

Understanding Our Food Systems

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2019

**CREATING AND FOSTERING INDIGENOUS FOOD
SOVEREIGNTY IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO**





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FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES AND THEIR RESPECTIVE STAFF AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS:

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- Aroland First Nation
- Biigtigong Nishnaabeg
- Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek
- Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek
- Fort William First Nation
- Ginoogaming First Nation
- Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek
- Long Lake #58 First Nation
- Namaygoosisagagun
- Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg
- Pawgwasheeng
- Red Rock Indian Band
- Whitesand First Nation

PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

- Jessica McLaughlin
- Dr. Charles Levkoe
- Ivan Ho
- Shelby Gagnon
- Tyler Waboose
- Brad Bannon
- Beau Boucher
- Courtney Strutt
- Victoria Pullia
- Karen Kerk
- Silva Sawula

RESPECTED ELDERS

- Gene Nowegejick
- Marcel Bananish
- Marlene Tsun
- Gerry Martin
- Larry McDermott
- William Yerxa
- Florence Yerxa

ORGANIZATIONS

- Roots to Harvest
- Sustainable Food Systems Lab and Lakehead University
- Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy
- EcoSuperior Thunder Bay
- Ingaged Creative Productions
- Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre
- Ka-Na-Chi-Hih Specialized Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre

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For more information on this report please visit www.understandingourfoodsystems.com.

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Territorial & Historical Indigenous Context & Project Connections

The First Nation communities living within the Lake Nipigon and Lake Superior watershed have occupied and nurtured the region from time immemorial. The lakes and the land were an essential part of spaces and places used for shelter, gathering, hunting, fishing, foraging and all relationships – human and non-human. Since European contact in the early 1600's the Indigenous people have been striving to hold onto those practices and relationships. Settler-colonial policies, tactics and discourses have been responsible for theft of land and cultural practices; however, Indigenous peoples have actively resisted and continued to weave traditional knowledge with modern lifestyles. This has included a growing movement for Indigenous food sovereignty that is rooted in Indigenous people's ability to control their own food systems from harvesting and production through to consumption and waste management. According to the 2011 Pan-Canadian People's Food Policy¹:

Food sovereignty includes the fundamental recognition of Indigenous Peoples as nurturers of food systems that have been sustainable for thousands of years. Indigenous food sovereignty understands food as sacred and part of a web of relationships with the natural world that sustains culture and community. Food, water, soil, and air are not viewed as "resources" but as sources of life itself.

Over the past three years, the Understanding Our Food Systems project has built on this movement for reclamation and resurgence of Indigenous food systems by supporting communities to determine and act on a food system future rooted in self-determination. The long-term investment in this project from the Indigenous Food Circle, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, The Sustainable Food Systems Lab at Lakehead University and numerous partner organizations are providing momentum for communities to engage in this work at a local level. The longevity of this project has been integral to community and regional success and continued long-term support is necessary for ongoing momentum. The project has been driven by a predominantly Indigenous team which has also contributed to its success by fostering local knowledge and skills and increasing long-term capacity among the First Nations communities. There is still much work to be done, but the momentum from the Understanding Our Food Systems project has given the communities (and the Indigenous project team) an opportunity to build a more just and sustainable food system.

¹ The People's Food Policy project's final report, Resetting the Table is available at <https://foodsecurecanada.org/people-food-policy>



Understanding Our Food Systems Phase Sept – Dec, 2019 Timeline and Context

In October of 2018, the Indigenous Food Circle took on a contract through the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (through the Ontario Ministry of Health's the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program Enhancement Fund) to support fourteen First Nations in the Robinson Superior and Treaty 9 areas to better understand and reclaim their traditional food systems. Funding was provided from October 2018 until March 2019 to support this work. Over the summer of 2019 the Indigenous Food Circle used reserve funds to maintain project momentum. These efforts supported the ongoing community projects and relationships that had been developed over the first two phases of the Understanding Our Food Systems project. In October of 2019, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit acquired additional funding to advance the project until the year end. The Indigenous Food Circle, in collaboration with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, developed a project plan for the remainder of the year. This included an action to host two days of events and to continue to support Food Sovereignty Visions of the First Nations that were established from the previous phase of the project.

The 14 First Nation Communities agreed on a plan of action to host two days of events and to continue to support each community's Food Sovereignty Visions,

established in the previous phase of the project. The current phase has led to further fostered relationships, trust and momentum within the First Nations and with the project team and supporting organizations. The project team has witnessed first-hand the growth and implementation of each First Nation's Community Food Sovereignty Vision goals and believes that continued support will only achieve more at the community level.



Project Impact Acknowledgment

Since the Indigenous Food Circle's inception in 2016, there have been countless relationships built with urban and regional Indigenous organizations, Indigenous people, as well as with non-profit organizations and settler people. These relationships are an essential part of this work. Settler-colonialism has fractured relationships and have forced First Nations and Indigenous peoples to adopt practices that are contrary to traditional ways of being. The provision of funding under firm and prearranged timelines decreases the momentum and ability of First Nation communities to adequately and comprehensively contribute to self-determination and food sovereignty. There may also be barriers and challenges as Indigenous and settler organizations work under differing frameworks. For example, the Indigenous ways of being and working are often rooted in their culture and traditions, which are different than that of the priorities of settlers. It has also been identified that Indigenous people may often face different emotional impacts when not working in an environment that is consistent with their beliefs. Facing this reality poses a range of mental and physical health impacts on Indigenous people and the land. Throughout the course of this project, there has been committed and sustained funding for this project, which has allowed for increased autonomy and long term planning, which has allowed for more self-determined work to occur.

The Understanding Our Food Systems project has enabled the Indigenous Food Circle to develop and foster relationships in the fourteen First Nations involved in the project. It has allowed for the breadth of relationships to grow and for the establishment of a network of learning and unlearning among Indigenous people. It has provided a glimpse of what decolonization and reclamation work can be. Further, it has built a community of allies that are committed to supporting the First Nations to achieve food sovereignty. Although there is still much work to be done, we have begun to dismantle settler-colonial processes and give Indigenous people and communities the power to determine their own futures. After three years of the Understanding our Food Systems project, our team is now being fully welcomed into the communities because we have built trusting relationships and those we work with are ready and willing to go the distance with us.

"Indigenous Knowledges, practices, and values are interwoven as a complex web of teaching and learning Indigenous Food Systems through intergenerational transmission by oral traditions and apprenticeship" - Dawn Morrison, Secwepemc, Founder and Curator of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty.

THE TEAM



The team for the Understanding Our Food Systems project is constantly evolving. It is made up of a breadth of people from Indigenous and settler communities that represent food system activists, academics, youth, climate activists, artists, urban farmers, cooks, firefighters and health practitioners. It's truly a unique blend that is far more than the sum of its parts.

One particular outcome of this carefully assembled team is reclamation, learning and relationships that the five Indigenous team members have been able to achieve. As stated in the previous phase's report, these type of projects, when driven by Indigenous people, projects have the ability to transform and provide a space for reclamation to happen. Indigenous people of all walks have different stories and different experiences of colonization, providing a space for Indigenous people to determine, direct and learn together is essential and is true reconciliation.



Jessica McLaughlin,
PROJECT DIRECTOR

Jessica is a member of Long Lake 58 First Nation and grew up in Nakina, Ontario, she is an executive member with the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy, where she collaboratively assisted in the founding of the Indigenous Food Circle. As Project Director, Jessica supported the overall visioning, planning, coordination, engagement with communities, facilitation and implementation of both the wild game and community planning days, planning community visits and community implementation, staff coordination, and administration.



Charles Levkoe,
PROJECT ADVISOR

Dr. Charles Levkoe is the Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Food Systems, the Director of the Sustainable Food Systems Lab and an Associate Professor in the Department of Health Sciences at Lakehead University. In the role of Project Advisor Dr. Levkoe's responsibilities included intellectual contributions to the overall project, providing guidance on the methodology and ongoing research, supporting team members, conducting community visits, and organizing and analyzing the information collected.



Silva Sawula,
PROJECT ADVISOR /
MANAGER (THUNDER BAY
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT)

Silva served in the capacity of as a project advisor and as the liaison between the Health Unit and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. She provides input into the oversight and long-term project planning and overall budget management.



Ivan Ho,
PROJECT ADVISOR/
PUBLIC HEALTH
NUTRITIONIST (THUNDER
BAY DISTRICT HEALTH
UNIT)

Ivan is a Public Health Nutritionist at the Thunder Bay District Health Unit. His work focuses on creating healthy food environments and self-determined food systems, with particular interest with the indigenous community. Ivan provided oversight from the Health Unit to this project in decision making and engagement with the communities and project director.



Shelby Gagnon,
EVENT & DIRECT
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Shelby Gagnon is an artist from Aroland First Nation but has lived in Thunder Bay for most of her life. Shelby is a graduate of Lakehead University in the Honours Bachelor of Fine Arts program where she explored the reclamation of identity and traditions of being an Indigenous woman in Canada. She is involved with community-engaged organizations and included in the project Understanding Our Food Systems, where she helped as Community Support and promotes awareness around food sovereignty and Indigenous climate action.



Tyler Waboose,
EVENT & DIRECT
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Tyler was born and raised in Thunder Bay, and is a band member of Eabametoong First Nation. He joined the Understanding Our Food Systems team during the second phase of the project after working at Roots to Harvest for two years under various capacities. As Project Support, Tyler directly supported communities through networking, planning, and the purchasing of items related to the community determination of food.



Brad Bannon,
EVENT & COMMUNITY
SUPPORT

Bradley Bannon is from Fort William First Nation and is influenced by his Anishinaabe culture where he participates in land-based activities such as hunting, fishing and gathering medicines. Currently, he works at In Common as a cook and has helped as an assistant chef at the Wild Game event. He also helps FWFN as Community Support for the Understanding Project. In the future, he hopes to bring food sovereignty and security into mainstream restaurants.



Beau Boucher,
DIRECT COMMUNITY
SUPPORT

Beau is a member of Fort William First Nation. He grew up on his reserve and in Thunder Bay. Beau is part of a collective run in FWFN where they tap and make ancestral and traditional make maple syrup. As direct community support Beau helped allocate how communities were going to implement their goals from their Community Food Sovereignty Visions and achieve overall Food Sovereignty.



Courtney Strutt,
PROJECT SUPPORT

Courtney is an educator and program development practitioner who has worked with First Nation communities in Northern Ontario over the last decade in youth programming, education, and strategic program development. In her role as Project Support, Courtney supported team meetings, as well as the planning and implementation of the Wild Game and the re-launch of Understanding Our Food systems project with community partners.



Victoria Pullia,
EVENT AND
ADMINISTRATION
SUPPORT

Victoria is the Intern at the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy. She grew up in Thunder Bay, ON where she studied at Lakehead University. She joined the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy in 2018 working collaboratively on regional food systems projects. Through this role, she was able to provide administrative support for the Understanding our Food Systems project.



Karen Kerk,
EVENT & ADMINISTRATION
SUPPORT

Karen is the Coordinator of the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy and works to bring together stakeholders to build a more food sovereign region. Karen has a background in macro and micro project management, facilitation and teaching. Karen helped provide some administrative and coordinating support for the project, specifically for the Urban Access to Traditional Foods event, and community planning day.



Project Partners



INDIGENOUS FOOD CIRCLE

The Indigenous Food Circle is a collaborative group of Indigenous-led or Indigenous-serving organizations in the Thunder Bay region that aims to better understand and promote Indigenous perspectives and experiences around food. Using food as a tool for reconciliation and resurgence, the Indigenous Food Circle creates the space to reclaim and weave Indigenous knowledge and experiences into food systems.

The Indigenous Food Circle has five key priorities;

1. Develop a regional network to support connections through food systems
2. Improve Indigenous food security
3. Support Indigenous food sovereignty
4. Support the resurgence of Indigenous food networks across the region
5. Establish meaningful relationship with settlers through food

Overall, members of the Indigenous Food Circle provided guidance on the project and support to the First Nations on their community food plans along with ongoing support for its implementation. The partnerships and relationships that have been developed through the Indigenous Food Circle and its member organizations will build a stronger foundation for food sovereignty into the future.

Webpage: foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca/indigenous-circle/





THE THUNDER BAY DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT (TBDHU)

The TBDHU is one of 36 Public Health Units operating in the Province of Ontario and administers programs and services to approximately 160,000 people across a large geographic area of 235,531 sq. km. It is a non-profit agency funded jointly by the provincial government and the municipalities they serve. The TBDHU is committed to improving health and reducing social inequities in health through evidence-informed practice. The TBDHU's jurisdictional boundaries are host to 25 First Nations that are located within the Treaty 9 and Robinson Superior Treaty areas. Due to the vast geography of the region, a decision was made at the onset of the project in 2017 to divide communities with the Northwestern Health Unit. For this project, the TBDHU is providing services to road accessible communities for the purpose of this project, while Northwestern Health Unit is providing services to fly in communities.

Website: tbdhu.com



THE SUSTAINABLE FOOD LAB

The Sustainable Food Lab at Lakehead University is a hub for academics and community-based practitioners engaged in sustainable food systems research and action. It is a collaborative event and work space and a resource for researchers, practitioners and activists. Working closely with communities in Northwestern Ontario and beyond, we aim to build meaningful relationships that enable knowledge sharing between research, policy and practice with an ultimate goal of healthy, just and sustainable food systems for all.

Website: foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca

Page 10, top: Shelby Gagnon hosting an art workshop in Aroland First Nation

Middle: Shelby Gagnon, Brad Bannon, Jessica McLaughlin and Tyler Waboose recording the Urban Access to Traditional Foods video at the School of Indigneous Learning

Bottom: Hayley Lepalme Nourish Canada, Larry McDermott Plenty Canada, Shelby Gagnon IFC, Victoria Pullia TBAFS, Karen Kerk TBAFS



THE THUNDER BAY AND AREA FOOD STRATEGY

The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy is committed to creating a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system that contributes to the economic, ecological, and social well-being and health of the city of Thunder Bay and Area. TBAFS is a member of the Indigenous Food Circle and supported this work by providing administrative and project support for the Urban Access to Traditional Food: Understanding Wild Game and the Community Re-Engagement and Launch Days.

Website: tbfoodstrategy.com



KA-NA-CHIH-HIH SPECIALIZED SOLVENT ABUSE AND TREATMENT CENTRE

Ka-Na-Chih-Hih Specialized Solvent Abuse and Treatment Centre is a solvent abuse treatment centre situated in Thunder Bay, Ontario. It serves First Nation Youth, ages 18 to 30 from across Canada. A twelve-bed long-term facility, KNCH provides holistic care through traditional as well as contemporary treatment methods. KNCH strives to connect culture, tradition and reconnection to participants and serving traditional foods is key to this reality. KNCH is a member of the Indigenous Food Circle and supported this project by hosting the Urban Access to Traditional Food: Understanding Wild Game event.

Website: kanachihih.ca



INGAGED CREATIVE PRODUCTIONS

Ingaged Creative Productions is an Indigenous-owned company, and is at the forefront of positive change across Canada. Their continued work is focused on working with non-profit organizations, businesses and government to help systemic growth, prosperity and to make a difference in the lives of community members. They believe in the power of self-determination and the importance of culturally informed value creation. Technologically adept and multilingual, their team applies innovative techniques to find solutions to the most complex challenges. Ingaged supported this work through the development of the Urban Access to Traditional Food: Understanding Wild Game short documentary and the designing and development of the Understanding Our Food Systems website.

Website: ingaged.ca



ROOTS TO HARVEST

Roots to Harvest provides transformative educational and employment opportunities for youth to engage with local agriculture and cultivate healthy communities. They have a vision of a future where youth are leaders, connecting a diverse community and cultivating food that's healthy and accessible. Roots to Harvest is a member of the Indigenous Food Circle and supported this project by hosting the Community Re-Engagement and Launch day. Roots to Harvest has been a continued partner in the Understanding Our Food Systems project and has cultivated relationships with the fourteen communities where the communities frequently utilize R2H's kitchen space and technical skills in garden development and fostering.

Website: rootstoharvest.org



OUTCOMES

Phase September – December 2019 Outcomes

GATHERINGS

Over the past 10 plus years, engaging in food systems work (e.g., food security, community food security, food justice, food sovereignty, agro ecology, etc.) has increasingly been recognized as a key opportunity for a better future for people and the planet. In First Nation communities, food has increasingly become a pathway for reclamation, reconciliation and connection to traditional/ancestral ways of doing and being and further connection to suppressed ways of knowing. Although this movement has been slowly growing over the past decade both in Western and Indigenous communities across Canada, there is little funding and resources allocated to gathering and allowing food practitioners and community activists to share and learn together. Especially for Indigenous people and communities, there is a lack of opportunity to gather, network, share and reclaim together. The Understanding Our Food Systems project has provided this space for the fourteen First Nations to learn and grow together and to foster relationships with other Indigenous people from their region and beyond.

Over the course of the project, there have been opportunities to gather and bring people together to learn about different topics of interest through common themes developed in the early phases of the project, through work locally at the Indigenous Food Circle and through community-based needs realized during the project. The Understanding Our Food Systems team has been able to gather people together to learn and network. There have been two gatherings both located in Thunder Bay (a central hub for many First Nations communities); each gathering focused on a different topic. The first day focused on accessing wild game in the urban setting, and the second day concentrated on the communities' Food Sovereignty Visions. These two opportunities have not only

provided the necessary learning opportunities but also provided much needed space for the communities to work collaboratively with the support team and each other. The momentum and empowerment these gatherings provided has given those in attendance the courage to return home and continue to do the hard work at the community level. Gatherings also provided the space for uncovering and determining paths forward. They produced concrete tangible deliverables to move forward with in the larger Food Sovereignty Visions (developed in the second phase), and the uncovering and dismantling of years of systemic injustices and exploitation that the dominant food system is built on. With regards to the current phase gatherings' there is much work to happen in the future to contribute to the actual dismantling of systemic injustices and much work to support communities in reclaiming their traditional/ ancestral food systems and adapting them to the modern world. But the work has begun and the movement has been mobilized. Continued gathering space is necessary in the future of this work.

Below are brief descriptions of both gatherings hosted during the second phase of funding and key outcomes from each.

Urban Access to Traditional Food: Understanding Wild Game Event

The Urban Access to Traditional Food: Understanding Wild Game event came out of a needs assessment that the Indigenous Food Circle conducted in 2019 along with 3+ years of member consultations and discussions. The event originally began as a partnership between the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy, Sustain Ontario and the Indigenous Food Circle but became much more once the funding for the current phase was committed through the Thunder Bay District Health Unit. The event took place at Ka-Na-Chi-Hih Specialized Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre where there were 95 people in attendance and the event was webcast internationally. The Indigenous Food Circle wanted to assist its member organizations to better understand the challenges and issues they were facing when it came to serving wild game to their clients during programming and ceremonies. The event had many different presenters that were brought together to round out the issues the organizations were facing, provide an understanding around those issues and then develop actionable outcomes for the Indigenous Food Circle to pursue. The event began with the Indigenous Food Circle founding members providing a context of the issue then led into a panel discussing the cultural and historical context of accessing wild game for Indigenous people/organizations. In addition, the event provided the regulatory context from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Thunder Bay District Health Unit's newly implemented policies around assisting organizations in serving traditional food to clientele. As an exception to the legislative boundaries, the event also brought in the Meno-Ya-Win Health Centre and the Miichim Program staff to discuss the program that operates within their centre, that offer patients an option to access traditional foods (including wild game). The results of the event brought greater awareness to the communities as well as the

local organizations but also left some questions about next steps on the issue. It was realized that this has not been explored in other parts of Canada with the depth that has been completed locally in Thunder Bay, and that more research and understanding needs to be completed by the Indigenous Food Circle and partners in the future. The TBDHU has been making localized change by reflecting on internal policies to make wild game more accessible to organizations, and there continues to be further opportunities to build greater understanding and learn from the local Indigenous communities.



Community Re-Engagement and Project Launch

The primary focus of the Community Re-Engagement and Project Launch was to bring together the community members from the fourteen First Nations who have been working in collaboration with the project team for the past three years and those implementing their Community Food Sovereignty Visions. The day was spent discussing the project, community members sharing about the work happening within their home communities and networking, learning new skills and building relationships. The group experienced a Wild Rice popping demonstration from Traditional Anishnaabe Wild Rice Chief William Yerxa with his wife Florence, and their son James. The group spent the end of the day discussing plans for the next phase of the project and what would work best for the communities that would complement and add to the work already happening. The overall outcomes of this day were deepened relationships, intensified trust in partners and supporting organizations, greater understanding of the existing work and the work to be done. The gathering was also an important part of fostering momentum for further on the ground local work within home communities while providing a framework for the remaining months of the existing phase.



Understanding Our Food Systems Website

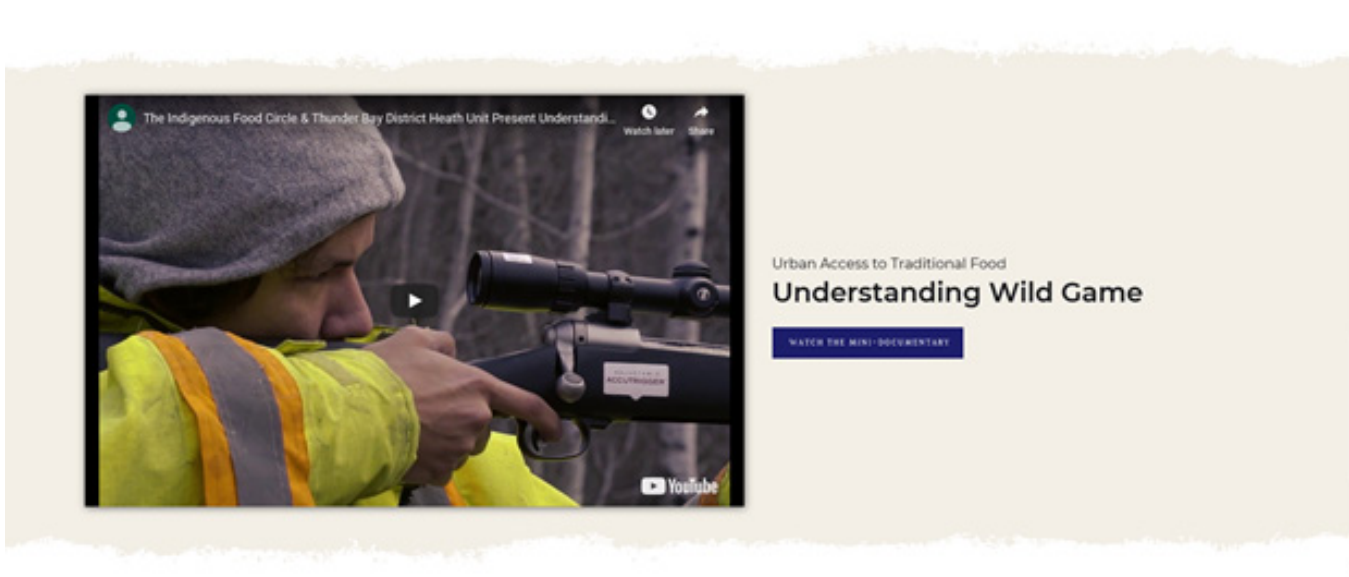
As a result of the continued growth of this project, the work happening in the First Nations, the need for continuous live updates, ongoing communication, food sovereignty and security resources, the project team, in collaboration with Ingaged Creative Productions, worked collectively to build a website to virtually host the project. Moving forward the website, hosted by the TBDHU, will act as a hub for the First Nations, project team, partners, funders and others to quickly access information and communicate collectively in a shared path forward.



Documentary Film: Urban Access to Traditional Food: Understanding Wild Game

A documentary film was developed with the support of Ingaged Creative Productions to capture the relationships and work happening among the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and the Indigenous Food Circle and partner organizations around the topic of accessing wild game in an urban context. The short documentary provides viewers with the cultural importance of accessing traditional foods for Indigenous people and presents the barriers that organizations faced while focusing on a path forward for further collaboration and understanding.

The documentary will be hosted on the newly developed Understanding Our Food Systems website and will be shared widely to provide awareness and generate conversation and work around the topic, it is hoped that the resource will lead to urban Indigenous people and organizations receiving/offering more wild and traditional foods. There was a documentary teaser developed by Ingaged Creative Productions that generated a significant amount of traction online; statistics around this are included in the appendices.



To access the website, please visit: www.understandingourfoodsystems.com
(the documentary can be viewed on the website)



COMMUNITY FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISIONS / DESCRIPTIONS

The community projects that are described in this section represent community self-determination in all of its capacity. Communities were provided with a small amount of funding that allowed them to assess and determine where and what their community should be working on at this point in time when it comes to food security and food sovereignty. It is important to recognize that each community is at a different point in their process/journey to becoming self-determined and sovereign. As such, it was crucial to ensure that communities had the opportunity and flexibility to determine their needs in their local contexts. By allowing each community to assess where they need to go and providing resources in good faith puts power in the hands of First Nations people and builds trust between the partners. The portion of funding used for providing direct community support has been integral for community stewardship and momentum. Certain community's needs assessments led them to address more immediate food security concerns, whereas others focused on addressing broader issues and concerns, for example, food sovereignty. Moving forward, it is important to continually recognize the varying levels of community growth and to ensure that resources are allocated based on the individual needs of the community.



Top Right: Concrete Foundation and Moose Hang in Red Rock Indian Band

2nd Right: Priscilla Shaganash, GFN, Kim McGibbon R2H, Lisa Echum GFN Building Community Gardens

3rd Right: Shelby Gagnon IFC in Pawgwasheeng

Bottom Right: Good Food Box for Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg

Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek

ABOUT THIS NATION



Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek (AZA) was historically located near Ombabika Lake and Auden Ontario located on the Northeast side of Lake Nipigon. Through the Lake Nipigon Reserve Negotiations, AZA focused their land negotiations on the establishment of a community (reserve) near Auden/Ombabika Lake. The government disagreed with the establishment of the community's chosen location due to the remoteness and the people were forced to negotiate and seek alternative locations. In 2002, an agreement was signed outlining the establishment of a reserve land base located at Partridge Lake near Jellico and in 2008, the community celebrated the creation of their reserve. AZA members are dispersed in municipalities along Highway 11 and 17 from Thunder Bay to Geraldton with the Band administration providing services to all its members in these communities from its office in Beardmore. AZA continues to focus on the development of their community while strengthening their members' resilience through engaging communities, households and individuals in a variety of programs. AZA has a registered community membership of 398 people.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 - January, 2019)

Community Raised Bed Project: The community partnered with Roots to Harvest to build raised garden beds for community members. A total of five beds were built at a workshop with Roots to Harvest. Nine community members attended, with three of those being from Geraldton, so that they could conduct a similar workshop with AZA members living in that respective community. The group who attended and would be hosting the beds were provided with seeds, small hand trowels, watering cans, a growing in short seasons book and garden gloves. The raised beds were successful for all of those community members who volunteered to host the beds. The partnerships with Roots to Harvest has proven to be a successful partnership as AZA throughout the year has hosted in collaboration with AZA a composting workshop, planning a garden, and a canning. The community continues to partner with Roots to Harvest.

Christmas Good Food Boxes: AZA has been partnering with the Thunder Bay Good Food Box program for a number of years. The initiative is very successful with members but requires the use of community resources through funding, staff time, transportation and delivery. Through the Understanding Our Food Systems project, AZA was able to use the additional financial support to offer an extended option of the Good Food Box for the holiday season. The community members were very grateful for making this happen, and they have been interested in exploring ways to allocate resources for their own sustainable Good Food Box.

PHASE (September, 2019 - December, 2019)

Communities are often faced with hard decisions when prioritizing food-related work, for example education around food security and food sovereignty. It is often hard to talk about large and deeper issues like food sovereignty when families struggle to feed themselves. To support education around food security and sovereignty, this project was able to provide support for the community to purchase a Cricut Maker to for the development of Indigenous materials and resources for education purposes. An example of this is the addition of education materials around indigenous food systems within their

Christmas milk voucher program. The AZA health team and project staff will be meeting in February 2020 to discuss how to expand and grow their education campaign.

Dehydration Workshops: Due to the continued success of food related workshops the Health Centre decided to purchase two dehydrators for the ability to conduct dehydration workshops while on the road visiting members in all of the communities that they live. The health centre team will be beginning workshops in early 2020 and will be conducting a larger workshop in collaboration with the Indigenous Food Circle and the Thunder Bay District Health Unit at the 2020 AZA Health Fair happening in Thunder Bay in March.



Aroland First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Aroland First Nation (AFN) is located 60 km north of Geraldton, just west of Nakina, and is accessible by highway 643. AFN gained reserve status under the Indian Act on April 15, 1985 through the Six Pack Negotiations. AFN is dedicated to delivering and creating education, health, cultural and economic opportunities for its members while conserving its traditional territory. AFN has a strong connection with the land and has a long history of protecting and utilizing the land for hunting, fishing and harvesting. There are 700 registered band members, with 400 of those members living in the community while others are dispersed throughout Canada.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Health Centre Greenhouse: The community school has a very successful greenhouse that the Health Centre sometimes utilizes for programming. The Health Centre wanted to build a small greenhouse with a few raised garden beds for the health centre to be able to access quick than the school garden. The health centre had a difficult time starting the garden during the 2019 summer but will be beginning for the spring of 2020.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Walk-in Refrigerator (Development of a Community Kitchen/Hub): The community hosts one of the largest fresh blueberry depots in Northern Ontario and often has a large amount of blueberries that need refrigeration before shipping happens. The community also conducts many food related workshops but lacks the space for cooking and teaching. The vision for the warehouse has been to convert a portion of the space into a community food hub where community can gather and offer more food related teachings. The first step in this process was the purchase of a walk-in refrigerator for the space, the purchase of the refrigerator was cost shared among different departments within the band as well as a contribution from the Understanding Our Food Systems project funding. Next steps are to look for additional infrastructure funding to support further development of the hub/community kitchen.



Left: Healthy Babies Coordinator Kathryn Atlookan at the AFN Health Fair, Middle: Graphic Record of the Aroland Blueberry Initiative Right: Sheldon Atlookan AFN Councilour, Shelby Gagnon IFC talking about the community's vision

Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek

ABOUT THIS NATION



Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek (BZA) is located on the eastern shores of Lake Nipigon and borders the municipality of Macdiarmid. BZA is 20 km from the municipality of Beardmore and 185 km from Thunder Bay. The community hosted the first Indigenous CBC television program in the late 1980's called "Spirit Bay", which focused on community member reconnection with the land using traditional methods of hunting, fishing and harvesting and the challenges that followed. Since that time, the community has committed to providing unique methods and opportunities for its members to access traditional food through sustainable fishing and the establishment of a community orchard. The community has a registered membership of 678, with 348 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 to January, 2019)

Community Centre Sink: The health centre hosts workshops on a regular basis on a wide range of food related things, and utilizes the kitchen space at the community centre. The kitchen is in need of renovation but limited funding has not made this possible. The health centre staff choose to replace an old leaking sink with a new industrial stainless-steel sink, which provides more space for cleaning and working with food. The sink has allowed the community to provide more food related workshops and gatherings in the community centre.

Community Kitchen Workshop Supplies (Canning): The health centre wanted to begin to host workshops around pressure canning but lacked some equipment and skills required. The project supported the purchase of a pressure canner and canning supplies and the project team visited the community with master canner Diana Bokus to conduct a "train the trainer" workshop around canning. Staff learned the basics about teaching people how to can properly, and the importance and benefits of canning. Staff conducted community member workshops throughout the summer of 2019. There has been a positive response from the community.

PHASE (September, 2019 - December 2019)

Community Centre Dishwasher: Although the community centre kitchen has a lot of use for multiple food related programs and workshops, the community is still in the slow process of replacing equipment and completing renovations when they are able to find funding to support such ventures. Staff purchased an industrial dishwasher to support the increased use of the kitchen since the sink replacement in the previous phase.

Bee Keeping: The community is in the fourth year of their community orchard and this past summer the orchard began to yield fruit in small amounts. The health centre staff was interested in the pollination aspect of their orchard and had visited Roots to Harvest where they learned more about how beehives could potentially support the pollination of the orchard while producing honey and contribute to a healthy sustainable earth. The project team is having conversations with the health centre, Roots to Harvest and Bears, Bees and Honey to host a workshop for the health team and other community members.

Biitigong Nishnaabeg (Pic River First Nation)



ABOUT THIS NATION

Biitigong Nishnaabeg (Pic River First Nation) is located off highway 11/17, approximately 352 km east of Thunder Bay. It is accessible by Highway 627, adjacent to Pukaskwa National Park, with reserve land totalling 332.7 hectares in size. The traditional territory encompasses over two million hectares combined with Exclusive and Shared territory on the north shore of Lake Superior. Pic River First Nation has asserted Aboriginal Title and has filed a comprehensive land claim in the Ontario Superior Court for Aboriginal title over its traditional territory. Biitigong Nishnaabeg is a vibrant and growing community with an increasing population. Currently, there are 1,200 registered members, with 500 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Traditional Food Sharing Freezer Program: The community hosts an annual fall harvest which brings in many harvested foods from the area; from berries and medicines to moose and geese. The Health Centre wanted to build on an idea of communal food storage and decided to purchase a freezer that could store a wide range of traditional foods for community members and programs to access. The community is currently in the process of working out the details for this program.

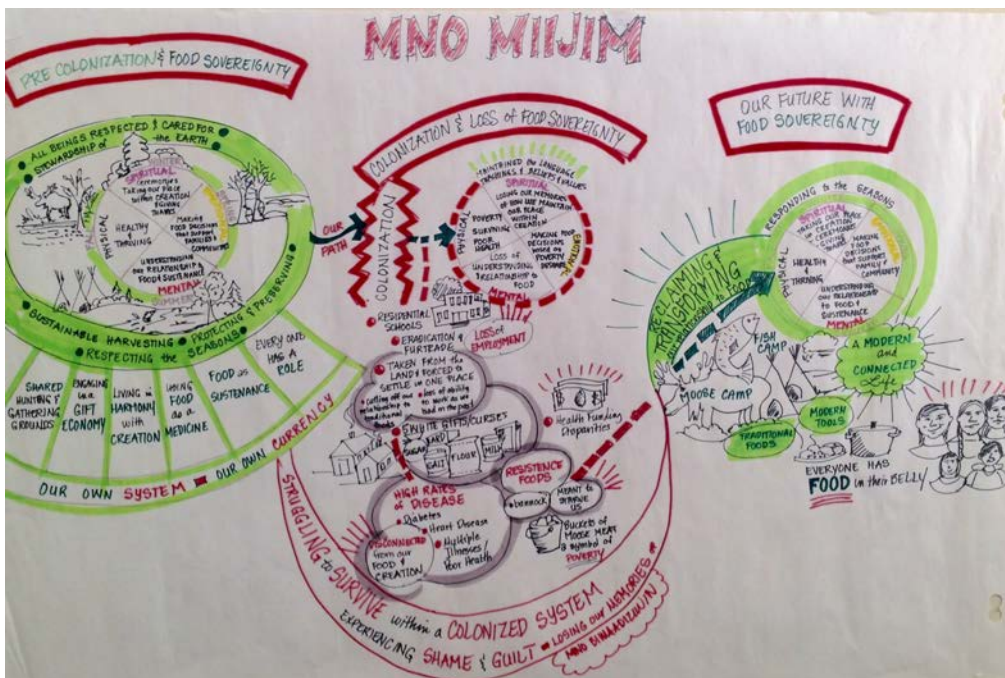
Food Sovereignty Committee/Staff (Education/Engagement Campaign): Through a number of programs, departments, and engaged community members, Biitigong Nishnaabeg has been actively working towards food security and food sovereignty goals that align with the overall vision for the community. These food related activities generally fall into the following categories: harvesting & production; education & skill building; direct food access; eating together; distribution; processing; land management; and communal food storage. Through working with the Understanding Our Food Systems project, community leaders determined that working towards food security and sovereignty goals meant increasing the connection to the land and understanding the historical traditional food systems - a deeper understanding of where food currently comes from and how to ensure health and sustainability in the longer term by looking at how their traditional food systems were changed as a result of colonization. The key changes that Biitigong Nishnaabeg is trying to make in the long term are community sustainability through food sovereignty. Thinking and applying a food sovereignty lens to community food work inherently means thinking seven generations ahead, to ensure that for future generations there is also food and healthy land. Working towards this goal in the short term, the community sees beginning with increased community connection and education; developing a team focused on furthering community food work; and engaging the community in the planning process for long term food sovereignty in Biitigong Nishnaabeg.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Expansion of Traditional Food Sharing Program (Refrigeration): Since phase 2a of the project Biitigong has identified the need for a refrigerator for the traditional food sharing program, the program will become a hub for all community food programming and harvests and the food sovereignty committee to have a base home. In addition to the freezer purchased in phase 2a

the community identified the need for this space to be a hub for food programming. The project and community teams along with the committee are beginning the process of understanding and implementing these two initiatives early in the 2020 year taking the time to connect all community food programming currently happening.

Support for Food Sovereignty Committee and Health Centre Team: The project team is working with the committee and health centre team to develop a workplan and look for additional sources of funding, this is on-going work and will continue throughout the 2020 year.



Biitigong Nishnaabeg beginning of their Community Food Sovereignty Evaluation Tool



Biitigong Nishnaabeg Day Care Potato Garden

Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek



ABOUT THIS NATION

Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek (BNA) reserve land includes 984.6 hectares in what was the former Black Sands/Lake Nipigon Provincial Park. BNA is located on the eastern shore of Pijitiwabik Bay, which is on the southeastern shores of Lake Nipigon, 50km north of highway 11/17. BNA's land was returned to them in April 2010 following years of displacement caused by the provincial and federal governments. The community and its leadership are now forging ahead with major economic development initiatives and re-establishing the community for the eventual return of its membership to their homeland. While some BNA members live on reserve seasonally, many reside in neighbouring municipalities across Northern Ontario. The total membership of BNA is 250 members and their administration office is located in Thunder Bay.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Community Freezer and Dehydrator Project: Due to the fact the community is currently in the process building its actual community space on its traditional lands, and is exploring many options for providing food for those community members who are able to move back to the developing community. One of those options is the thought of a small community store that would be stocked by some of the other options the community is perusing such as a for-profit greenhouse. The community wanted to also make a space accessible for those community members who harvest off the land to have a space to process and store access foods. Through the Understanding Our Food Systems project the community purchased a community freezer and an industrial dehydrator for community members, the store and the potential greenhouse to utilize. The summer of 2019 brought three families back to the community where both the freezer and the dehydrator were used to process and store foods harvested from the land.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Community Traditional Pantry: Although the community is in the process of building their community on their land, the majority of the community members live in Thunder Bay or are scattered across Turtle Island. The administration office is located within Thunder Bay and the team provides a wide array of workshops and opportunities for the members in Thunder Bay. Through this phase the administration choose to fill the community pantry that the administration runs in Thunder Bay, the community hosts a space for members to access food from the pantry, some of those foods are traditional and sourced from community members who hunt, fish or gather. This community tool has proved to be a very successful tool of assisting families achieve a small portion of food security.

Grassroots Community Led Initiatives: Within the members that have been able to move back to the new community development, some of those members have engaged the Understanding Our Food Systems project team to assist in some of the grassroots initiatives that they are wanting to embark on. One particular family is interested in raising rabbits and chickens for slaughter to sell to market. A proposal is being developed in collaboration with the project team on this initiative.

Fort William First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Fort William First Nation (FWFN) is located on the western end of Lake Superior adjacent to the city of Thunder Bay. The reserve land was set aside under the provisions of the Robinson-Superior Treaty in 1850 and the reserve was officially formed in 1853. The traditional territories occupied and used by the FWFN people stretch from Pigeon River to the south, north to Treaty 9 boundary and east to Nipigon. In the negotiations of the Robinson Superior Treaty, FWFN agreed not to interfere with colonial settlers. In return, the Crown promised cash payments and trade goods, annuities beginning in 1851, and complete freedom to continue to hunt and fish as before (except on private land). Most people made their living in traditional ways, utilizing an aquatic territory on Lake Superior that encompassed Pie Island, Flatland Island and south to Sturgeon Bay as “the Grand Fishery”. The people of FWFN would spend their winters in the interior on their hunting grounds. The community has a registered membership of 1,798 people, with 832 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Community Fishing Supplies and Ice Fishing Event: Through the Diabetes Department staff and the project team the department decided to expand on an initiative that had been happening for a few years that brought people and community members out on the lake for a day of fishing. The project purchased the community a range of fishing supplies such as nets and knives, the department asked community members who had fishing skills to assist with the event. The community volunteers taught kids and parents a wide range of skills from setting a proper net to cleaning the fish once caught. The event brought out over 45 people into a local bay where the Fort William First Nation people would have historically fished along the shores. There was a feast at a later date with some of the fish harvest and other harvested food from the program. The department continues to connect land-based activities with human health in the fight to prevent and manage diabetes in the community.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Sugarbush Collective: The Fort William First Nation people have harvested maple sap since time immemorial and a community collective of members have been resurrecting that ancestral tradition for the last 8 years. As community members began to get a little older and have families, and those that came from families that were taught about the sugar bush their blood memory began to drive them to learn more about the history of their people in harvesting maple sap become reality in 2013. The group is made up of a number of families who have now made a yearly tradition of harvesting the sap and making maple syrup for their respective families and other community members. This is a fully grassroots driven initiative that has struggled to fund their actions over the years with supplies and machinery needed for the production of maple syrup. The Understanding Our Food Systems team hosted a member of the Sugar Bush collective this year as a staff and the project funding went to support their initiatives through the purchase of much needed supplies and resources. The project team met with the Sugar Bush Collective to discuss next steps and there is hope to work towards a sugar shack in the new phase of the project.

Ginoogaming First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Ginoogaming First Nation (GFN) is located on the northeast shore of Long Lake, 1 km south of the municipality of Long Lake with access from highway 11. GFN occupies an area of 7,000 hectares. The GFN people have been living along Long Lake since time immemorial and were first recorded by the Hudson's Bay company in 1840. GFN has a registered membership of 816 people, with 173 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Christmas Good Food Box: The community has been exploring the idea of joining the Thunder Bay Good Food Box for many years and has not had the momentum to do so until the Understanding Our Food Systems project and the allocated direct community support. Due to the timing of the project and the project team connection to connecting partners the community choose to purchase Christmas Good Box Boxes for each family in the community, sourcing locally in the region for some of the contents of the boxes. The response rate for the Christmas Good Food Boxes was welcoming but met with apprehension for members and the health centre as the overall logistics for getting the good boxes to the community is difficult. More collaboration and conversation needed to happen with Thunder Bay Good Food Box, project team and other connecting partners.



Community Raised Garden Bed Project: In the summer of 2019 Roots to Harvest partnered with the community to build six raised garden beds for community members who volunteered to host one. Roots to Harvest staff helped to build and plant all of the garden beds, the community had some success in this initiative but it was later realized that water access posed as an issue. The community is interested in an outdoor water spout with tubes to help alleviate this issue in the 2020 summer.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Christmas Good Food Box: Due to the success of the previous year's Christmas Good Food Box, the community decided to try to provide a local Christmas Good Food Box sourced from stores located in the local communities (Longlac/Geraldton). This second year proved to generate more interest in exploring how this could be an option for community members. The Understanding Our Project team will be coordinating a meeting with the community early in 2020 to begin generation of a plan that will support this project in expanding.

Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek

ABOUT THIS NATION



Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek (KZA) is located on the western shores of Lake Nipigon. It is 200 km from Thunder Bay and 45 km from the municipality of Armstrong. KZA has a registered membership of 1,375 people, with 328 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January 2019)

Community Garden Project: In the summer of 2018, KZA connected with Roots to Harvest to start a community garden behind the Government office. The first season was relatively successful and was a great learning experience. During the second phase of the Understanding Our Food Systems project, the community expanded on the project from the first reason, and requested the materials to build a small greenhouse for the community garden space. Roots to Harvest supported and assisted with the building of the greenhouse and planting of the garden in the summer of 2019. The second year was more successful with an official community launch, and larger variety of produce grown.

Community Christmas Food Boxes: The social services department was interested in a pilot response from the community from bringing in a Good Food Box program for members in need. During the Christmas of 2018, the community offered each household a Good Food Box and asked members for feedback on starting this program on a regular basis. The response was varied with many members feeling that the program would be extremely useful, but limited to those who had adequate income from employment. More research and follow up needs to be done to evaluate its feasibility.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Community Seasonal Extension Garden Project: Students from KZA that wish to attend secondary school have to travel to Thunder Bay or surrounding areas to do so. This often means that many community learning, participating and sharing opportunities do not take place. This initiative took place to provide students who took green industry classes in Thunder Bay or surrounding area, with hands on practical experience in a community setting. It also allowed them to contribute and give back to their own community. This year the class built season extender greenhouses to allow the KZA community garden to begin planting seeds earlier in the season.

Community Christmas Food Boxes: Due to the success of the 2018 Christmas Good Food Boxes, the community opted to do the same project for the 2019 season. The need for this project was realized following the 2018 pilot, and the community recognized the positive impact it had on bringing the community closer. Discussions have already begun to continue the program throughout the year starting 2020.

Community Food Hub: Since the beginning of the community garden and the conversations around the Good Food Box, KZA has begun to conduct more workshops and events around food. The team feels that the space within the community can be expanded on other food initiatives, for example, food literacy for youth, while continuing to provide services that improve food security. One consideration is to seek additional or continued funding to explore this area. This will be considered in the next phase for Understanding Our Food Systems.

Long Lake #58 First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Long Lake #58 First Nation (LL58) is located on Highway 11 along the northeast shore of Long Lake and adjacent to the municipality of Longlac. LL58 has been located on one square mile of land since 1905 and sits within the geographic boundaries of the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. The community has not signed a treaty with the crown. The community has faced many changes to their land with the expropriation in favour of the development of the Canadian National Railway and the Trans-Canada highway. LL58 has a registered membership of 1,400 people, with 450 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Expansion of Long Lake General Store Pre-Feasibility Study: The community has a very successful gas station and general store located along the highway 11 corridor; there has been discussions for expansion full-service grocery store for years, however, there was never any major movement. Through this project, the community choose to conduct a pre-feasibility study to determine the feasibility and validity of a full-service grocery expansion, which did provide the evidence that it would be a successful venture and worthwhile for the community. The project team met with the Long Lake 58 General Store board of directors in the summer of 2019 for approval, which was granted and well received.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

School and Day Care Garden: The project team met with both the school and the day care to discuss their idea of a shared community garden for the summer of 2019. There had been a garden in previous years hosted by the school, but this was largely reliant on the facilitation by the teachers. Because of summer break, the garden was often left unattended during the summer months and often faltered. The day care located adjacent to the school is in operation during the summer months and was interested in starting their own garden, so the project team decided to collaborate with the school and day care to facilitate a collective garden. The project team invited Roots to Harvest to support the collaboration due to their expertise and experience working with a sister First Nation (Ginoogaming). The resulting garden was a success for the 2019 summer; staff-built water cisterns and propped them up for easy access, kids from the day care and school helped with the gardening. The harvest was shared amongst both groups with plans to continue this partnership.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Expansion of Long Lake General Store Northern Ontario Heritage Grant: Based on results from the pre-feasibility study completed in the earlier phase of the project, the community wanted to further pursue funding options for the completion of a business plan and estimates for the expansion of the general store. A consultant from the community was hired to submit applications to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. Applications have been submitted and the community is currently waiting for an application response.

Support for Migizi Miigwanan Secondary School Land-Based Program: In an earlier phase of the project, the team met with a Migizi Miigwanan Secondary School Principal and Education Councillor, where the project team learned about the extensive land-based learning in collaboration with educators and elders. Secondary school young adults were taken on the land and taught land-based learning, which focuses around hunting, gathering, preparing and storing food and medicines. In this current phase of the project, the team plans to expand on the existing activities with additional hunting and trapping gear and equipment.

Namaygoosisagagun First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Namaygoosisagagun First Nation (NFN) is a small remote access community in Northwestern Ontario within the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. NFN has been in existence since time immemorial, but has yet to receive official reserve status, although it has applied and negotiated for official band status and reserve lands through the provisions of the Indian Act. NFN members have historically lived near Onamakawash Lake on the north shore of Collins Lake, northwest of Lake Nipigon and continue to maintain a thriving, healthy community in the north. The name “Namaygoosisagagun” comes from Namegosi-zaaga’igan, meaning “Trout Lake”, which is the Anishinaabemowin name for Collins Lake. Access to NFN is limited to train, portage trails, and snow machines in the winter. With limited access comes challenges, but it also makes for a strong and resilient community. There are no stores within the community so many people rely on the land for sustenance. Therefore, protection of their traditional lands is one of the community’s main priorities. NFN has 140 registered members, with approximately 30 members live in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Community Freezer Project: Due to the lack of accessible shopping in or around the community the administration wanted to offer a one stop place for community members to bring and share wild foods harvested around the community. A freezer was purchased and shipped on skidoo trail and sits within the band administration building which is a hub for members to visit. The freezer is stocked with harvest foods and is accessible to anyone in the community. The project has been helpful for those who are no longer able to get back on the land and hunt, fish or trap. This project continues to live and has also become a tool for community gatherings for those who are preparing food to use some of the shared meat and other foods.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Community Energy Project: The community does not have a reliable energy source and relies on diesel fuel to power community members homes, administration offices, school buildings etc. and suffers from frequent power outages. Since the purchase of the freezer in the last phase these outages have become a more regular thing. Community members and the community infrastructure that holds food is often compromised during one of these outages, and outages can last for undetermined amounts of time. The community opted to purchase three large scale generators to power community members and the freezer while outages occur, to ensure the prolonged use of the food being stored. This has proved very as a very successful idea and has saved the community and its members money, time and anguish. Other options are being explored for a more stable source of energy, and when that happens the hope is to utilize the generators when the community does their fall harvests and other land based events.

Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg Pic Mobert First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg (Pic Mobert First Nation) has two reserves, both of which are located off highway 17, approximately 55 km east of the municipality of Marathon, along the eastern shores of White Lake. Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg is governed by a community constitution named Chi-Naakigewin where they assert that the community never ceded, surrendered, or in any way extinguished Aboriginal title to their lands and waters. The community has a registered membership of 1,010 people, with 400 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Community Kitchen Workshop Supplies: The community hosts a number of food related workshops from a variety of different programs and has heavy use of their kitchen within their recreation centre. Due to the excessive use and lack of infrastructure funding to support a kitchen renovation or supplies the kitchen and its supplies have begun to deteriorate. For this phase of the project the community choose to replace and purchase new kitchen supplies, wooden spoons, canning supplies, knives, bowls and other useful kitchen supplies. Programs continue to use the new supplies and the kitchen for workshops.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Community Kitchen Range Stove: As identified in the last phase of the project the community's kitchen is deteriorating and recently the only stove broke and the community wanted to utilize their funding to purchase a new stove for their kitchen space. Once the stove was installed the programming started happening again, the space has become a space where different groups can gather, prepare, store, cook and eat food together. The community is set to meet with the project team early in 2020 to begin work plan development for their community food sovereignty vision.



Left: Pawgwasheeng Community Garden, Right: Pawgwasheeng Harvest

Pawgwasheeng Pays Plat First Nation



ABOUT THIS NATION

Pawgwasheeng (Pays Plat First Nation) is located near the municipality of Rossport Ontario, 175 km east of Thunder Bay along highway 17. The people of Pawgwasheeng have lived on the north shore of Lake Superior for a long time, surviving on hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering food and were heavily involved in the fur trade. There is a registered membership of 210 people, with 70 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Community Kitchen Refrigerator (Kitchen Renovation): The Health Centre utilizes the community centre for many food related programs, when the project team first visited the community the health team stressed the need for a kitchen renovation in the community centre. The band administration decided that they would conduct the kitchen renovation if the Understanding Our Food Systems project would support the purchase of a much-needed replacement refrigerator to add to the renovation and to further support food related initiatives and programming. An industrial refrigerator was purchased and delivered to the community, the health centre staff explain that this purchase and the kitchen renovation have really changed the dynamics of food related programming and the space that the community utilizes for such programming. The results have been increased attendance to programming, the ability to hold higher quality foods for freshness longer and more space to hold food for programming. The community centre is a hub and the renovation and refrigerator purchase have only increased its potential.

Health Centre Raised Garden Beds: In the summer of 2019 Roots to Harvest visited the community and assisted in the building of four raised garden beds behind the health centre. Roots to Harvest assisted in the planting of the beds and mentored the health centre staff throughout the summer. The raised beds yielded a large harvest that feed into many community programs hosted at the community centre, some of the left-over harvest was given to Elders in the community and no food went to waste. The health centre gardens became a focal point for community conversation and visits, the gardens also proved to be a source of relaxation and health centre staff breaks where time was spent weeding or harvesting while taking a short break from the work happening in doors.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Health Centre Greenhouse: Due to the success of the raised garden beds behind the Health Centre the community wanted to extend their season for growing and starting their own plants from seed so decided on buying a plexi-glass greenhouse with shelves for inside along with some seeds from Superior Seasons.

Extension of Raised Bed Building and Planting Initiative: Community members had an overwhelming response from the raised beds and the health centre wanted to build a few more beds in their space as well as offer some raised beds to those community members who were interested in hosting and caring for one within their yard. The project also purchased the community enough wood to build six more raised beds for the summer of 2020. The Understanding Our Food System team and Roots to Harvest will be traveling into the community to plan, plant and build early spring 2020.

Red Rock Indian Band



ABOUT THIS NATION

Red Rock Indian Band (RRIB) is located on the Lake Helen Reserve #53A approximately 1/4 km from the junction of Highway 11/17, 100 km east of Thunder Bay. It consists of two sections, Parmachene Reserve 53 and Lake Helen Reserve 53A. The total area covered by these two reserves is approximately 950 acres. Historically, the people lived in different locations on and around Lake Nipigon such as at Jackfish Island, Gull Bay, and McIntyre Bay. RRIB became an Indian Reserve under the Indian Act in 1914. They have a registered membership of 1,823 people, with 323 of those members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Community Moose Hanger and Butcher Shop: The community has four major traditional events/gatherings that bring community members together in a traditional way; a yearly Pow Wow each July, the Fall Harvest every September/October, Indigenous Peoples Day Celebrations in June and the Salmon Derby every spring. More recently through the Understanding Our Food System project, the community has been more forward thinking in developing a more consistent and economically driven multi-year plan that can support the development of their Chalet Lodge venue into a cultural harvesting site. The intended use is for community gatherings as well as sharing with off-reserve members and visitors. During the second phase of the project, RRIB built a four-prong moose hang to provide a community friendly space for dressing moose. The space serves as a means for community access and education (see attached picture). While installing the moose hang, the community realized the need for an adjacent butcher shop for community members to harvest moose and other animals. The community has planned the space along with a tannery to allow for traditional teachings around the harvesting of moose and other trapped animals, and also as a means for tourism.

Community Garden: Due to the interest from the team in food related initiatives the community decided to support the development of a community garden behind the band office and try and incorporate programming and community members around it. The summer of 2019 was the first year for the garden and it grew and yielded a number of different harvests, although there are some growing pains the community is planning for another year of the garden for the summer of 2020.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Butcher Shop (continued): The project supported labour for the community to lay the concrete slab for the butcher shop this year. The project team and community team have developed a workplan and are committed to completing the butcher shop by mid-summer 2020, additional grants have been written in collaboration with the community team to support this work.

3rd Phase Food Gathering: The community has partnered with the project to host the 3rd Phase gathering set to happen in August of 2020, planning has begun with the community and project teams and will continue throughout the year.

Whitesand First Nation

ABOUT THIS NATION



Whitesand First Nation (WFN) is located 246 km northeast of Thunder Bay on highway 527 and is situated northeast of the municipality of Armstrong. WFN has a land base of 615 acres. Historically, the community was located along the northwest shore of Lake Nipigon near Mount St. John and the Whitesand River. In 1942, high water levels began eroding the shoreline and flooding out the community's buildings and burial grounds. Many WFN people settled along the rail line with the majority settling in Armstrong, where the establishment of the new reserve lands were negotiated. The community has a registered membership of 1086 people, with 311 members living in the community.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISION

PHASE (October, 2018 – January, 2019)

Raised Bed Community Project: Roots to Harvest supported the community in building 10 raised garden beds, community members volunteered to host and care for one in their backyard. There were positive results from this project as the gardens produced vegetable harvests, kids were positively involved in all stages from planting, caring, harvesting and cooking. This project will continue into the summer of 2020.

PHASE (September, 2019 – December, 2019)

Health Centre Food Bank: The Community Health Centre is a hub for programming, and the health team is a very active community orientated team. The team is in the process of turning a small portion of the centre into a community food bank. A partnership is being explored between Feed Ontario, the Regional Food Distribution Association to begin this process. The Understanding Our Food Systems Project purchased the community an industrial freezer to assist in this project, the community already has an accessible industrial fridge for use for the proposed food bank. Small renovations will begin in early February 2020, continued conversations and partnerships to be built and established throughout the first few months of 2020. The Understanding Our Food System team and the Whitesand Health Centre team are meeting in February to develop a workplan for the 2020 year.

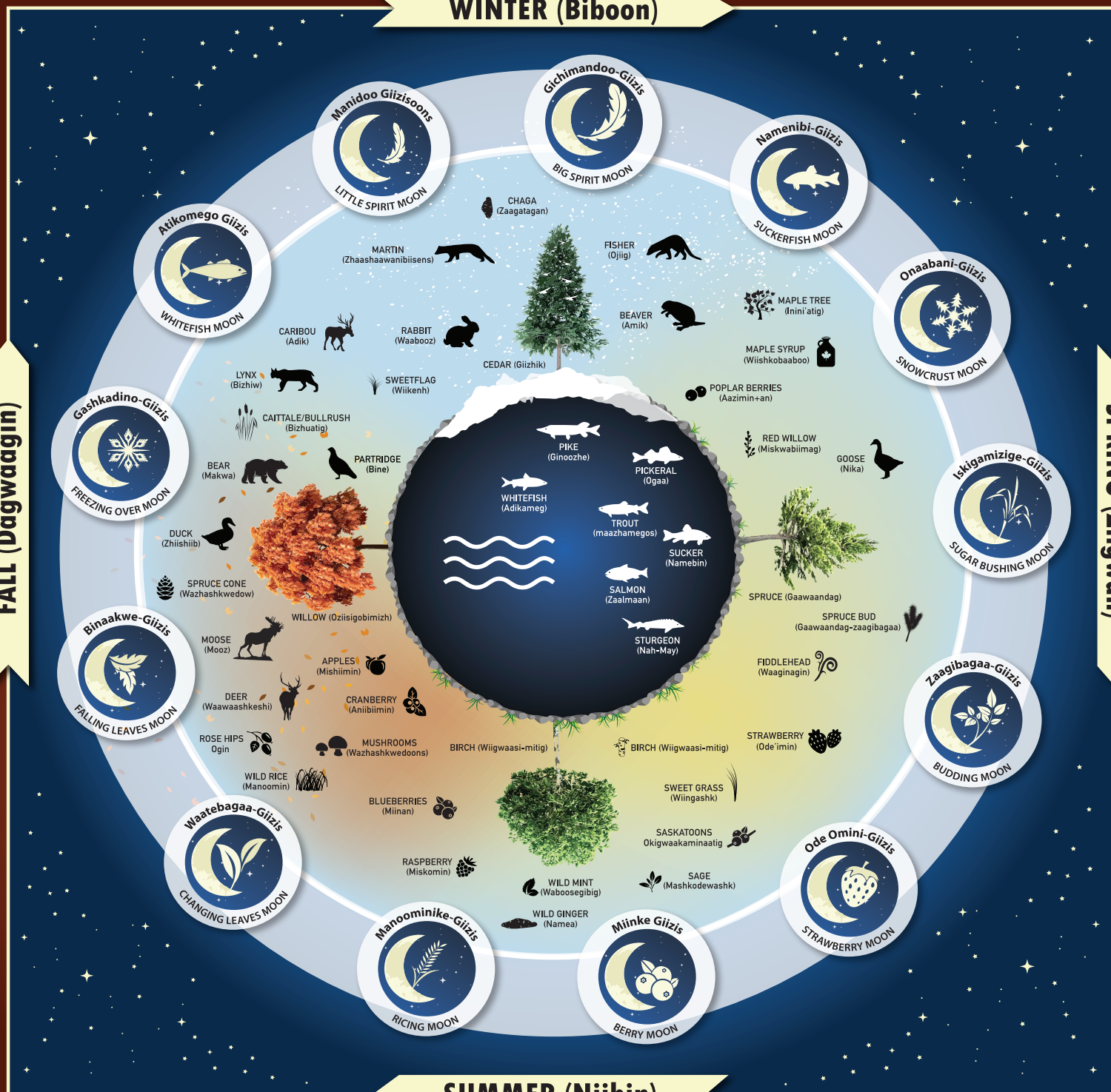
Community Bulk Buying (Potential Cooperative) Project: Due to the fact that the community only has one grocery store in neighbouring Armstrong that lacks fresh, quality, affordable food the Whitesand Economic Development is in the process of conducting a feasibility study on the potential of a cooperative store for the community. The Health Centre team met with the Silver Mountain Cooperative Buying Group in December 2019 to hear about the cooperative and see if there was an opportunity for the Whitesand Health Centre team and other interested parties to become temporary members of Silver Mountain and do some test runs for ordering in bulk. In addition to the potential for buying in bulk the group is interested in coupling this with workshops around storing the food and different methods for storing. In February when the workplan is being developed the team will be deciding on a trial run with the Silver Mountain buying group.

WINTER (Biboon)

FALL (Dagwaagin)

SPRING (Ziigwan)

SUMMER (Niibin)



TRADITIONAL/ANCESTRAL HARVESTING IN AND AROUND ANIMBIIGOO ZAAGI'IGAN AND ANISHINAABEWI GITCHI-GAMI

Historically the Anishinaabe / Anishinaabeg / Anishinabek of the Lake Nipigon and Lake Superior regions used the sun, moons, planets and stars to guide community practices around time, harvesting, gathering, storing and preparing food and medicines. Most common is the use of the thirteen-moons to guide seasonal cycles and community practices.

This poster includes a snapshot of some of the cultural practices of the Anishinaabe / Anishinaabeg / Anishinabek in the past and present. Every community and region have their own way of recognizing the moon cycles and the time of year certain harvests take place. This harvesting map represents more of a broad example of the teachings that surround the lakes. These cycles remind us of our special relationship to the natural world and our commitment to teaching younger generations about the good life.

Respect, the land no matter where you travel and only take what you need. These teachings have guided and continue to remind us of respect, balance and living with one another in harmony.

In the spirit of reclamation, reconnection and shared learning, the project team worked closely with four local Elders and Knowledge Keepers:

*Marcel Bananish from Long Lake #58 First Nation
Gene Nowegejick from Kiashe Zaaging Anishinaabek
Marlene Tsun from Allderville First Nation
and Gerry Martin from Mattagamig First Nation*



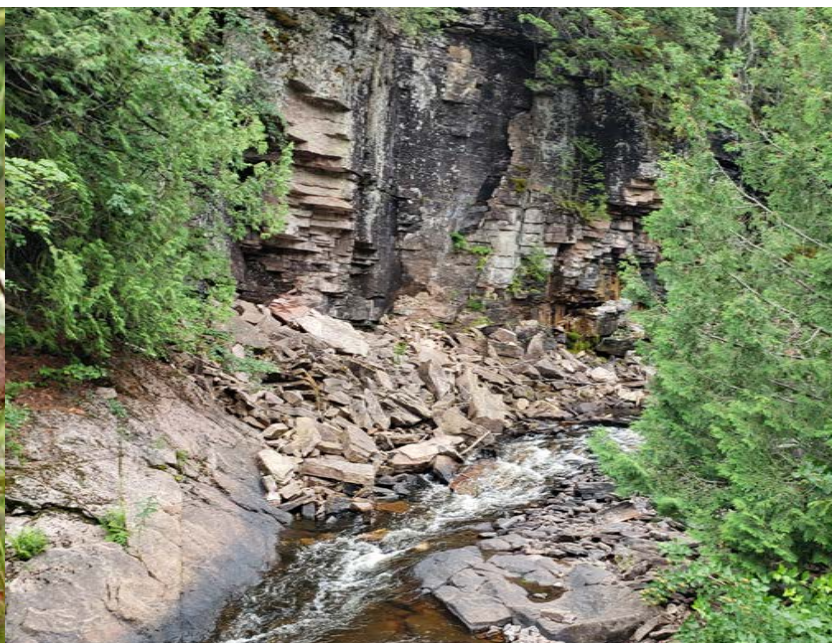
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Traditional Harvesting Poster

Another outcome of this current phase was the creation of a Traditional Harvesting Poster. In the spirit of reclamation, reconnection and shared learning, the project team worked closely with four local elders: Marcel Bananish from Long Lake #58 First Nation; Gene Nowegejick from Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek; Marlene Tsun from Allderville First Nation; and, Gerry Martin from Mattagami First Nation. In collaboration, they developed a resource poster for the First Nations and organizational partners to use within their communities for working towards food sovereignty.

Historically the Anishinaabe, Anishinaabeg of the Lake Nipigon and Lake Superior regions used the sun, moons, planets and stars to guide community practices around time, harvesting, gathering, storing and preparing food and medicines. Most common is the use of the thirteen-moons to guide seasonal cycles and community practices. Although the thirteen-moon guide is represented in many different Indigenous groups across Turtle Island there are many differences based on regional and cultural contexts. This particular resource has been developed based on the four Elder's perspectives and guidance with the overall goal to capture the essence of the thirteen-moon cycle for this region, while acknowledging that this may not be truly accurate for all Indigenous communities and people.



Recommendations and Future Thinking

Recommendations and future thinking are being provided from the context of on-the-ground experience and first-hand knowledge of what works best and what could work better. Utilizing listening and implementing the recommendations will only add to the work and generate quicker results and success. To further and acknowledge and listen will create momentum for continued progress and improve the fractured settler-Indigenous relationships.

The current phase of the Understanding Our Food Systems Project again saw a host of successes, due in large part to the community-centered, relationship-based approaches to supporting the fourteen First Nations in their Food Sovereignty Visions. This section reflects on the successes and challenges of this current phase and makes recommendations for the next phase of this project. It should be noted that many of these strengths and successes, challenges and areas for growth, and recommendations build upon those from the previous phase. The reflections and recommendations for this report have come directly from the First Nations and the project team to guide future food sovereignty work in Northwestern Ontario.

A) STRENGTHS & SUCCESSES

- Continued and deepened collaboration, partnership and momentum occurred between First Nations, the project team, and connecting partners. This has led to enhanced trust in all parties and further belief in the community led projects;
- Over 110 representatives from the fourteen First Nations, connecting partners, and invited knowledge holders from across Canada were brought together at the October Gatherings;
- The project team was made up of a majority of Indigenous members which provided the sense of a First Nation determined and led project;
- Through the project work and community relationships the Indigenous team was able to reclaim and reconnect to traditional and ancestral people, stories and knowledge providing a true space for reconciliation;
- A greater understanding was gained from the supporting organizations (Lakehead University, Thunder Bay District Health Unit and Indigenous Food Circle) about how this project could potentially be carried out with more sovereignty from the Indigenous communities.
- Realizations on the impact this work has on Indigenous people's mental, physical and emotional health.
- The development of an Understanding Our Food Systems website will provide the First Nations, project team, community/connecting partners and others interested with a continue space to access project information and resources

B) CHALLENGES & AREAS FOR GROWTH

- Periodic and temporary funding served as a barrier for continuous and prolonged community capacity building. Currently, the communities are still planning, implementing, and evaluating various aspects of their Food Sovereignty Visions. With the anticipated on-going funding for this project, it will allow this work to continue with momentum to support Indigenous communities to reach sustainability and self-sufficiency.
- The realization that this work has different outcomes on Indigenous peoples' mental, physical and emotional health;
- Although provided with a larger Indigenous team the continued mentorship needed for team members was not easy to implement during this phase as a result of compressed and rigid timelines at year end.
- As the Health Unit has different operating frameworks compared to indigenous communities, there will need to be on-going collaboration and engagement to continue building strong, open and respectful relationships

C) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT PHASE

1. Continued funding for the Understanding Our Food Systems project that supports past and present recommendations
2. Direct community support has acted as a source of empowerment and momentum at the community level, due to the lack of food related funding that support Food Sovereignty these small portions of funding have really led to community driven change, the continued funding of the direct community support portion will lead to continued community and project success
3. The goal of hosting a local gathering for all participating First Nation communities within their respective communities to foster localized collaboration and inter-community relations.
4. The ability for communities to share and learn from one another within the region and beyond will only grow and build community and regional success
5. Continued listening to Indigenous voices and recommendations, as they are the best experts and directors of their own future.
6. Focus on relationships and trust building within an Indigenous Worldview.
7. Connections with work and organizations happening in the urban spaces being used and occupied by regional First Nations.
8. Supporting various organizations to recognize the need for culturally safe indigenous training, which will open up opportunities for stronger and broader partnerships.



