



# Our Ancestors' Wisdom

**FINAL REPORT**

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JUSTICE  
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# Section 1





## 1.0 Background

*They say that Justice is the conscience of a community. This means that the values the community holds as integral to the fabric of their well-being are reflected in its members, in its institutions, and in its laws. There was a time that our People did not have to work so hard to uncover Justice because it was everywhere, however, in contemporary times, and more specific to the purpose of this report, we embarked on a journey to study the intersection of Indigenous Laws and Justice, as previously defined, to create a solid foundation for self-determination as espoused in our Deshkan Ziibiing Anishinaabe Aki Chi-Inaakonigewin.*

Indigenous Law is different than any other law (as the modern society knows it); meaning it is so much more than just words on paper. It is an intricate system of knowledge based on learning and doing at the same time; something you feel in your heart, something you hear in Anishinaabemowin, something you see through Ancestors' eyes, something you implement daily with intention, and something that can be expressed through many powerful forms. Our Anishinaabe Laws are in our songs, stories, language, ceremonies, natural law, customs, and traditions.

There is an indescribable magic that happens when Indigenous Law is at work. A body of wisdom, thousands of years old, that one can never master. A world built on inherent responsibility and inclusiveness.

# 1.1 Truth & Reconciliation (TRC) Call to Action #50

50. In keeping with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations, to fund the establishment of Indigenous law institutes for the development, use, and understanding of Indigenous law and access to justice in accordance with the unique cultures of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada predicated this Call to Action on an understanding and truths found in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*; the 2013 study, “Access to Justice in the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”, authored by the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the 2014 report, issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – S. James Anaya – as he then was; the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples; and a 2012 partnership titled, “Accessing Justice and Reconciliation (AJR) Project” which examined different Indigenous legal traditions across the country.

In 2020, the federal government issued a Call for Proposals focused on restoring Indigenous legal systems, rebuilding Indigenous law institutions, and revitalizing Indigenous laws. Our proposal titled “Our Ancestors’ Wisdom” was successful and received funding in the amount of \$500,000 over 3 years (2021-2024). This report is about the work that took place during that timeframe.



# 1.2 Acknowledgements

There are many people to acknowledge and say Chi-Miigwech to for their support and sharing of knowledge along our journey.

## Matriarchs

Albert, Ardith  
Beeswax, Denise  
Deleary, Beverly & family  
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Hilliker: Raquel, Karen-baa  
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Yulanda, Sandra-baa  
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Jason & Shenoa Smith  
Corbin Hendrick  
Justice Dept.: Garrett Cloud, Leelle  
Derynck, Becky Young  
All those Lodge Builders helping us!

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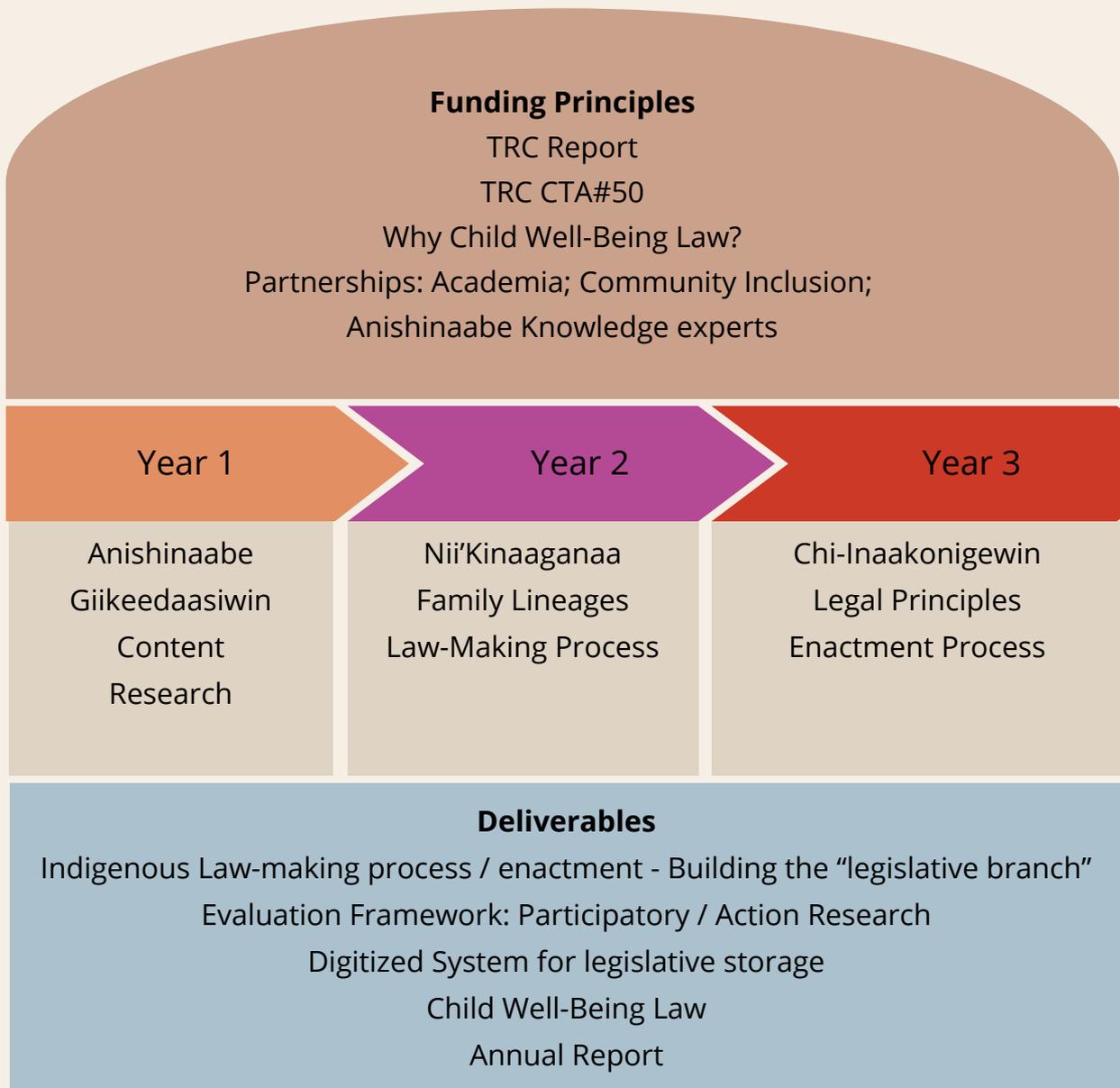
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Andre Halfday  
Kegedonce Dr. John Borrows  
Dr. Alan Ojiig Corbiere  
Waagosh Dr. Anton Treuer  
University of Victoria: Language,  
Arts, Culture Programs



# Section 2



# 2.0 Project Framework



Above is a diagram showing the project outline when we commenced this work. In each year there are 3 conceptual words indicia of necessary components for Indigenous Law. Starting at the top, is the Anishinaabe value/practice, followed by the English similarity, and the bottom being the legal practice. The Anishinaabe Giikeedaasiwin was mobilized by our Matriarchs and is found in sections that follow noted as “Year in review”.

# 2.1 Key Hypothesis for Our Indigenous Law-Making

## **Deshkan Ziibiing Anishinaabe Aki Chi-Inaakonigewin**

In 2018, our community ratified the Deshkan Ziibiing Anishinaabe Aki Chi-Inaakonigewin by signing their respective names onto birch bark. Within this document, there is a model of governance that infers a legislative body is to be created. The Chi-Inaakonigewin was meant to be an assertion of our jurisdiction and envisioned a revitalizing of our Indigenous Institutions, including our legal systems. We know from our Dodemag system that there was a division of roles and responsibilities, a degree of independence between each - if you will, and this applied to all functions of governance. Through this project we attempted to create a legislative system that reflects the actions of our Ancestors, in contemporary times.

## **Nii’kinaaganaa**

An integral component to our Indigenous law-making process was to ensure that we made space for participatory involvement. We believe that all women in our community hold a significant purpose that nurtures connection, strength, and vitality. We believe that all women in our community should be provided every opportunity to fulfill those leadership opportunities and this project presented a perfect fit. This does not mean that the men are excluded, their voice is welcome in the larger process, but the process is led by the women.

In the simplest form, we compiled a listing of the families by last name residing in the community. Essentially, the same family last names have resided in the community for hundreds of years and one can typically trace their relations back to one of these families (even if their current last name has changed). We identified a Matriarch from each of these families, not necessarily the oldest woman in the family, but the one who typically is most likely to circulate information within their respective family. We had developed a listing with 23 family names.

We provided a hand-delivered invitation to come to a kick-off meeting and discuss our intended process. Each woman was given, what we called an “invitation stick” that was to be “dressed” and brought with her to our kick-off meeting and each meeting thereafter. At the kick-off meeting we discussed the Matriarch role in this law-making process, which was to ensure that they gathered content for the Law through discussions with their respective families, received feedback and shared the same with all Matriarchs when they convened together, and they would be supported by technical staff and others while they continued to learn and “do” at the same time.

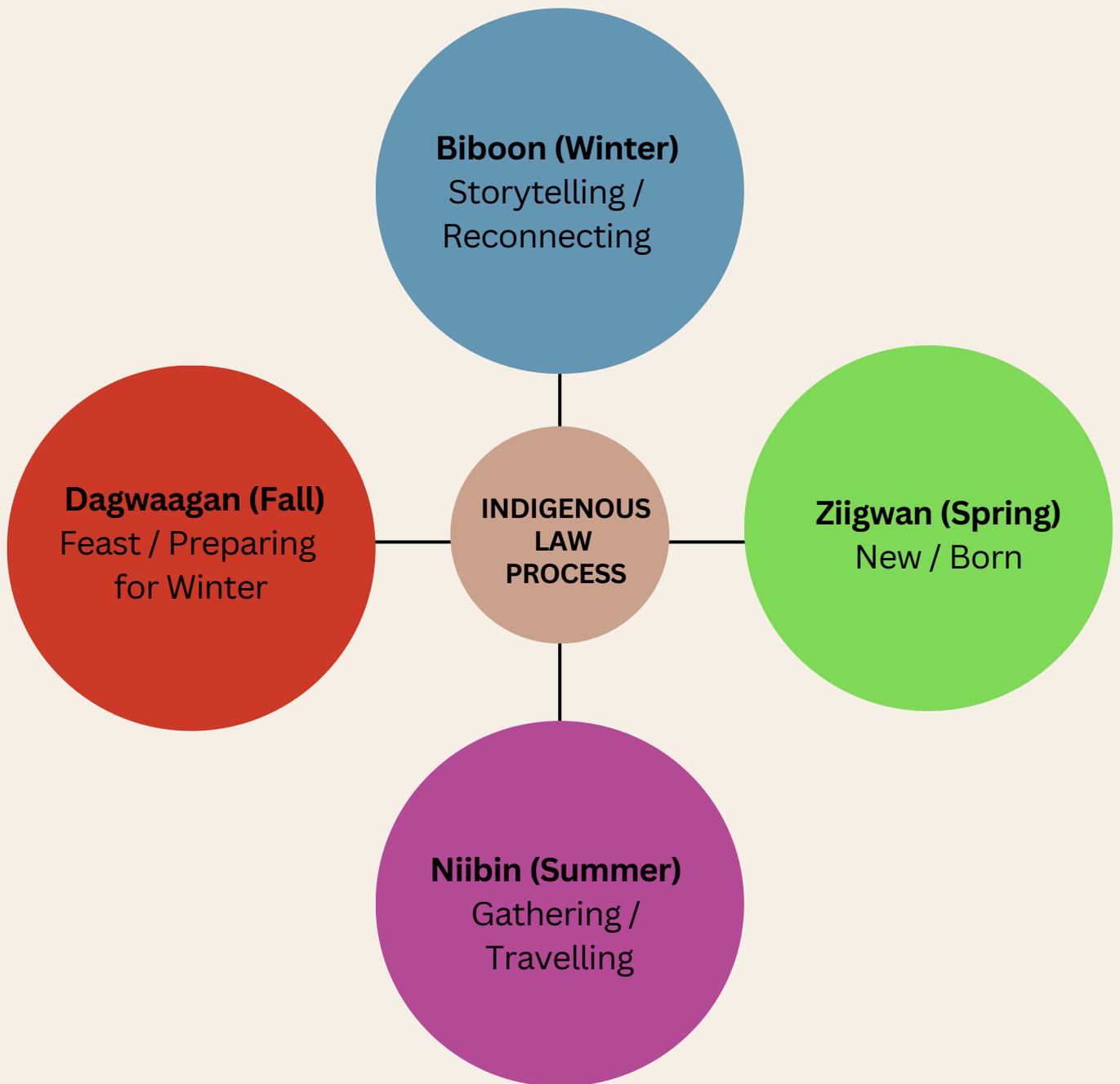
# Law Content Components Diagram

Below is a diagram of our initial design to support the Matriarchs in law content development. We were successful in activating all areas in the diagram as described in the following section 2.2.

## DESHKAN ZIIBIING ANISHINAABE AKI CHI-INAAKONIGEWIN: LEGISLATIVE BRANCH



# Law-Making Process Diagram



# Law-Making Process

We applied an approach that aligns with the basic four seasons. Each season indicates different actions that take place, and we lightly planned our activities in accordance with same. We are clear in our understanding that there is a time in the natural world for certain life processes to occur and we believe that law-making should not be any different. It is the Matriarchs that action this system.



**Ziigwan (Spring)** will be when new legislative proposals will be presented. Loosely, Ziigwan represents the time for awakening after winter, birth of new life, and a time of letting go (for example, sap flows, rivers flow).

**Niibin (Summer)** is when there is communication with extended families about the legislative proposals from the Spring. Loosely, Niibin represents the time that we travel throughout the country and meet up with our relatives. This practice offers the opportunity to gather a lot of input about a legislative proposal from Ziigwan.

**Dagwaagan (Fall)** is when the legislative proposals from Ziigwan will be prepped for winter. The proposals will now have some input that can be synthesized. There can be a truth revealed from the input about whether the legislative proposal is something that the community wants or is it something that the community does not want. A feast can be offered for the legislative proposals from Ziigwan.

**Biboon (Winter)** is when the legislative proposals will be discussed. Loosely, Biboon is the time for storytelling, a time to slow down, to rest and recharge. The input gathered to date will be discussed and decisions should be made on whether the legislative proposal survives, whether the legislative proposal requires more amendments, or whether the legislative proposal dies. If a legislative proposal requires more amendments, it will go through the seasons again.

## Enactment

If a legislative proposal survives, it is meant to become “law”. A formal “enactment” of an Indigenous Law is basically redundant if the process outlined above is completed with intention, the people will have already agreed to the existence of the law. They will have placed it through quasi-ceremonial protocols and lent their voice to it - participated in its creation. An Indigenous Law is going to be something a person carries with them in their soul and will have a moral responsibility to abide by it therefore there is no need for punitive consequences (i.e. enforcement) of an Indigenous Law. An Indigenous Law will be lived every day.



## 2.2 Goals and Results

### Year 1 in Review

#### Focus: What is Indigenous Law?

At our Deshkan Ziibiing Anishinaabe Aki Chi-Inaakonigewin Reciting, held on August 11, 2021, we grounded our work with an opening address from The Honourable Murray Sinclair. He talked to our community about the importance of Justice and specifically the importance of Call to Action #50, the importance of revitalizing Indigenous Law. We made an official announcement about Our Ancestors' Wisdom – Project Framework and its relationship to Call to Action #50.

We started our journey with a Matriarchs' Feast for the Ancestors. Our purpose was to ask for guidance on our path over the coming years as we searched in Anishinaabe Giikeedaasiwin to develop our understanding of Indigenous Law and seek to develop a collective Matriarchs' Bundle. This was also a time for the Matriarchs to build their relationship with one another and understand the unique gifts they each possess to offer to the work ahead.

A special 6.5 km memorial walk, in remembrance of Chief Tecumseh (Tecumtha) on the anniversary of his death, took place on October 5, 2021. This was important to build a connection to Tecumtha because he was a true warrior for Indigenous Law hundreds of years before the term was coined and his death happened in our traditional territory. He lived by the customs of his Peoples in conjunction with natural law. He was defiant to the government's desire to expand onto tribal territory and knew how the loss of territory would be detrimental to our Peoples (interestingly, this is a war we continue to this day). He lived a life understanding his value/responsibility as a Shawnee, living a life protecting Sovereignty, and the importance of unity for our Peoples. The picture above is from the area news, but the story was picked up by national newspapers.

Our deep dive into Anishinaabe Giikeedaasiwin took place over a 7-week Learning Series. It was interesting to note that all discussions included Anishinaabemowin in their messaging, to convey concepts.

Below is a synopsis of the calendar for the Learning Series.

<b>Knowledge Carrier</b>	<b>General Topic</b>	<b>Learning/Discussion</b>
Alan Corbiere	Clans/Treaties	Introduction to Clans: Generally; Critical thinking – Why would our Ancestors’ have organized this way? Can we organize this way again? What will improve? Should we organize this way again?
Jim Dumont	Dodem Roles & Responsibilities	Does the Nation know what to do – if not, what information is necessary to know what to do; Can we legitimately link the lack of exercising our clan responsibilities with any real or perceived Nation dysfunction – if so, how do we remedy that?
Heidi Bohaker	Dodem & Council Fires	How far off are we from living our Clan responsibilities; are we too far removed and it’s only become an activity/namesake; what needs to be done to ensure that future generations don’t question what their Clan is?
John Borrows	Indigenous Law / Anishinaabe Constitutionalism	What is it; where to find it; difference from Canadian law; what does it look like –should it be written or if not, how is it “enforced”; beauty & deep meaning of Indigenous law vs. the authoritarian feeling of Canadian law; language importance.
Jerry Fontaine	Anishinaabe Governance	Anishinaabe Governance: What are our “traditional ways” – how did our leadership sit with one another, make decisions – what characteristics did a leader possess; what is the difference between now and then *we are still Anishinaabe ** what do we need to change / structural changes - how does a Nation become un-indoctrinated, overcome Genocide.
Heidi Stark	Anishinaabe Governance	Anishinaabe Governance: how many daily processes reflect Anishinaabe Values; repairing disconnected relationships with community; medicines & leadership (how does one lead w/o a clear mind).
Anton Treuer	Anishinaabe Governance	Anishinaabe Governance: political relationships; chief & council means what? In Anishinaabe Governance, what does it take to dismantle hierarchy.

## Results highlights:

- Learned from world-renowned experts to build a foundation for our understanding.
- Matriarchs created a Participatory Reflection/Evaluation Framework over a 5-week session based in Action Research methodology.
- Created a Digitalized System for legislation storage.
- Learning Tables held on Chi-Inaakonigewin, TRC Final Report, Legislative Enactment Design
- Envisioned home for our “Indigenous Law Institute” included in the Schematic Design document of our “Heritage Hub”





## Year 2 in Review

### Focus: Where do we find Indigenous Law?

Building upon last year, we knew the importance of connecting with Nii'kinaaganaa – All my Relations – the action of being related to all of Creation, not just humans. We planned several interactive methods to engage with our relations, such as Full Moon Ceremonies, Pipe Ceremony, Family Gatherings and Community Gatherings; some happened, and some did not.

We held an inaugural “Family Lineages Gathering” on August 11, 2022, at our ballpark grounds. Our theme was to put our law-making process into action. Each Matriarch was tasked with inviting at least 10 people from their families, including extended family relations. We started our day with a Pipe Ceremony, a Water Ceremony, and singing. We shared about the Chi-Inaakonigewin (Legislative Branch contained within it) and the revitalization of Indigenous Laws and Processes. Each Matriarch was introduced, and they subsequently introduced their relations who were present. We had prepared a mixture of interactive activities and serious discussion topics. There were games, such as musical chairs, potato dance and trophies awarded to the winners. There were activities, such as ‘dressing’ their family invitation stick, and creating a family tree. There were survey questions/discussion topics to illicit responses feeding into the content to be included in a Child Being Well Law. All the above was completed in an open manner and shared with everyone in attendance. Our technical support was scribes and recorded the discussion feedback that was shared.

The Matriarchs hosted a Family Day Children’s Conference entrenched in Storytelling – a form of Indigenous Law. We held this Conference at our Antler River Elementary School, starting our day with a Sunrise Ceremony. We had several activities for the children such as colouring, fidgets, craft making, and blank family trees for the adults to complete while listening and to take home. Each Storyteller had a unique message; there was a special treat for the children – a puppet show. Subsequently, pulling out the applicable law was a fun exercise for the technical support to undertake. Everyone received a take home sweatshirt to mark the occasion.

We next ventured into the world of Natural Law – another form of Indigenous Law. Our “Exploring Naaskodaading (The way things were/are)” International Women’s Day Event centered on a full day of learning and practical engagement with the natural elements. Our phenomenal keynote speakers, Dr. Bev Jacobs, and Dr. Eva Jewell reiterated the importance of revitalizing Indigenous Laws and spoke about the government’s inaction on the TRC Calls to Action. We held concurrent sensory workshops with the theme: “What if we took the violence out of Air, Fire, Earth, and Water” – the experience was to engage with the natural elements in a good way and understand the Indigenous Law that attaches to these natural elements when we do engage in a good way. We held an Open Plenary to hear all voices & experiences with Indigenous Law and our technical support listened intently to the words shared. Our day ended with a Round Dance Social attended by approximately 200 people.

### **Results highlights:**

- Matriarchs’ Ribbon Skirt Making Sessions
- Participatory Reflection Sessions
- Family Lineages Gathering
- Family Day Children’s Conference
- International Women’s Day – Exploring Naaskodaading & Round Dance





## Year 3 in Review

### Focus: How do you implement Indigenous Law?

Our Deshkan Ziibiing Anishinaabe Aki Chi-Inaakonigewin sets out a model of governance for the Nation. This journey allowed us to explore legal principles applicable to our Indigenous Law Enactment Process. We are clear in our understanding that Indigenous Law must speak with a voice that comes from Nii'kinaaganaa, informed with Anishinaabe Giikeedaasiwin, and in accordance with our Chi-Inaakonigewin. If a law is presented that does not include these legal principles, then, very simply, it is not Indigenous Law.

We focused this year on pulling everything we learnt and heard over the previous two years into a law. When we embarked upon this journey, we were referencing the creation of a “Child Well-Being Law” however as we started to work, it became clear that wording is often associated with mainstream child welfare/protection – otherwise known as CAS – and that was not what we were trying to accomplish. Technical support staff had heard Chief Wilton Littlechild on a webinar refer to the concept of “Child Being Well” and this did seem to resonate a little more. As we learned more about Indigenous Law and heard the voices from our people, it seemed appropriate to mirror an action of our Ancestors where the children are the center of a Nation and learn what it means to ensure that all decisions made in the Nation have the children at the heart – this is our Law.

A partnership was arranged with the University of Victoria within their community-based program offerings to have the Matriarchs undertake 3 credits towards a Certificate in Revitalizing Indigenous Languages. Our courses would be offered as Intensives, the first being an Anishinaabemowin course, the second being an Anishinaabe Law/Governance course, and the third being a music course (albeit, due to circumstances beyond our control, we had to pivot this last course out of the credits and instead engaged a few young music production professionals from our Nation to help us with the music portion). Our Law would be the core practical resource for each course; in other words, our Law would be brought to life through each course.

We had two parallel paths in motion: creating an Indigenous Law System and creating an Indigenous Law. The Indigenous Law System components are: Legislative Process Manual, Legislative Database, and Indigenous Law Institute (a home). The Legislative Process is described in more detail in Section 2.1 of this report. In completing our Indigenous Law, we knew the principles that were necessary: Anishinaabemowin and an expression that meant the most. We had learnt from Elder Stan Peltier that the highest honour one can give someone else is in the form of a song. And, so, our plan was solidified, our Indigenous Law would be expressed as a song.

We continued to build our knowledge base with the inner components of our Law related to broader concepts of Indigenous Law. On August 11, 2023, the Matriarchs hosted an Anishinaabemowin miinawaa Inaakonigewin Gathering. Our focus was on the customary laws connected to Eagle Staff teachings. We, once again, had several families engaged in learning about Indigenous Law and how important the Eagle Staff is in terms of being present when Indigenous Law is being worked on. It is important that the Matriarchs create an Eagle Staff for their collective bundle.

The Matriarchs and community volunteers built a Lodge where we could have our Anishinaabe Law/Governance course. Through the working hands there was practical Indigenous Law being transmitted. We held our course practicing certain Indigenous Laws every day, embodying them within our spirit. A significant observance came when the children from the school joined us in the Lodge and eagerly took part in our discussions. On the last day of our course, October 5th, we travelled to retrace what is said to be Chief Tecumseh's path taken leading up to his death, otherwise known as the Tecumseh Trail and we had a Food offering for him at a monument dedicated to him.

Over the last months of the fiscal year, we put the final touches on our Law, translated it into Anishinaabemowin, put a melody to the words, and sang it repeatedly in preparation for us to Gift the Law to the children. On International Women's Day, we had a beautiful day with the children, inviting them to take part in a Pipe offering, a Water offering, and a Food offering. Then we Gifted the song to the children; meaning we sang the song to them – the Law that we had created over 3 years was now theirs. In parallel legal principles, this means that the Law was enacted. The children were invited to take part in an activity to create, by decorating, their own family cedar paddle. The Matriarchs were gifted shawls specifically made for each of them. We continued the day's events with presentations on the Rights of the Child from an International Law perspective, the Voice of the Child perspective, and a community-centered perspective. To end our IWD events, we hosted a dinner and Round Dance for the community; a significant observation was the high number of youths in attendance.

## Results highlights:

- Completion of an Indigenous Law – Minogi’aawaso (Raise Children in a Good Way)
- Completion of an Indigenous Law System
- A Lodge for the Children
- Completion of Participatory Reflection/Evaluation





# Section 3



# 3.0 Participatory Evaluation Framework

From January–April 2022, Nii Kiniganaa – the legislative committee comprised of matriarchs from 23 families – co-developed a participatory evaluation framework to be used to reflect on the law-making process so that that learnings can be incorporated into future Indigenous law-making. The construction of the framework and plan took place over five meetings and began with a reflection on learnings about Indigenous law-making from the Fall training sessions.

The tree framework describes the desired process, outcomes, and impacts of Our Ancestors' Wisdom.

**The roots** represent the learnings related to the law-making process and how this process respects and is inspired by the core values of the community. The seven themes have been prioritized by the group and are deeply connected to the key principles that will guide the group (for example, the Seven Grandfathers' Teachings as presented below). It is possible that other themes emerge during the process, related to a need to generate learning about collaboration or decision-making mechanisms for example. We invite the committee to add these themes to the reflection as needed.

**The trunk** represents the legislative committee and the 23 Matriarchs. It symbolizes the heart of the process and the junction between the principles guiding the work and the results of this law-making work.

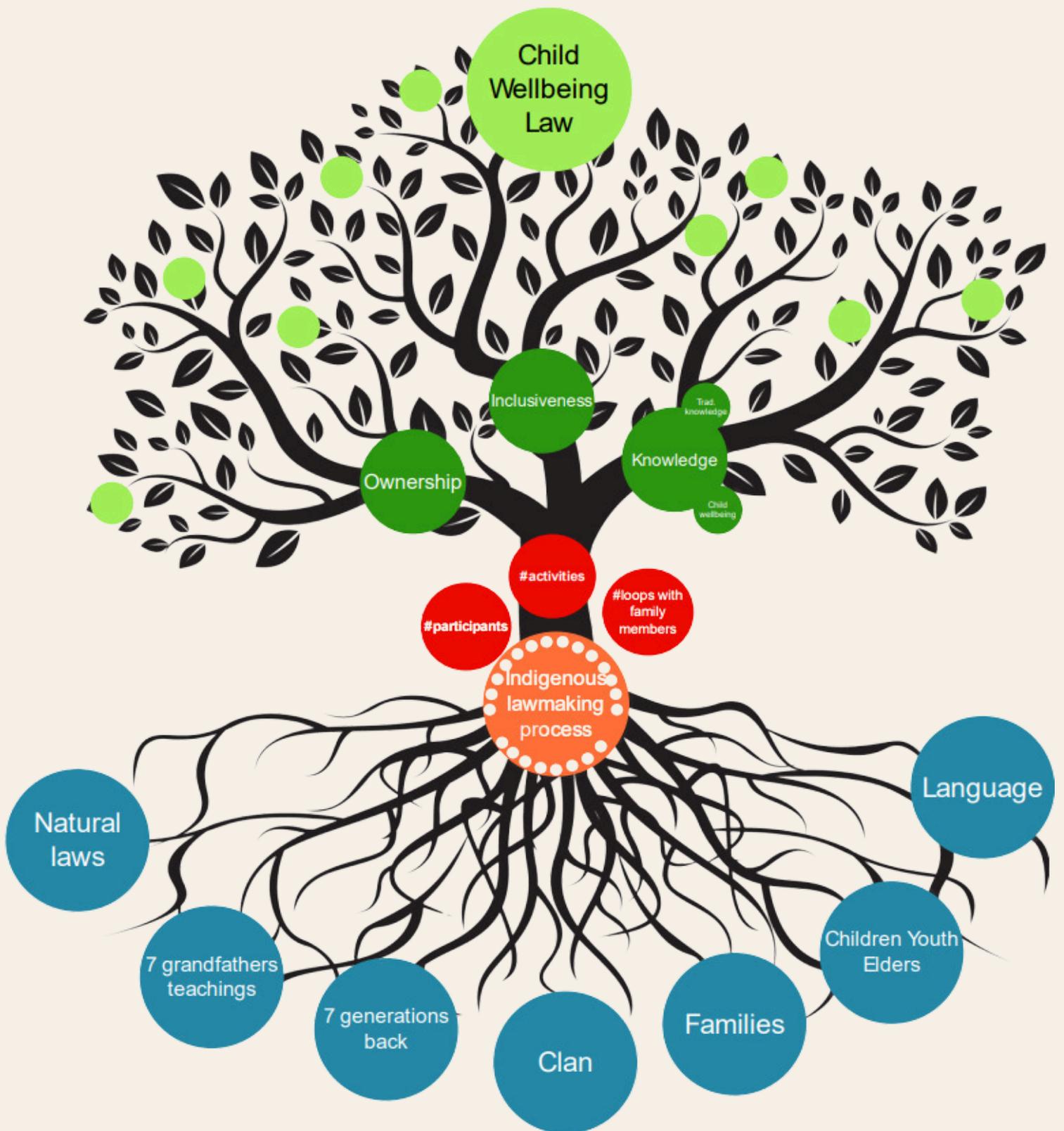
**The main branches** represent the outputs resulting from the work of the committee: number of activities, number of people involved in the process, etc.

**The secondary branches** represent the effects and therefore the short-term transformations generated by the legislative work in the community and more specifically in the families (knowledge, ownership, inclusiveness).

**The foliage** represents the multiple impacts of the project, visible and invisible. The long-term changes generated by the existence of the law, represented by the many leaves of the tree are also considered impacts of the project.

Each element of the tree is connected to one or several specific measurements, reflections or learning questions that have been designed by the Matriarchs.

# Participatory Evaluation Framework



# 3.1 Participatory Evaluation Summary

This summary includes reflections on the roots and the trunk of the tree, captured through a sharing circle. This reflection session took place towards the end of the project, after learning and engagement process but before the law was finalized.

The words included below are what was shared by the matriarchs, organized by core value and themed. The words are included as they were shared, without significant editing, to reflect the spirit of the sharing circle, the wisdom of the matriarchs, and so that these words can be used to share about this law-making process in a way that honours both.

## Natural Laws

**How did we incorporate our natural laws in our law-making process? Indicators: Review of situations where natural laws have been used in the law design process.**

**Seasonal rhythms** – Using the seasons to inform what we talk about and how we engage our families. This is the very first time that this is being done. So we are taking our time with it.

**Indigenous law** – We talked about when you make an indigenous law, it is not going to be like what you see or think about when you think about federal and provincial law. We are making it be an expression of a law, an Indigenous law. And where did we get the information for the law? Through all the activities and engagements with our families. What's in the law comes from the people. The words will reflect our roles and our traditional teachings and the spirit and the intent of the law or of the child well being.

**A broad and emergent process** –It's been an amazing journey with everybody and sitting here with all traditional people walking a traditional path on that red road. And for me, the red road isn't a narrow road. The red road is as broad as the land. And everybody walks on it. Everybody walks it because that's where everything comes from. That's the natural way of things. Where you are is where you're supposed to be. You just have to kind of go with that spirit and let the wind guide you.

**Leveraging the natural familial roles and responsibilities in the law-making process** – Our responsibilities change as matriarchs, when we're parents, we have different responsibilities and roles. And when we come to grandparents, our responsibilities and roles change. In native ways, matriarchs are the ones that are the most caring.

**Using collective governance processes** – Natural laws are like our ways, our old ways, where we lived in a collective, and we governed as a collective. We bring ten leaders here, and there are five back home, and this is how we do our governance. We don't want to pick just one leader to represent everybody. It wasn't just chief and council making decisions. It's not how we do things. We ask – where are we going? Or what are we doing? How are we going to deal with this or that? It was decided in the community. They'd all gather there and make decisions as a collective. We governed as a collective, and we lived as a collective, and we moved with the seasons and followed the herds. So that's the natural law we're governed by.

**Connecting to something bigger, the lesson behind it** – We incorporate our natural laws into our law-making process by sharing and by ensuring that those little ones have that understanding and that we have that open mind so that we're able to hear not just who's talking, but the lessons behind it. We're a part of something bigger and acknowledging that through our prayers, through our openings, through our understandings, through our ways of being. The understanding, the reciprocity, of how everything is connected.

**Through relationships, through gathering, through humour** – We incorporate our natural laws by gathering together, not just as a group, but as sisters and as aunts and as grandmothers, because we're all related. We started the fire, we planted that seed, and we're all adding to it. When we had that fire at Betsy's, that's when I think it really started the group going. When we had the fire that we had there, and they were doing that ceremony, I think that's really when I think we connected and bonded together as a group.

The lodge is something special, and when we built it, I felt so happy when we were all sitting there on the ground and just being ourselves, laughing. That's the way we should be. I think we're doing amazing work, and it's only going to get better with us supporting each other.

We have to understand that we are all fighting battles that we do not know about in our families, in our lives. And we just have to be mindful, and kind. This is how our people talked in our lodges, to each other. The humor was our medicine. That's our connection to each other. They think we're this stoic thing, but we're not.

**Decolonizing our practices** – We have to really decolonize ourselves. The Indian Act system does not work for us. We know that. So why are we trying to conform? Why are we trying to do that? It's not our way. We have to decolonize not only ourselves, but the process and the systems that we put in place. And we need to teach our younger generation to do that as well. And the only way that we're going to teach them that is that we show them that.

**A law in the form of a song** – The elder spoke about one way to honor something is to do it through a song. This is a beautiful way to tribute or give our children that honor, or our community members. By giving our community a law that is in a song and even more so in the language, we're on that right path. When it's a song that goes into the wind and then it's going to carry on and it's going to be there forever.

*Matriarchs identified a significant number of ways in which where natural laws have been used in the forming of Nii Kiniganaa and in the law design process.*

## Grandfathers' Teachings

**How did we follow the 7 grandfathers' teachings in creating this law? Indicators: Each matriarch can identify a moment or a situation where a teaching has been used and has improved the process.**

**Seven grandfathers' teachings affect how we show up here** – Just as we're growing up as young women and we're learning those seven grandfathers teachings, they affect every part of our stage of life. And we learn and we change and we grow with that, with the spirit. I really enjoy coming out and listening to everybody and just getting knowledge from each person. I felt like I had more of a voice in this group. We might not know it, but we do use a lot of the seven grandfather teachings when we're just sitting here or at those events.

Everybody here has affected me in a good, healthy way. And we had a big loss, back to the spirit realm. But if I didn't know all these teachings, I wouldn't have been able to handle that.

From listening in on the matriarchs, my boy noticed stuff too. He said, "oh, this is about love and things like that, and we need to respect these things". And he goes, "those are those things, mom". I said, "yeah, the seven grandfather teachings."

**Bravery** – We try to do better than we did the day before. We keep trying. We're mindful of those things and we recognize that we're not perfect. We are going to make mistakes. And who we were yesterday, last week, a month ago, a year ago, we're not that same person that we are at this moment today.

**Humility** – We recognize that we're all equal. We're no better than anyone else. Respect - I think we do really come here because we're connected this past three years with each other. And we do have that respect by just what we were doing, just laughing. We feel comfortable enough to roast each other or joke, but we know we have that understanding, that connection to our spirit, where we feel safe with the kids and each other.

**Honesty** – We have that respect to talk to each other. The communication of: “Oh, I didn't like that way”; “You offended me; “Oh, I didn't mean it that way.” Laughing, joking, playing. Yeah, we wrestle around, but we don't really hurt each other. When you lie to somebody, that's the biggest disrespect there is because you're saying that person must be stupid enough to believe you.

**Love** – I look at her as a family, even though we're not blood related, we support each other. If something's really going on, she'll text me and I'm like, oh. Then I'll say something silly. Then we just both take our minds off things. I think we have that community connection now. And if we didn't be together for those three years, like that group chat, we wouldn't be there.

**Wisdom** – I just say everybody has their abilities and inabilities. Nobody has it all and nobody doesn't have nothing. Everybody has their abilities and inabilities. That's what makes us unique and interesting. And then we all benefit from each other's gifts. Like what I don't have, somebody else has.

**Truth** – Listen, try and listen to other people, and not only listen to what they're saying, but how they're feeling. Sometimes people don't even have to say anything to be heard. I can just see their feeling a certain way and try and respect that, too.

**How we use the 7 grandfathers' teachings** – Morality doesn't stop at these seven grandfather teachings. There are many more values that you can do that isn't in this list. And we need to recognize those too. People have insight, they have foresight, they have thoughtfulness. I think thoughtfulness should be in here

*Matriarchs identified examples of how all seven grandfathers teachings were used and have improved the process.*



## Seven Generations Back

**How did we learn from 7 generations back? Indicators: Learnings from 7 generations back are explicitly described in the presentation of the law.**

**Spending one year focused on learning** –We spent the first year just on learning, just those learning sessions, engaging with people who carried those tidbits of knowledge that we had to put together and start to piece together.

Law-making is not a quick thing. When we've come about creating this, we've also had to go back and learn. We'd have to go back and learn different things so that we could carry forward. It gave me so many things to think about and some of the things that they would teach, I would go and try and study a little bit more, learn a little bit more about so that I understood what they were telling us.

There is so much hurt going on in the community right now, and we feel like we can't do anything about it, that's frustrating. But we still have to learn. I appreciate this journey that we've been on. From my heart, I appreciate all the people that came in and the teaching that we got. We all grew together, in knowledges and ways.

This learning helps me to say whether what I've been thinking is way out there, or is it good thinking? It gives me some kind of confirmation about my own ideas on things and hearing from you on your ideas.

### **Specific topics of learning mentioned:**

- Anishinaabemowin language learning
- First Nation sovereignty and the community grassroots approach
- Learning who our clans are
- Learning what our rights are as a Nation
- Traditional law-making processes

**Pushing against western processes** – I think that was part of the intent, because I'm kind of westernized in my educational life, in my academic life, thinking that everything has to be codified and we have to have it on that white paper. Right? If it's not on the white paper, is it real? And then that's very difficult to put a law on white paper because then you have to be a legislator drafter, and it takes like 100 years of education to get that. We're lucky that we have Brenda. She has that background.

I think we just need to go back to our ancestral ways of being and knowing and doing, because these other ways are not working for us. And it's evident that our people have been doing this since time immemorial. So we got to continue that on, and that's how important it is.

That's why we're doing this law, because we've already seen that residential school. They had no right to take our children and say, oh, we're going to put you in jail. We're not going to let that happen. Everybody being here is dedicated, committed, and we will not let that happen again.

*Matriarchs described how learning from seven generations back has informed their knowledge of law-making processes in significant ways. Learnings from 7 generations back are explicitly described in the presentation of the law.*

## The Clan System

**How did we leverage the clan system to get information to communities and what did we learn?** Indicators:

- The clan system has been used to engage the community.
- Existence of learning (what worked well and what didn't work well).

**Role of matriarch within the family** – I'm the go to person in my family when something happens. It doesn't matter what time of night it is. I'm the one that they call, and I'm not complaining, but it is a huge responsibility. And I think for people that are in those situations, you have to take care of yourself because you get tired. And I don't think people realize the heaviness when you carry so much.

**Connecting between families** – I could talk to other family members in the community and know what was going on. Whatever your definition of your family is, that's your family's definition. But if we all come together and have that same mindset, I think it's good. This group "Our Ancestors Wisdom" gave me an opportunity to connect to all the families in Deshkan Ziibing.

**Clan support through loss** – I think that's what our community needs is when there's a loss we should come together as the clans. Like, if it's a turtle clan, then the other clans step in and cook for that family. Tend the fire. These two clans, here's their helper over here, and that's who they go to. And then if that person needs something, these two clans are supposed to come and help them right away, and then they go to the other clans and get help. And just being there, not having to say nothing, no words, but their spirit was there to help lift me up.

That's community, that's support. A hug. You don't even have to say anything, but that shows loving, kindness, caring. You do have to play that role. And then that comes full circle.

**Children connecting with their families** – I think the greatest example of leveraging the clan system was when we sat in that lodge after we built it. We had the children. Every different grade came out. We were all like, where do we sit? Some children came in and they knew where they needed to sit and they didn't even have to be told. They gravitated towards that, right? It's that connection that they have. Because they're younger, they have that connection and it is a lot stronger.

**Shared leadership** – In the clan system there is no one leader. Everyone's a leader. That young child that was there, she's a leader, right? We have those qualities within ourselves. We just have to nurture that, and we have to convey that, and we have to model that, and we have to share that.

**Wanting to ensure inclusion** – How do we ensure that the process of appointing a designation or not appointing a designation from the families is inclusive of everyone? I think these three years have been kind of evident towards that.

**Finding support through clan connection with other communities** – It's important that each and every one of us has that time to take care of ourselves. In that good way. If you can't find those ones within your group, within your family, within your community, then go to another. And when you do that, you're expanding your knowledge, you're expanding that family, that circle. We need that support. Community has added to my spirit.

**Binds us together, interdependence** – The clans to me is what binds us together. Otherwise they just try and look after their family and that's it. They don't even care about anybody else. They do everything just to their own self, like very individualized. But the clan system is a collective, and we govern as a collective. And how we govern as a collective is within our clan systems, so that it's a really good system.

**Still learning, it is in our blood memory** – We live in our clan system, and our clan system operates in our community, even though we really don't know how it works or that it works, but it has survived everything that we've been through, because we all help each other. When somebody's out of groceries or something, we'll go and chip in and get something. Or when there's an accident or a death or something, everybody will come and say, okay, what do you need? All these different clans will come, and then they'll have it all covered.

That's the clan system. I think everybody, even though we don't know it, we still do originally what our clan does, for some reason, that must be in our blood, in our veins, in our heart, because whatever clan you're in, you'll see that's where your talents can be used. Over the years, we've adapted. But it's going to be easy to return to because it's evolved into our bodies, into our being, into our minds, into our brains, into even how long our arms are.

*Matriarchs described the value and importance of the clan system. We see evidence that the clan system was used to share information between families. For future law-making, the matriarchs could discuss the ways in which they will intentionally use the clan system to engage the community regarding the law.*

## Families' Involvement

**How can we ensure that the process of appointing a designation from the families is inclusive of everyone? How did we involve a diverse range of families in this process? What was the process of getting the community involved in the law-making process? How did it work?** Indicators: Number of families and family members involved. Review of situations where the committee has been proactive in reaching people that could be left aside in the process.

**Bringing families together in new ways** – This group has managed to bring together families within the community in a way that I don't think any other community event, program, department function has. We started as a group, seeds have been planted and it has grown. It's greater than us around this table because it branches out to our families.

**Family discussions** – I've brought this stuff home and we've talked about it. When we do have family gatherings, she [younger matriarch] would bring this and we would discuss it. Every time we sat down, that call went out and everybody got together. Those that could not make it, they wanted to be there. We know that it's not always possible for everyone to be there. But we always have to keep each other updated and informed. That's our responsibility to one another. We all said that from the beginning.

**Family healing** – Growth, healing, families working collectively together through the representatives of this table. It has been a tremendous amount of growth and everyone working towards the betterment of the community as the goal in general. This process has shown that we can put those family differences aside, and we can work in a healthy way. It offers a healthy example of community working together. It has allowed for families to now feel like they have a voice. Families don't want to go to chief and council and stuff like that. We have made ourselves open to those that felt like they didn't know. We all came together and we updated them.

**A range of activities + discussions at matriarch table** – Not only did we have our events and our workshops and our little group gatherings, but we were having these discussions amongst ourselves. And I think that was the beauty of it. When we have those discussions, not just one person representing in our families, it was good to see. Like Lana brings her daughter, right? Because those ones go home and they go to their circles and they share.

*Matriarchs described the process of discussing topics amongst themselves, and then intentionally bringing topics home to their families for discussion as a natural process that is working well. Matriarchs shared that naming of the matriarchs as family representatives has allowed for families to have a voice, and has allowed for the sharing of information to keep everyone updated and informed. For future law-making, the matriarchs could discuss the ways in which they can be proactive in reaching people that could be left aside in the process.*

# The voice of Elder, Children and Youth

**How did we ensure everyone's input, including youth was considered or addressed?  
Indicators: Number of Elders, Youth and Children involved in the process.**

**General process supports community voice** – The process works in allowing each to have their voice heard.

**Opportunities through the lodge** – A prime example is when we had our lodge, when we had the youth come in, the children come in. They had that voice. It was really good medicine to hear that. And they knew that they were at a place where they weren't judged, that they could sit there and have their say, they could speak when they wanted to share something and they could be themselves.

Creating that space for them in that setting is so very much needed, because we all have challenges with westernized institutions. We're always trying to fit in. Our group created a spot where they could fit in, and they know they can. They know they can go there if they need to.

We haven't even accessed the lodge since. There are opportunities to further engage kids. Because every time I go to ceremonies, I always see the young boys always trying to do fires and they're trying to help. It should be the men that show the boys how to do it, but also the women, the young girls how to do fire, because we are the ones to make the fires in the hunters.

So that would be something that I would like to see out of this, which would be good for us to start teaching the children, especially culture.

*Matriarchs shared how children were engaged through the lodge and also named an opportunity to engage children and youth more in the future. Follow up question: How many Elders, Youth and Children were involved in the process?*

*In future law-making, the matriarchs could discuss the ways in which they can be proactive in ensuring people of all ages are providing input for future laws.*



## Language

**How is our language reflected in these laws? What can we do to ensure our language is reflected in our law-making process? Indicators: The existence of a specific process to ensure our language is reflected in all deliverables and at all stage of the work.**

**Language learning through this process** – An elder come in to do language teaching and I didn't think we were going to learn that much with the short amount of time that we had with him. But I learned more from him than I have from other language teachers in a long, long time. It was a real honor to sit there and listen to him. So miigwech for creating that opportunity, and for him, as old as he is, to be willing to travel and leave his community to come here.

**Ceremony** – It's good to see that and be around that. It was good medicine, and we had that ceremony with the elder. Wow, what an opportunity. I'm glad that I brought my grandkids and my children, my daughter, my children, to see that, be part of that for the two days.

**Law is written in Anishinaabemowin** – It just has to be. It can't be any other way because it's not ours, if it's not. We all know that our language is descriptive. The song that we're creating is going to be in the language. If we're really thinking about child well being, we need to see the Anishinaabemowin words so we can view it in that lens, not from the western lens of policies. We can have the English translation, but they don't reflect what it actually means.

**Use the English translation as a teaching tool** – I think what we need to do is that when we do our child well being law, and we do it in the language, there are going to be those ones, like, I can say for myself, I'm not fluent. I'm still learning. So we do have to have the translation where we can put it into words for those other ones so that they understand the significance of that law.

**Language is connected to child wellbeing** – When I think about my grandchildren and their well being, I want them to be well versed in Anishinaabemowin first. I don't want them to be so westernized thinking that it clouds their Anishinaabemowin.

*Language is reflected in this law-making process in significant ways.*



# 3.1 Learning for Future Law-Making

All matriarchs present at the reflection session shared resoundingly that this process works. They named the specific feedback below which can be used to improve future law-making.

## Worked Well

- Collective empowerment of families
- This process has provided a healthy example of community working together
- This has evolved and shifted how we operate as a community
  - An awakening – rekindled or sparked the fire
  - We are picking up our bundles
- The role of the matriarchs to focus on community and family health
- It is helpful when we have several people representing one family
- Involving families and having matriarchs as the go-to people
- The matriarchs feeling connected with each other
  - Taking the time to strengthen relationships
  - Having a way to connect with other matriarchs through the WhatsApp group chat.
- Important to have Brenda with legislation knowledge to walk the matriarchs through the process. “I really want to thank Brenda for starting this, because I don't know if anybody else would.”
- The lodge – bear witness to how to gather in clans.
- Land-based and grassroots approach following the seasonal patterns (can be done even more)

## Challenges

- Split focus – forming as a group, discussing the needs of the community, and doing the work to create a law.
- Sometimes feels like we're not making progress, or not focusing on law-making enough. Response: there's nothing that we've done that isn't without purpose and without meaning.
- Sometimes we can get frustrated with the length of time it takes to develop policies and procedures in a community. And even then when a policy gets set into place, it doesn't mean anything unless the community engages with it.
- Are our voices being heard?
- Pushing against political or western ways
- Building engagement will take time – we need more engagement with families
- We engaged with youth and children – I just think they need to know that it can be more.
- Engaging with men, youth, children, seniors is important for the continuation of this process

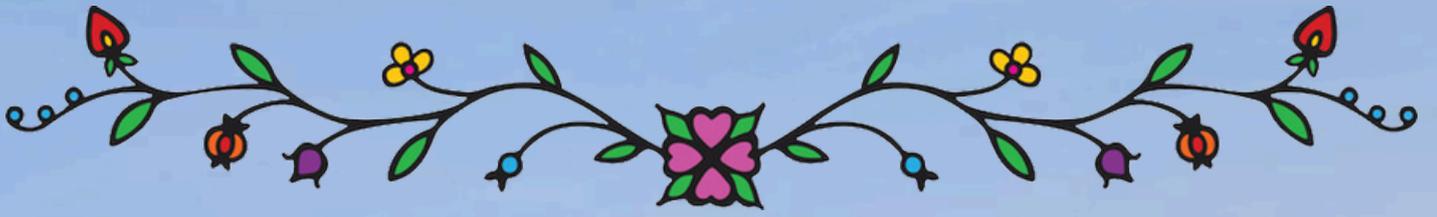
## Ideas

- Matriarchs need to be the ones who share out the successes, what we learned
  - As matriarchs we need to take our story, and ask for those words to come so that we're able to convey those stories and the importance of the work that we need to do here.
  - A video where we could share what those experiences are.
  - Video could be used for future proposals.
  - Use it as a teaching tool in our school
  - What the community really needs to see is the collective effort of all of the families and the representatives of those families here at this table, and the healing work that's been done, the learning, the engagement. The matriarchs need to do a really good job of sharing with the community to show the community that we can work together. We can put those family differences aside, and we can work in a healthy way.
  - Next time – document the process along the way
- I would like to see us working with the children more
- I just hope we can continue on, even if we don't have funding for honorariums and stuff like that. If we're really about community and really about child well being, let's just continue on and we'll figure out a way if we need funds somewhere. If we are all for this, then we should be all for not expecting anything from it.

## Questions

- How can we establish and connect the three branches of governance? The legislative branch needs to be separate.
  - "I want us to do it on our own."
  - Community-led and involved
- Do the matriarchs exist to discuss key issues or to make laws?





# Section 4



# 4.0

## Law: Minogi'aawaso (Raise Children in a Good Way)

### MINOGI'AAWASO (Raise Children in a Good Way)

*Raising children begins before conception*

manidoog g'bii-baa-gi-wag  
ni' doo-daa-pi-naa giin  
weweni ga-na-we-nim  
ni-nan-da-wen-dam maskwa g'doo-de-  
mi-na-nig, maskwa i-nah-di-zi-win  
zhigo maskwa oodena

The Spirits have called  
I choose you  
Take care of me  
When I get there, I need strong  
families, strong identity, strong  
community

*Importance of the Seven Grandfather Teachings*

gi-noon-dan aa-ni-koo-bi-ji-ga-nag in-  
we-win: Zaa-gi' i-di-win; Zoongi-de'e-  
win, Ni'bwaa-kaa-win, Debwewin, Da-  
baa-den-di-zi-win, Gwa-ya-kwaa-di-zi-  
win zhigo Mi-naa-den-da-mowin)  
gi-noon-dan aa-ni-koo-bi-ji-ga-nag in-  
we-win

Can you hear the Ancestors'  
voices in the wind: Love,  
Bravery, Wisdom, Truth,  
Humility, Honesty, Respect: Can  
you hear the Ancestors' voices  
in the wind

*The whole community is responsible for the care of all children*

Deshkan Ziibiing, mii'iw anokiwin gii-  
ni-ta-ma-wind  
Anishinabe a-bi-noo-jiinh  
Gii-na-wind ga-na-we-ni-mi-go  
Anishinabe a-bi-noo-jiinh  
Gii-na-wind ga-na-we-ni-mi-go

Deshkan Ziibiing; the  
responsibility is ours  
Anishinaabe Child  
We will protect you  
Anishinaabe Child  
We will protect you

*The stages of life*

apichi n'minogi zhigo ba-bi-mi-wi-da-  
di min niin onji  
Kina gego indoo minoshegesii  
Miinjimishin aa-na-pi waniseyaan

As I grow, have patience with  
me  
I will not always get everything  
right  
Hold me up when I lose my way

*Importance of Seven Generations decision-making*

o-zhi-toon awe oodena n'minogi  
apane mii-ga-dan wahbung mii-ga-dan,  
gaa-wiin a-waa-si-na-go gi-gii-da-min  
ezhi ma-ska-waa awe gaa-gii'ge waa-  
wi-ye-bi'i-gan

Build a community where I will  
flourish  
Always fight tomorrow's fight,  
not yesterday's quarrels  
So, the mighty circle will never  
end



## **Closing reflections from matriarchs**

**The only place this law matters is here in our territory, amongst our community, amongst our families, within the nation. I'm not just even talking about just the boundary of the reserve.**

**It matters. Deshkan Zibiing territory. But we can never wait for somebody else to do what needs to be done, because if we're going to wait for somebody else to come along and be the leader, nothing will happen.**

**But you are the leader.  
Everyone sitting around this table, you are the leader.**

**If we don't keep pushing, we're never going to get to where we need to be.**

**This has been powerful. We as a people can be so powerful together. Helping lift each other up. We are all powerful.**

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