



Dagwaagin 2025

Education Directors' Forum



BEST WESTERN NOR'WESTER, THUNDER BAY
DECEMBER 10 & 11



Dagwaagin 2025



Education Directors Forum

Day 1: Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Post-Secondary Education

8:00 am	Registration and Breakfast	
9:00 am	Opening Prayers	Elder Lucy Kakegamic Elder Victor Chapais
9:15 am	Welcoming Comments Overview of the day	Emcee Janine Desmoulin DGC Anna Betty Achneepineskum
9:45 am	OSAP Presentation	Dawne Johnson
10:30 am	Break	15 Minutes
10:45 am	Queens University STEM Presentation	Kayla Ford, Program Lead First Nation STEM Futures Academy
11:30 am	Oshki Pimache-O-Win Presentation The Wenjack Education Institute	Nikki Louttit, Director of Trades Susan Sinclair, Director of Academics
12:00pm	Lunch	1 hour
1:00 pm	Youth Panel – Transition Challenges Breakout Group Discussions	Facilitation by Ali Maunula, Post Secondary Transition Coach
1:45 pm	Breakout Group Discussions	45 mins
2:30 pm	Queens B.Ed. and Pikangikum Partnership	Darrin Potter, PEA Administrative Supervisor
3:00 pm	Break	15 minutes
3:15 pm	Inspiring the Next Generation of Leadership through Sport, Storytelling and Mentorship	Ronny Musiktele
4:15 pm	Closing Comments Prayers Daily Draws	Elder Lucy Kakegamic Elder Victor Chapais

Day 2: Thursday, December 11, 2025

Early Learning and Child Care

8:00 am	Registration and Breakfast	
9:00 am	Opening Prayers	Elder Lucy Kakegamic Elder Victor Chapais
9:15 am	Review of Yesterday Overview of the day Welcoming Comments from ELCC	Emcee Janine Desmoulin Kristy Hankila, Manager of Early Learning and Child Care
9:30 am	Welcome to Early Learning! Interactive activity exploring our understanding of Early Learning and Child Care.	NAN Early Learning and Child Care Team
9:50 am	Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care at NAN Overview and update on work including Infrastructure update with NAN Housing and Infrastructure Questions on Menti	Kristy Hankila Zach Adams, Early Years Infrastructure Coordinator, NAN
10:30 am	Break	15 Minutes
10:45 am	Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care - Framework and Funding Presentation by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)	Angela Gillis (ESDC) Jessa Williams (ESDC)
11:15 am	Seven Minutes of Song	
11:22 am	Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care - Funding and Reporting Presentation by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)	Jaime Dumont (ISC)
12:00 pm	Lunch	45 minutes
1:00 pm	Quality Improvement Project – Embracing Our Children, Our Way Overview and Update with Questions on Menti Embracing: Our Children, Our Way - Table Activity	Kristy Hankila, NAN and Dr. Nicole Ineese-Nash, Toronto Metropolitan University, Finding Our Power Together Research Team
2:00 pm	Exploring Lifelong Learning Systems - WORKSHOP An interactive workshop led by Toronto Metropolitan University and the Finding Our Power Together Research Team.	Nicole Ineese-Nash
3:00 pm	Break	15 minutes
3:15 pm	Land Based Learning – Generative Curriculum A deep dive into the mind map developed to guide post-secondary curriculum development in every interested NAN First Nation, for community members working with young children. Table Activity – In Small Groups	Laura Baxter, Early Learning and Child Care Policy Analyst
3:45 pm	Play Is Learning. Play is Ceremony. Hands on experiences to explore play as we finish our day.	NAN ELCC Team and TMU
4:15 pm	Closing Comments Prayers Daily Draws	Elder Lucy Kakegamic Elder Victor Chapais

Elder Victor Chapais



Elder Victor attended St. Joseph's Residential School in Fort William, Ontario and then Confederation College and Cambrian College for his post-secondary education. Victor worked in the forestry industry for 19 years before deciding to go back to school in the early 1980's, as he really felt the need to change the scope of his work to help others. He believes he was guided into the social work field. He has previously worked as the manager for Child Welfare in the Longlac office for Dilico and is presently working for Ginoogaming in Education. Volunteering has always been big part of his life. He has acted as a minor league referee, coach, assistant coach, and trainer in both Longlac and Ginoogaming since 1989. He has sat on school boards in his community and the surrounding area of Greenstone as well as the Geraldton District Hospital for 11 years, Community Care and Access Centre for 3 years and has done volunteer work with Greenstone Victim Services. After many years of training, Victor has achieved his 2nd degree black belt in Shotokan Karate.



Elder Lucy Kakegamic

Lucy is from Keewaywin First Nation, she is a life long advocate and supporter of Education, a legacy and passion she continues after her late husband Goyce Kakegamic, who shared that passion for education and advocated for the people across Nishnawbe Aski.

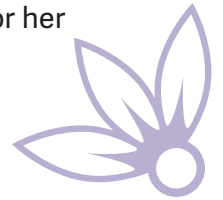


Speakers



Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum

Anna Betty Achneepineskum is Anishinaabe-Mushkego from Marten Falls First Nation (Ogoki Post). Prior to being elected as the Deputy Grand Chief for Nishnawbe Aski Nation, she served on the Council for Marten Falls. She is currently in her third term as the Deputy Grand Chief. As a leader, and as a social justice advocate for many years, she has strived and committed to raising awareness of issues and challenges experienced by First Nations people, families, women, and children. Anna Betty is a person of action and a strong voice for transformative social change. Her life's work and contributions are driven by a passion to help the most marginalized people, especially the people from the Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory. In whatever she does, she advocates for equitable access to justice and services, and for improving the quality of life, community wellness and safety for all NAN citizens. She currently resides in Thunder Bay and credits her children and grandchildren as the inspirations for her lifelong work, service, and advocacy.



Dawne Johnson

Dawne Johnson is a Senior Policy Advisor with the Student Financial Assistance Branch (SFAB), based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. She leads the Students with Disabilities portfolio and brings over eight years of experience in policy development and program design. Dawne has held multiple roles across strategic and operational units at SFAB, including designated French-language positions, and is recognized for her collaborative approach and commitment to improving access to postsecondary education.

Dawne will deliver a presentation on the range of Student Financial Assistance supports currently available to underrepresented learners, with a focus on initiatives tailored for Indigenous students and students with disabilities.





Kayla Ford

Kayla Ford leads the First Nations STEM Futures Academy and Good Roots programs with Indigenous Futures in Engineering at Queen's University. She works with First Nations communities to bring fun, hands-on STEM activities and learning opportunities to students. Kayla loves helping youth explore science, technology, engineering, and math while showing how these connect to Indigenous knowledge and traditions. Her goal is to inspire students to dream big, be curious, and see themselves as future leaders in STEM.

STEM Presentation Synopsis:

This presentation showcases how Indigenous Futures in Engineering at Queen's University is transforming the landscape of STEM education through culturally grounded and community-driven initiatives. Guided by the belief that the future of innovation must reflect the diversity, strength, and brilliance of Indigenous youth, the session will highlight how the First Nations STEM Futures Academy, led by Kayla Ford, is removing barriers, building confidence, and creating meaningful pathways for students from First Nations communities to excel in STEM fields.

Forum attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how Indigenous Futures in Engineering bridges traditional knowledge with modern technology, fosters mentorship between university students and youth, and cultivates sustainable partnerships with Indigenous communities. Together, we are not only redefining the face of STEM education, we are shaping a future where Indigenous youth lead with innovation, identity, and purpose.



Nikki Louttit

Omushkego Cree from Treaty #9, resides in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Nikki has served in roles supporting elected leaders of Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Chiefs of Ontario and has worked within First Nation organizations throughout her career. Nikki currently is the Director of Trades at Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, an Indigenous Institute mandated to serve NAN First Nations. Nikki is passionate about nation-building and advancing treaty and Indigenous rights, including the right to lifelong education. Nikki is a proud mother of two sons who keep her active and are a loving reminder of the importance of her vocation.



Darrin Potter



Darrin Potter has worked with First Nations' Education in the NAN territory for over 25 years. His recent work focus has been in capacity and education program development and expansion at the community level. He has worked in public education but most of his work has been in First Nations' Education as a teacher, principal, and Director of Education and now with the Pikangikum Education Authority as Administration Supervisor.

He passionately believes that if you want the best for students and the community in terms of programs and opportunity, you do the work to build the structures and people will show up and succeed!



Ronny Musikitele



Ronny Musikitele is a High-Performance Culture Coach, educator, and speaker dedicated to helping youth, athletes, and educators discover purpose through sport, storytelling, and leadership. As the Founder of Skyline Sports Global, Ronny has developed mentorship programs and certification workshops across Ontario, partnering with SHSM Sport programs, school boards, and community organizations to teach personal development, leadership, and sport management. His sessions blend motivation with practical skill-building — showing students how discipline, mindset, and education can open doors both on and off the court.

Beyond the classroom, Ronny speaks at colleges, universities, and youth conferences, sharing his journey from Ottawa's West End to working with Sport Canada's FIFA 2026 Team, and producing for the Toronto Raptors. Through his talks and mentorship, he empowers the next generation to believe in their story, maximize their opportunities, and build legacies beyond the game.

I'll be speaking about my journey. The importance of perseverance and not letting the "system" determine how we view ourselves. But understanding our roots and where we're from. How I went from being pulled out of class because I was told I learn too slow, to getting into university, getting a bachelor's degree, a college diploma and now working for the FIFA World Cup team at Sport Canada.





Diane Bjorn

Diane is based in Thunder Bay and works on the traditional territory of Fort William First Nation, the ancestral lands of the Anishinabek Peoples under the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. Her educational background is in Psychology and Human Resources with an interest in connections between mental wellness and health. In her spare time she can be found reading or in nature hunting, fishing, bird watching and contributing to the Gray Fox Project.

With 18+ years of work experience at ISC she continues building working relationships with Ontario Region communities and partners. Some of her roles at ISC resided in Funding Services, Funding Arrangements, Community Development, Community Infrastructure, Education and Social and Community Programs. As a result, Diane continues to learn about community needs and is committed to increasing her knowledge base, while connecting with communities and partners. Currently, she is a Healthy Child Development Specialist with a portfolio reflecting the importance of children's health, early learning and development. Diane engages with communities to find creative solutions to program delivery and welcomes enquiries and conversations. Please feel free to contact her at diane.bjorn@sac-isc.gc.ca.



Jaime Dumont



Born and raised in rural Ottawa, Jaime is a proud member of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. As a registered dental hygienist with a strong background in health promotion and disease prevention, Jaime has dedicated her career to enhancing community health outcomes. In previous roles, Jaime has worked within the dental clinic at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in partnership with Ottawa Public Health and has served as an oral health provider, completing rotations in Northern Ontario. This work has provided her with invaluable experience and has enhanced her knowledge of Northern Ontario communities. During the pandemic, Jaime worked as a casual instructor in the dental hygiene program at Algonquin College, sharing her expertise with the next generation of dental professionals.

Since joining Indigenous Services Canada in 2020 as a Senior Program Officer, Jaime has contributed to various initiatives, including the Health Facilities Team, Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI) and now, the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care program. With project management training and a passion for working within systems and applications, Jaime is dedicated to empowering communities in achieving their program goals. Jaime.dumont@sac-isc.gc.ca





Jessa Williams

Jessa Williams is a Senior Policy Analyst with the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Secretariat at Employment and Social Development Canada. Jessa has spent the past fifteen years working in support of First Nations communities in the areas of community planning, health, economic development, and now early learning and child care, including 10 years with the First Nations Health Authority in BC. She lives in Ottawa with her husband, six year old son and puppy. She is a settler of mixed European descent with Swedish, Welsh, Irish and English ancestry.



Lauren Harney

Lauren Harney is a settler researcher, educator, and community worker of Irish and English descent. She was born and raised in Toronto, where she continues to live, learn, and work while reflecting on her responsibilities to the lands and Indigenous peoples across the territories she engages with.

Lauren is a Project Coordinator with TMU x Finding Our Power Together, an Indigenous-led organization that supports community-driven early childhood research, wellness programming, and culturally grounded initiatives for children, youth, and families. She is also a Registered Early Childhood Educator with over fifteen years of experience in classrooms, childcare centres, and lab school environments, where she has supported both children and emerging educators through mentorship, pedagogical documentation, and relational practice.

Her graduate work in Early Childhood Studies attends to peer mentorship, professionalization, and liberatory pedagogies. She draws on critical, relational, and decolonial approaches, with interests in Indigenous early years programming, community-led curriculum design, and the possibilities of mentorship as collective care. Lauren's research and professional practice are grounded in reciprocity, relational accountability, and a commitment to collaborative knowledge mobilization and capacity-building alongside communities and colleagues.





Dr. Nicole Ineese-Nash

Assistant Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies and Child and Youth Care - Toronto Metropolitan University
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Executive Director, Finding Our Power Together
info@findingourpowertogether.com

Registered Early Childhood Educator

Dr. Nicole Ineese-Nash is a mixed Indigenous (Mushkego Cree, French-Canadian, and Irish) researcher, educator, and community worker. She is a registered member of Constance Lake First Nation with family ties to Mamawmattawa along the English and Kabikagami Rivers in Treaty 9 territory. She was born and raised in Tkaronto, where she presently lives and works.

Nicole is an Assistant Professor in Early Childhood Studies and Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is also a registered early childhood educator. Her research attends to Indigenous childhoods, disability justice, madness and healing, drawing on participatory, land-based, and decolonial methodologies. She is also the founder and Executive Director of Finding Our Power Together, a national Indigenous-led charitable organization that offers mental health programming, cultural healing services, and community-based research with Indigenous children, youth, and communities across Canada.



