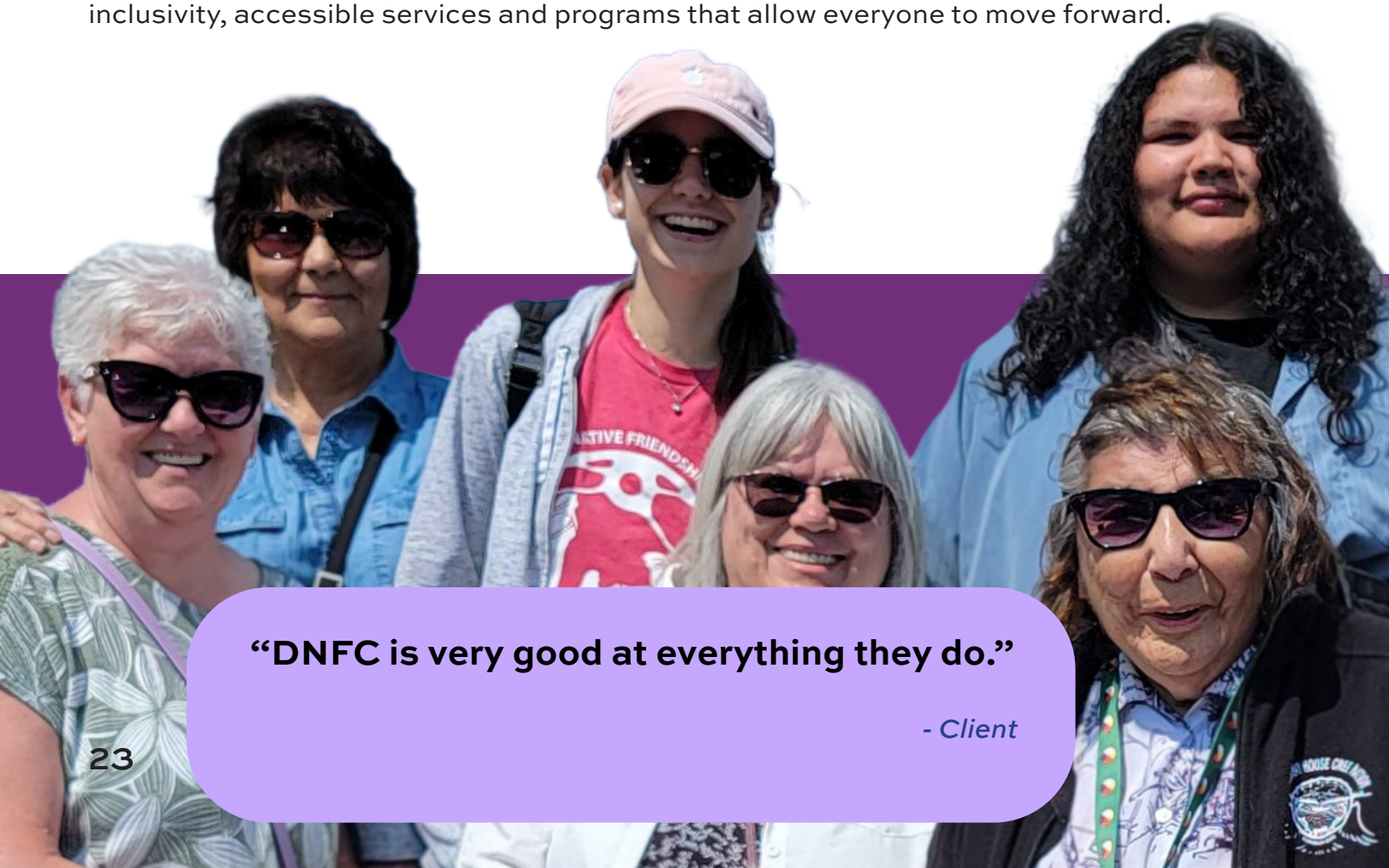
Vision

We see a thriving community where everyone is able to share their unique gifts, participate and contribute fully to the social, economical, cultural and spiritual wellbeing of our community today and for generations to come.

Mission Statement

To strengthen the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of urban Indigenous peoples through culturally safe supports, community partnerships and healing centred initiatives that bridge traditional knowledge and modern mental health practices.

Like our vision statement, our mission over the next few years will also expand to ensure inclusivity, accessible services and programs that allow everyone to move forward.



“DNFC is very good at everything they do.”

- Client

Core Values

- **Cultural Integrity**: Grounding all actions in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing
- **Community Empowerment**: Building collective strength through inclusion and participation
- **Healing and Safety**: Creating spaces that promote dignity, compassion and trust
- **Collaboration**: Working in unity with other organizations, Elders, and knowledge keepers
- **Accountability**: Acting with transparency, respect and responsibility to community

The Plan

To accomplish what this dynamic plan is proposing, it will take a rebranding of the DNFC's motto from "Family and friends coming together to help each other" to "DNFC - Your Life Centre: Lovingly supporting and guiding you through every stage of life".

The longer range plan will be to expand the DNFC's physical presence in the community by either procuring land and building a stand alone mental health and addictions centre (Perhaps a Life Centre) or purchasing an already existing building and retrofitting it to meet the needs of staff and clients.



1. Partnerships – Building Strength Through Collaboration

Goal:

Develop meaningful, long-term partnerships that expand access to culturally appropriate mental health and addictions resources.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Formalize partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers, including health authorities, shelters, treatment centers, and hospitals to cross share knowledge and resources
- 1.2 Create a Community **Advisory Circle of Elders**, knowledge keepers, and lived-experience advocates to guide partnership alignment and ensure cultural safety.
- 1.3 Collaborate with educational institutions to support Indigenous mental health research and student placements in cultural wellness programs.
- 1.4 Advocate for policy change and equitable funding in partnership with urban Indigenous coalitions and networks.

Success Indicators:

- At least 6 formal partnership agreements by year two.
- Biannual Partner Roundtable meetings to review shared outcomes.
- Increased referral pathways for Indigenous clients accessing care.

“I started volunteering here after a friend encouraged me to come for lunch. The soup was delicious! Shortly after that, I became a volunteer. We’re not serving strangers - we’re serving family.”

- Volunteer

2. Cultural Activities – Restoring Identity and Community Connection

Goal:

Strengthen individual and collective healing through culturally grounded activities that foster identity, belonging, and resilience.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Offer ongoing cultural programming such as sharing circles, drumming, traditional arts, and seasonal ceremonies.
- 2.2 Host annual community healing events (e.g., Mental Health Awareness Feast, Indigenous Wellness Week).
- 2.3 Develop a **Cultural Mentorship Program** pairing youth and adults in recovery with Elders and knowledge keepers.
- 2.4 Integrate traditional healing approaches (smudging, land-based teachings, sweat lodges, storytelling) into mainstream therapeutic spaces through collaboration with health agencies.

Success Indicators:

- Over the term of this plan, new initiatives, programs and supports will have been created.
- Documented participant feedback showing increased sense of cultural identity and belonging.



3. Communication Strategy – Raising Awareness, Reducing Stigma

Goal:

Establish a strong community presence and public voice to normalize mental health conversations and promote available supports.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Develop a **Cultural Communications Plan** with messaging rooted in Indigenous values and storytelling traditions.
- 3.2 Launch a branded awareness campaign (“Healing Our Spirits”) across social media, radio, and community events.
- 3.3 Share success stories, testimonials, and educational resources highlighting Indigenous perspectives on healing and recovery.
- 3.4 Strengthen relationships with local media and policy stakeholders to amplify Indigenous mental health issues and solutions.
- 3.5 Report on all programs presently offered that provide mental health and addictions recovery supports

Success Indicators:

- Increased online engagement by 50% within the first year.
- Positive shifts in community survey data around stigma and help-seeking behaviors.
- Recognition as a trusted voice in local Indigenous health advocacy networks.



4. Programming – Delivering Holistic, Accessible Support

Goal:

Create and deliver trauma-informed, culturally safe mental health and addictions programming for urban Indigenous individuals and families.

Objectives:

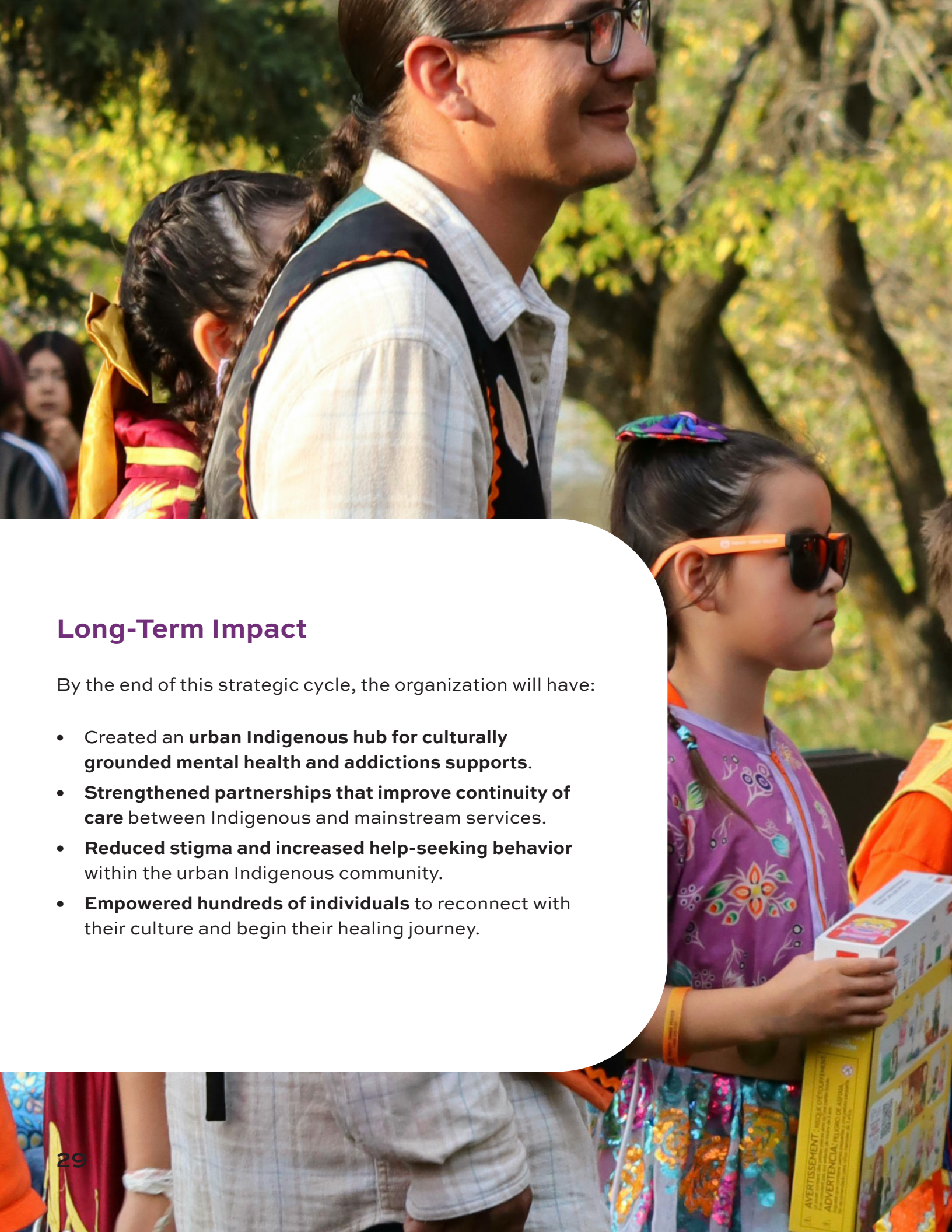
- 4.1 Establish drop-in and appointment-based healing spaces offering counseling, peer support, and land-based learning.
- 4.2 Develop **Integrated Healing Programs** that combine traditional teachings with modern therapeutic modalities (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness, and Indigenous trauma frameworks).
- 4.3 Provide youth and family-specific supports that address intergenerational trauma, identity, and cultural reconnection.
- 4.4 Build a network of trained Indigenous mental health practitioners and peer mentors.

Success Indicators:

- Launch of at least 3 new mental health and addictions programs in the first two years.
- 80% of participants report improved wellbeing and cultural connection.
- Sustainable funding secured for all core programs by year three.

“DNFC is very good at providing extra support for food, programs and activities.”

- Client



Long-Term Impact

By the end of this strategic cycle, the organization will have:

- Created an **urban Indigenous hub for culturally grounded mental health and addictions supports**.
- **Strengthened partnerships that improve continuity of care** between Indigenous and mainstream services.
- **Reduced stigma and increased help-seeking behavior** within the urban Indigenous community.
- **Empowered hundreds of individuals** to reconnect with their culture and begin their healing journey.



“I get great satisfaction helping DNFC as they help so many people.”

- Louise Seeley

Boozhoo! Wasa Kwa Eguey Kwe

Hello! My traditional name translates to Trailblazing Women. My given name is Anna Gibbon. I live in the Robinson-Superior Treaty Territory with my mother's family originating in Animki Wajiw - Fort William First Nation.

It has been an honour and a privilege assisting the Dryden Native Friendship Centre (DNFC) in creating their 2026-2031 strategic plan.I have been involved with the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre and The Thunder Bird Indigenous Centre (Geraldton) for many years and I'm a strong supporter of the mandate of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres.

Having said that, I'm in LOVE with DNFC! Within minutes of my first visit, I was struck by what this organization does, how they do it and just how much love, care, commitment and passion they do it with.

I quickly came to realize that they are more than family and friends coming together to help each other. They are a Life Centre. From new-borns to elders, they lovingly guide and support a person through every stage of life.

This strategic plan was done in collaboration with the board, the leadership, the staff, the clients, the volunteers and the broader community of Dryden and surrounding area. This plan will not only impact the lives of people in the next 5 years. It will impact their lives for the next 100 years.

Miigwetch for choosing me to walk this part of the journey with all of you!

With love and respect,

Wasa Kwa Eguey Kwe
Anna Gibbon



Acknowledging Our Formal and Informal Partners

- WNHAC
- OPP
- KDSB (including First Responders)
- OAHS
- Wabigoon Lake FN
- Migisi Sahgaigan (Eagle Lake) FN
- Wabigoon and Eagle River community halls
- NWMO
- Dryden District Senior Services Incorporated (Patricia Gardens)
- Ontario Health (Diabetes Educator on staff)
- City of Dryden: the Working Circle Committee and the Dryden Public Library Board
- Northwestern Health Unit
- All local schools
- Dryden Regional Health Centre and Clinic, including their Mental Health and Addictions/Stabilization Unit
- Dryden Crown Attorney's Office
- Community Living
- NEW
- Confederation College
- Treaty Three Police
- Hoshizaki House
- We sponsor many local organizations including Cloverbelt, 4H Club, kids/youth sports



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www.dnfconline.org