

Meadow Lake First Nation News



Birch Narrows
Dene Nation



Buffalo River
Dene Nation



Canoe Narrows
Cree First Nation



Clearwater River
Dene Nation



English River
First Nation



Flying Dust
First Nation



Makwa Sahgaiehan
First Nation



Ministikwan Lake
Cree Nation



Waterhen Lake
First Nation



January 2020

Volume 3 • Issue 1

Program manager ~ Waskoosis Safe Shelter Cecile Mistickokat loves her work

The Waskoosis Safe Shelter in Meadow Lake, operated by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, opened in 1992 to provide support and temporary housing for abused women and children in northwest Saskatchewan.

Cecile Mistickokat has been its manager since 1994. She laughs about turning down the job offer three times before agreeing to come on board on the fourth call.

"I wasn't thinking of staying here that long, but one year led to the next and now it's been 25 years," she laughs.

Mistickokat is a member of Waterhen Lake First Nation and her mother's grandfather was Waweyekisik (Round Sky) and his brother was Ochuschauryoo (Canoe Maker). Relatives on her mother's side of the family (Oseemass Mistickokat) come from the Saddle Lake, AB to Chitek Lake, SK regions.

"My family was a strong family that helped others," she says, adding when she was young they lived in a cabin just north of where the present Waterhen Lake powwow grounds are located. She also remembers a second cabin her father built near Flotten Lake.

"At Flotten my dad would trap, hunt, and take us along – those were



Cecile Mistickokat at the ground-breaking ceremony of the new Waskoosis Safe Shelter slated to open this spring.

good times. It's how I want to live," says Mistickokat.

These days, to unwind, you might find Mistickokat and her family fishing on Flotten Lake near her father's old cabin site. Depending on the season, her family will head out in the morning and not get back to town until dark.

Mistickokat says she grew up in a good home and then as an adult decided she wanted to share her good family upbringing with others.

"I feel what I do is not really a job," she says, noting her work at the shelter includes one-on-one talks and also group discussions. "It's something I enjoy doing."

Once in the same place as those who come to the shelter for help, Mistickokat is able to relate with her clients.

"When I went through my stuff, we didn't even know there were safe places back then," she adds. "As a young person, all I remember is if someone was needing help they would go to a relative's place for a while. Shelters didn't exist back then – we never heard of a shelter."

Mistickokat's path to her counselling career started in 1992 when she took an early childhood course. Since that time she has worked in a daycare, in pre-school, as a teacher

assistant in a school setting and a cashier.

"My first job, however, was a janitor," she adds with a laugh. "But when I first started working at the shelter I read the posters and pamphlets entitled *Abuse Affects Us All*."

Over time, she saw that abuse does affect everyone and most go through the cycle of abuse.

"It affects your whole family," she says. "It affects your friends and the people you work with even if you try to ignore it."

Along the way Mistickokat has learned that people who are abused need something to do.

"Find things that need to be done and do them," she says. "We all know inside what we need to do – to make our way our path. With clients, we sometimes make a chore list. A lot of people don't know each other here, so they have to find a way to work together. This is something we try to teach them."

Mistickokat says the families that come to the Shelter are very brave.

"It's a place to begin healing, change cycles and take a new direction. It becomes a second home for some, but we try help our clients learn how to live self-sufficiently," Mistickokat says. "All of us here care about our clients."



The Meadow Lake Tribal Council's Career Expo Tour 2020 began Jan. 27 and concludes Feb. 6. Presented by MLTC Economic Development and MLTC Education, there will be a career fair in each of the nine Meadow Lake First Nations with a focus on trades training and post-secondary education.

"We want to help First Nations individuals in their quest for career employment and to encourage life-long learning," said Chris Mazuren of MLTC Employment Services, adding the events were open to high school students as well as adult members. Shown here is Bobby Shott of the Fort McKay (AB) Group of Companies speaks to students at the Clearwater River Dene Nation band hall this past Monday.



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Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation

~ Community Profile



– Chief and Council –

Chief Ronald Mitsuing
Councillors
Derrick Cantre
Donovan Fineblanket
Tom Littlespruce
Dean Mitsuing
Robert Mitsuing
Sonny Weeseekase



Building supports for members

Since becoming chief of the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation in February of 2019, Ronald Mitsuing says he wants to help create more opportunities and build supports for everyone on the reserve.

“With our current corporate structure we allow the program directors to do their jobs without chief and council dealing with every situation that arises,” says chief Mitsuing. “This frees up the chief and council to travel, meet potential investors and do the necessary research that will help in presenting a plan for long-term sustainability.”

One of the highlights this past year include the purchase of a fire truck with band members currently being trained as firefighters. The fire crew is trained by a program offered by Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. Once fully trained, Mitsuing says the team will be able to respond to emergencies on the reserve including being dispatched via 9-1-1.

Last fall also saw 13 students from the Makwa Sahgaiehcan high school build a small house for an elder in the community. This project enabled the participating students to learn the trades involved in building a house.

“They also received their safety tickets,” added principal Alice Sand. “During the course of building this small house, they also were able to receive three high school credits



Chief Ronald Mitsuing

know we are going to do what we can to meet their needs,” he says, adding there’s a plan in the works for portable classrooms for the fall programming as the number of school students is increasing. “Renovations are also on the to-do list for the school as well as an extension to the school,” he says.

Band manager Barry Chalifoux gets excited when he sees students taking an interest in their own education.

“Some of our students were taken on a tour of colleges and universities in the past year and now they’re exposed to what it might be like if they decide to attend one of these off-reserve post-secondary schools,” Chalifoux says. “They now have an idea of how to navigate in another community and have become familiar with student life on campus and how to get around on a public transit system. The students can

toward their graduation.”

Chief Mitsuing notes the youth are the band’s future leaders. “They

need to

now imagine a future for themselves with a higher level of academic learning to help them prepare for the future.”

Chief Mitsuing believes sports also bring the community together.

“We have a great minor hockey program here,” he says. “Our rink is a place where MSFN members can feel safe as it’s a place where there is support and a place where people offer encouragement to others. The rink is always open and one of our community members lease the kitchen as one of our local businesses. Our kids love coming to the rink. I am a former hockey coach, but since I’ve been the chief, I haven’t coached. I have just been a hockey parent.”

He would like to see more parents at the hockey rink and local sporting events because he believes it would mean a lot for a child to see their parents there, tying their skates and cheering them on.

The chief also states their youth centre is popular as it’s a great place for youth to play games, foosball, video games and other things.

“We also have a weight room, which is an employment opportunity for our high school students,” Mitsuing adds. “There is a rotation of students who work there – to clean it, to monitor it as we want to promote a healthy body and a healthy mind.”

The reserve has a career centre

outside the regular job hunting portal. Here, members can be trained for safety tickets, security, first aid or whatever community members feel they need to enter the workforce. Recently, Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation has been training community members in mental health first aid.

“This has been provided by Saskatchewan Health Authority and The Minister of Rural Health,” says Chalifoux. “We’ll continue to offer the training until everyone who expresses interest is trained, and even retrained.”

What Mitsuing considers as the hidden gem of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation is the elders Lodge.

“It’s a nice beautiful place where elders make culture more available to the community. We as a community came through this last year stronger and better than before,” he says.

“Even though there are some differences, there is always a way to work things out. I want to work with the youth that are stuck – stuck without funding. That’s what our council is trying to do. To keep the community pulsing with activity. I just want to help the community, work with the elders and follow through on their advice. We have a to-do list, but that just comes with finding something to do. We can build more business potential and inspire more dreamers; but what we really need, is more love,” Mitsuing concludes.

MSFN HISTORICAL FACTS:

The english translation of Makwa Sahgaiehcan is from the Plains Cree language meaning Loon Lake.

The Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation (MSFN), of which its original name is Makwa Lake Cree Band, signed Treaty 6 on Sept. 9, 1876. They were successful in receiving the Makwa Lake Reserve (129 and 129A, 129B and 129C).

Today, of the 1,500 regis-

tered band members approximately 850 live on-reserve. The band controls a total of 5,881.7 ha of reserve land, the largest parcel of which is just west of the Village of Loon Lake.

On its land is Steele Narrows National Historic Site of Can-

ada from The Battle of Loon Lake which concluded the North-West Rebellion on June 3, 1885. It was the last battle fought on Canadian soil. Led by Major Sam Steele, a force of North-West Mounted Police, Alberta Mounted Rifles and Steele’s scouts caught up with

and dispersed a band of Plains Cree warriors and their white and Métis hostages. Wandering Spirit, the war chief leading the Cree, surrendered to authorities at Fort Pitt. Big Bear, the aging peacetime chief of this band of Cree was later captured on July 2, 1885.





Women empowering women on MSFN

“If you want your community to be strong you have to find avenues that encourage healing.”

Those are the words of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation’s health director Leah Mitsuing in regard to an eight-week program currently underway on the reserve called *Women Empowering Women*.

“If we don’t have this type of programming, we fail on trying to advocate for our women, our children and our youth,” she says.

MSFN is working with Shelley Wiart, the co-founder of Women Warriors. Her program is directed at Indigenous women to be leaders in their communities.

“Empowerment is needed for our Indigenous women,” adds Mitsuing. “Depending on where we are as Indigenous communities, whatever is going on, our women are the most vulnerable. All of the members of our First Nation

have different needs – they have different values and I think the holistic approach is going to work for everyone, no matter their background.”

Mitsuing believes the creation of a strong foundation for children, means empowerment and strength.

“Healing is holistic healing for the youth, the elders, the adults and the children,” she says. “It begins with family and here at the health centre we all serve the same community, we all serve the same children and the same families.”

The MSFN Health Centre works toward bringing all of the stakeholders together to create programming for not only the health centre’s perspective, but for all program offices within MSFN.

“For example,” Mitsuing states. “We work with the school, the RCMP, the justice division, band administration and our leaders. Everyone comes together and

plans together instead of each department working separately.”

Mitsuing notes there are powerful women in all Indigenous communities.

“They are empowered and that means having that ability to be able to be confident in

yourself, in who you are and in your identity,” she adds.

“Empowerment means we are safe in our community, respected by our community, by our grandfathers, by our leaders and by all the people we as women are connected to. Our front lines are moti-

vated by love and we care for all in our community. We always have an open door to the community’s ideas, what they might think will help them. In the end, it’s the children and their families that we serve who we wish to empower.”



Youth centre supervisor Bella Mitsuing and pre-employment worker Denise Weeseekase pose during one of the quiet times at this popular place on MSFN.



MSFN band members enrolled in a pre-employment program and their instructor.



The MSFN weight room is a place where band members can come and work out alongside others who are wanting to improve their physique and well being.



There's benefits to not smoking

This year National Stop Smoking Week took place Jan. 20-24 and MLTC's tobacco strategy coordinator, Charmaine Mirasty, travelled throughout the Meadow Lake First Nations to talk about the harmful effects of commercial tobacco.

Mirasty used to smoke, but due to a life-changing experience she quit and has continued to this day.

"I know it's all statistics and information sharing, but we need to share this information," says Mirasty. "I attend health fairs, treatment centres, schools, prenatal classes and community events."

The topic of tobacco and its traditional use is a tricky discussion. Traditionally, tobacco, called 'Sti-mau' in Cree or 'Tsel-dtu-i' in the Dene language, was given in exchange for news or information. It was also used as an offering to a healer, or elder. Tobacco is also one of four sacred medicines given by the Creator to the First Nations people. Today it is commonly used during prayers and pipe ceremonies.

"We have a tobacco strategy program where we set up a booth at career fairs," Mirasty says.

Sometimes there are youth who walk up to Mirasty's booth and talk about quitting smoking.

"In Waterhen Lake First Nation, a young man walked up and talked about why he quit smoking," Mirasty recalls. "He said he was an athlete and noticed

smoking and chewing tobacco was affecting his breathing and his lungs. And he thought to himself he wants to be a good athlete, so he knew he had to quit and he did. As a result, he says he feels so much better and healthier."

When Mirasty is in the communities, she says her message isn't to scare people out of smoking or out of the new trend of vaping.

"We travel to educate and share information. We also train the frontline workers in each community," she adds.

Norman Wolverine, an elder from English River First Nation, remembers when tobacco was not purchased from the store.

"Traditionally, the old people used to pick and dry the low lying cranberry leaves," he says, adding another plant used was the Red Willow bark as part of the mixture. Red willow has a natural pain killer and is also where aspirin comes from.

Mirasty states there are so many cancer causing chemicals that make up a cigarette today. When she travels her focus is on youth and pre/postnatal groups.

"With education, prevention will begin," Mirasty adds. "There's a few things to consider – role modelling, second-hand smoke and the actual financial cost. The statistics show we can all live healthier and have longer, more fulfilling lives if we listen to the voices of those who have quit."

"I smoked approximately 50 years and all of a sudden I quit in January 2018 because it started making me feel sick. For a long time, luckily I hadn't had cravings. When I would be having coffee with friends I did try to light up, but no luck. So I thank the Creator for that because I believe he made me quit. I'm still saying thank you prayers."

~ Florence Bell



Birch Narrows Dene Nation members following their recent training session on *Brief Intervention for Tobacco Cessation*.



Male and female athletes from the nine Meadow Lake First Nations showcased their volleyball skills Jan. 25 and 26 at Carpenter High School in hopes of being selected to represent Team MLTC at the 2020 Tony Cote First Nations Winter Games slated for April 12-17 in Prince Albert.

More than 100 tried out for the three female squads – U14, U16 and U18, while close to 50 competed in the male division. This was the final camp with 10 players per team selected. Clockwise, from top right: Sydney Lariviere shows perfect form prior to bumping this ball to the setter; Kaisaac Bearboy concentrates on making a good pass; a group of girls line wait their turn to step onto the court; head instructor/evaluator Alwyn Piche demonstrates what he wants to see in a bump pass.

