

Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services



2023-2026

STRATEGIC PLAN

Prepared by

Kwewok Nakii Collective with Lauren Power, Executive Director

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Artwork on this and the next page is by Jay Bell-Redbird,
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Table of Contents

- Our Story.....3
- Our Approach to Caring for Community.....4
- Land Acknowledgement5
- Message from the Executive Director.....6
- Message from the Board of Directors.....7
- Executive Summary.....8
- Pillars of Organizational Focus.....9



The bear is known for its strength to restore harmony and balance. (Elder Margaret Lavalley)



our previous logo 1993-2022

Our Story

MPSSAS began as a provincial sexual assault centre in 1993, working with rural women survivors of sexual assault 16+, providing a 24/7 helpline, advocacy and accompaniment, public education, and community development. From the beginning, our early feminist collective valued the wisdom of survivors in designing services to meet our needs and generously extended our original funding to include territory to the north. As service demands increased, we found we needed a modified structure with the creation of an Executive Director role.

Our first Director, Helen Debassige brought her vision which included Anishinaabeg and Scandinavian worldviews, creating an agency with social justice and Indigenous values. The last 30 years have seen the development of unique and thoughtful trauma informed programs, warm relationships and work spanning across all genders and numerous nations of people. We are proud to have developed core values in our work that reflect our commitment to wholistic visions for a world without violence.

We are an intersectional feminist organization dedicated to providing leadership, education, advocacy, and trauma-informed support to end sexual violence and harassment, and believe that gender-based violence, including sexual violence, is a global issue.

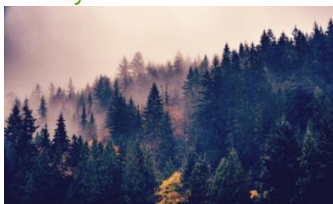
We develop strong collaborative responses to shift longstanding societal beliefs and systems to create social change.

We honour all people who have experienced sexual violence and harassment. Their diverse voices are heard and reflected in the design and delivery of our programs to facilitate empowerment and healing.

As an intersectional feminist based, anti-racism and anti-oppression, trauma-informed organization, it is our mission to provide our community the with the best support we possibly can in navigating a journey in healing from sexual and other forms of violence, and in working together to create a world of equality and non-violence. We have begun providing services to all genders, and are committed to ongoing collaborations with the 2SLGBTQ community to refine and improve our services.

We are committed to continued lifelong learning and understanding the process of truth and reconciliation and what it means to walk as an ally with Indigenous nations in our work. We are committed to work which enables us with our community, to enable healing and prevent violence in future generations. We are committed to working with the Indigenous community and hearing their voices to support their healing and prevent future violence for the next generations.

Visit us at <https://www.mpssas.org/his-herstory>





Our Approach to Caring for Community

As a survivor led and informed agency, we understand that impacts of gender based and colonial violence have a life long and intergenerational charge which is not simply felt by one individual but is carried by all those who encounter it, witnesses, children, family, and community. It impacts all genders of people.

Traumatic events, including violence in all its forms, racism, misogyny including transmisogyny and homophobia, and the genocide enacted by colonial Canada create changes not simply in the mind and memory of the individuals who experience the events, but for generations to follow as cellular changes and neural pathways incorporate knowledge of trauma risk for survival in the future. There is a biological change as trauma is incorporated into the next two generations' cell development.

As part of our commitment to truth and reconciliation, we are choosing to specifically focus on healing strategies for both settler and Indigenous client bases which incorporate Medicine Wheel understandings of healing work. We know that healing work also alters neural pathways and is protective for future children.

In creating services to address this trauma, we must incorporate wholistic understandings of physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental forms of healing. We help in creating new neural pathways of healing, which include safety formed from consistency, security, and predictability – the basis of secure human attachment. By working in this way, we enable future generations to incorporate these biological changes their parents undergo. We are also committed to services which recognize the differential impacts of GBV as it intersects with gender identity in all the myriad of ways this may be expressed by humans.

We use all forms of healing knowledge available to us including Western trauma therapies which include feminist therapy, reparative attachment, group modalities, cognitive and somatic approaches and skills training (DBT) which enables childhood trauma survivors to learn key skills that were not taught to them through loving caregivers when they were children. We use land-based approaches which come from Indigenous wisdom, including ceremony and medicine, storytelling, healing in cultural rituals and pride in this heritage.

We use advocacy with our voices to speak out against practices and beliefs which perpetuate gender based and colonial violence, through all the forms of communication possible for us. We model alternative practices and views which follow the Grandfather Teachings.

We learn from the survivors who work with us and amplify their voices the best we can. Their truths must be made visible and drive the change needed for reconciliation and cultural transformation.





Land Acknowledgment

We wish to acknowledge in all the work that we do that we are meeting on stolen land that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples from the beginning. Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services wants to acknowledge the impact colonization, oppression, and violence of all forms has aimed particularly at Indigenous peoples. We are grateful for the opportunity to be here and thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land and its waters – for thousands of years.

Long before today, as we gather from all our homes and offices, there have been Indigenous Peoples who have been the stewards of this place. In the colonial boundary of Ontario, we acknowledge the Cree, Oji - Cree, Haudenosaunee, Huron Wendat, Anishinabeeg, Metis and Inuit peoples of this large region surrounded by huge bodies of fresh and salt water. Our office is in Williams Treaty lands of 1923 and this is the home of Anishinabeeg, - Ojibway, Potawatomi, Chippewa and Odawa peoples, while to the north, the Algonquins. The Wahta territory of Haudenosaunee peoples nearby are Mohawk. Our agency also covers lands in the Robinson Huron treaty of 1850 area. We urge resolution of the annuity dispute and recognize the oppressive colonial structures which still impact Indigenous peoples with this treaty dispute.

We recognize and deeply appreciate the Indigenous peoples' historic connection to this place. We recognize the contributions First Nations, Metis, Inuit and other Indigenous peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and all of the teachings we learn in their Nation-to-Nation relationship with the territory called Canada. As a community group, we are committed to practices of anti-violence, anti-oppression, decolonization, truth, reconciliation, and justice for murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls and 2S.

We also want to recognize the terrible impacts of colonization on Indigenous African peoples, many of whom were brought by colonizers to this territory, and while also settlers, arrived here as enslaved peoples. The historic legacy of racist white supremacy continues today and must inform our commitment to end oppression of all kinds and challenge the colonial power systems that create and maintain it.

We are committed to reconciliation work and developing the capacity of other settlers to recognize the harms done by racism and colonization. We are also committed to providing culturally appropriate healing and advocacy to Indigenous clients of the agency and in the broader region of Turtle Island where we serve.

As a mainstream agency our work must also be clearly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities.

We must do this with our actions, not simply with words.

Executive Director's Message

I am pleased as the Executive Director to present our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and wish to thank all of you who shared in this visioning time in the past year. This year marks the 30th year of operations for MPSSAS –and this plan represents its future, but it also reflects the long-term trajectory of our development.

When we initiated this work in 2022, we had already made rapid and significant changes in our programming and in our lives, thanks to the global pandemic of Covid-19. Our services were stretched with increased crisis work, ensuring food security in our client communities and in hastily adapting to the online environment, while juggling the rapid change in our personal lives as well. We continued our decolonizing work, and in our all-gender inclusion we began working more mindfully with trans, non binary, genderqueer, 2S and then, with 1cis men and male identified folks. The shadow pandemic of increased gender-based violence brought us essential emergency funding. A process of change commenced, and we dug in. Further, our advocacy with community organizations and policing took a turn, which caused us to consider differently what are vehicles of oppression like never before.

As we moved forward with our visioning plan, the shape of our work in developing a sexual assault centre at the leading edge in truth and reconciliation work began to materialize. We know the impact of sexual violence for Indigenous peoples from their truth; the impacts of colonial violence and the legacy of residential schools is well understood but still change is elusive as systems of power continue. Our base of intersectional feminism has enabled analysis of patriarchal and white centred gender-based violence, which complements understandings of colonial violence as its basis.

For many years, MPSSAS has had Indigenous perspectives and cultural elements in our programs and worldviews, but this work has deepened through our commitment to uphold recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the MMIWG2S Inquiry and through the expanded leadership of Indigenous members of our staff and board. Our views that eradication of gender-based violence must mean targeted work on dismantling colonial violence and its spectrum of oppression still enacted became crystallized through this process. Our board, students, staff and our planning team of Laurie Hermiston and Cynthia Bell engaged in long discussions and meetings, culminating in a 3-day retreat held in October 2022, supported by a Recovery Grant from the Canadian Women's Foundation. Many thanks to all who contributed to the ideas in this report, and to our funder who enabled the process to unfold.

The linkage between decolonization anti-violence practice at the time we recover from a global pandemic is significant – it is a time to commit to our relationships with Mother Earth, and all our relations, as is the Indigenous worldview. Through the four directions in this vision plan we will begin to offer a sexual assault centre program which can bridge into new ways of understanding how oppression is enacted, with healing strategies and fresh eyes to create truthful, respectful, honest, wise, humble, courageous, and loving relationships among the planet's human population. ... Lauren Power



Photo by Carol Hermiston

We learned from Elder Carol Hermiston of the loss of Emma in her own family; a 10-year-old child taken from her parents to go to residential school, and who died without their knowledge in hospital and was then put into an unmarked grave without them even being notified. These eagles came to Carol as she searched to find Emma's Story and bring her home.

The eagles stayed with Carol through the search.

Many Indigenous families have members missing or murdered or who suffer or die through neglect. These stories represent colonial violence.



Board Message

Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services' Board of Directors is excited to introduce a rich and wholesome Strategic Plan to propel the agency through 2023-2026 and beyond. Its' strength is a direct reflection of the efforts and contributions of MPSSAS' staff, board, students, volunteers, pertinent funders, and the support of Laurie Hermiston and Cynthia Bell.

We'd like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in this process and brought this plan to life.

This plan reinforces MPSSAS' strengths while simultaneously encouraging and promoting growth and evolution. Importantly, it solidifies the agency's ongoing and unwavering commitment to decolonization by honouring The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations, to supporting diverse populations in meaningful ways, and to eliminating gender-based violence.

Furthermore, it provides important direction related to financial security and the wholistic wellness of the community, leaving the door open for ambitious possibilities within the agency - and community - in the future. With this plan as its foundation, MPSSAS has a clear path forward. This path is informed by reciprocity, relationality, respect, humility, accountability, compassion, and hope, and leads to healing and wellness for everyone impacted by colonial and gender-based violence and oppression.

We are proud to be guided by a Strategic Plan that so strongly reflects and nurtures the agency's values and the spirit of the work that it does, and we look forward to supporting its implementation over the coming years.

Karlee Woodrich, on behalf of MPSSAS' Board of Directors



This image was created through our community development work on the two regional GBV committees.



Executive Summary

Envisioning Growth and Wellness of our Staff, Board and the Community We Serve

At the end of the pandemic, many have become accustomed to isolation. While staying at home may have some benefits, it also has led to interruptions in communication, misunderstandings, increased anxiety, and for some in our community, increased risks of violence. The isolation forced the agency to positively adapt with online healing methodologies and online check ins with our team, and this has transformed our ability to reach rural and remote people, which will continue. At this time of hybrid work beginning, we will continue to fold in land-based healing opportunities which enable members of our organization and wider community to gather in retreat, using ceremony and Indigenous healing methodology to bring us together. We set this intention for the next few years, while hybrid work continues, to find many ways of sharing space and energy together in person, towards learning and healing.

Continued Learning and Understanding of Truth and Reconciliation in our Work

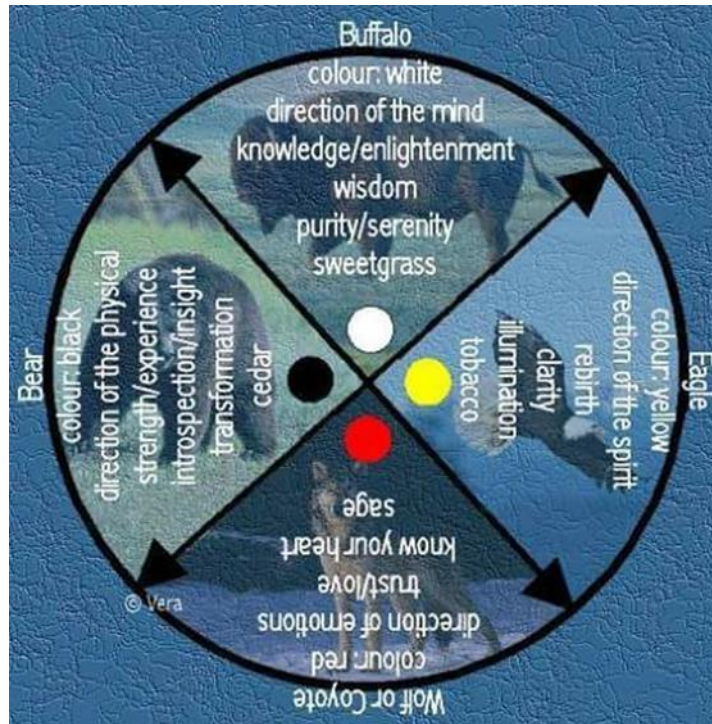
Our agency of both settlers and Indigenous people are working together to bring the healing practices of both cultures together for decolonizing practice and healing the harms of gender based and colonial violence. As we continue to examine the impacts of colonization, in truth seeking, we foster reflection and change. Our agency began to walk in truth regarding Indigenous genocide by colonial systems and people years ago, but as the people doing our work change over with time, our team at all levels must continue to deepen our decolonial practices and reflect the diversity of people in need of our services, and this process of education and reflection must widen. Reflection on truth and reconciliation brings with it a lifelong learning opportunity and developing decolonial ways of healing from the violence enacted over generations is on our shoulders to create together.

Widening our Collaborations for Change Centred on Gender-based/Colonial Violence

Advocacy has been our work since the beginning of the agency but currently our practice development is leading us to leadership in decolonizing practice – calling for change which deepens understandings of how colonial thinking and systems (colonial violence) perpetuates gender-based violence. We will aim to develop our advocacy work in the direction of greater community collaborations and decolonizing spaces which are working against CV/GBV.

Increasing Financial Stability as an Organization

Our sector of SACs in Ontario has faced financial hardship over decades, coupled with exponential growth in the numbers of support seekers who come for services. Through the pandemic years, grants became available which sought to shore up our ability to support survivors, but post pandemic, these opportunities are again changing. The burden of continually seeking project-based grants is difficult for agency leadership and the stability of programs over time. Over the next 3 years, we will seek to develop a flexible, transparent, and effective system of financial management and project coordination to ensure our ongoing viability in this funding environment. We will approach fundraising with a pragmatic lens, understanding that in the present climate, our agency is often not a priority but must compete with many other charities. We hope to leverage our grant writing capabilities to fill the funding gap in these difficult financial times.



Pillars of Organizational Focus



The First Pillar

Envisioning Growth and Wellness of Staff, Board and Community

It is vital in the post pandemic environment that the organization can sustain and develop continued opportunities and approaches to wellness for Staff, Volunteers and Board of Directors and the Communities we serve. We value feminist and trauma informed strengths based western healing braided with Indigenous healing practices which are rooted in the medicine wheel teachings and land-based ceremony. We recognize post pandemic that a major shift in service delivery is underway.

MPSSAS is doing this by:

- Maintaining and expanding our organizational health within our board, volunteer and staff team, recognizing that anti colonial/anti gender-based violence-based work has a cumulative impact on us all and finding ways to nurture and sustain health and well being as service providers.
- Having a plan to ensure that our organizational infrastructure meets the needs of our evolving programs and services; from wholistic spiritual support and understanding and learning opportunities, to physical space, technological needs, and human resources and training, succession planning, developing innovative partnerships, a solid financial structure, and strong communications strategies to tell the story of the organization.
- Continuing to build and develop anti racist and anti oppression practice; Indigenous medicine, feminist and trauma informed strengths-based healing, and sustainable growth that celebrates resiliency; with safe land-based spaces for Indigenous culturally responsive care opportunities for healing and the development of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual balance.
- Nurturing collaborative relationships with like-minded partners to further develop wrap around and supportive services for our community.
- Ensure that we recognize that there is a continuum of need to provide culturally sensitive training to both present and new staff. Our programs must provide culturally sensitive approaches for people with diverse cultural backgrounds – many as newcomers in this region.
- To understand that we provide services to a diverse group of people that may not have the same cultural backgrounds (Cree, Oji-Cree, Mi'kmaq, Anishinabeeg, Ojibwe, Chippewa, Potawatomi, Odawa, Dene, Algonquin, Haudenosaunee, Mohawk, Metis, Inuit) and that we will do our utmost best to support their backgrounds by providing the necessary training for our team.

- Create a list of Indigenous resources that can be accessed by staff.
- Reviewing our current policies and practices to ensure that they weave Indigenous ways of doing and knowing.



The Second Pillar

Continued Learning and Understanding of Truth and Reconciliation in our Work

We believe that it is important to understand, envision and define our commitment to truth and reconciliation and how it can be woven into the work we do at MPSSAS, so that we stay relevant and responsive through a decolonized lens. We understand that colonial violence which comprises oppression stemming from the systems of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and misogyny forms an underlying basis of gender-based violence in our culture. We also realize that the systems which fund and regulate us in a large way are held by the systemic colonial structures.

MPSSAS is doing this by:

- Recognizing that the opportunity to decolonize our practices and organizational structure is an active process, pursued in an intentional way, and is a cyclical, iterative process of looking at Indigenous ways of knowing and being and then evaluating how they can be appropriately woven into what we do as an agency.
- Understanding the importance of listening to the voices of our clients, being focussed on connecting our work with community understanding and consideration.

- Actively encouraging diverse leadership models, partnerships, and collaborations so that there is inclusiveness, sharing, and community representation leading to an agency which embodies diverse perspectives and approaches.
- Honoring the importance of storytelling, oral history, and the gifts of elders in guiding what we do as an organization, helping us to ensure that we stay focused on our commitment to truth and reconciliation.
- Re-imagining program delivery and thinking in a future forward way that is responsive to the needs of staff and community, while honoring the vision and mission of MPSSAS and our commitment to truth and reconciliation.



The Third Pillar

Widening our Collaborations for Change Centred on Colonial/Gender-based Violence

We believe that MPSSAS is positioned now to increase discussion of the linkages of colonial and gender-based violence within both primarily settler and primarily Indigenous spaces. We believe that over the next three years, linking together these forms of violence and fostering discussions of intergenerational impacts of them to envision alternative practices will begin to transform our culture's understanding of the roots of violence and how to leverage change. We believe that local change can impact global change.

We are doing this by:

- Working and planning from a place of linking the experiences of past generations towards healing of future generations, providing leadership to others in our agency methods and service delivery, while amplifying Indigenous leadership and methodologies in settler dominated spaces.
- Collaborating with Indigenous led or newcomer organizations to be responsive to the needs of community with diverse trauma informed land-based approaches to programs and services to meet the needs of those we serve, utilizing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers for land-based work.
- Leveraging our expertise as opportunities present themselves for us to offer training or create organizational models for decolonizing practice.
- Continuing to advocate for anti violence awareness and sustainable funding to our sector, while working within our sector coalition (the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres) to broaden these discussions and develop new decolonial approaches to anti violence work and the culture as a whole.



The Fourth Pillar

Financial Stability as an Organization

Having a strong financial strategy is crucial to the growth and development of MPSSAS as an agency and leader in colonial/gender-based violence awareness, prevention, and healing services. We recognize that nurturing positive, transparent relationships with funders and our community is of the utmost importance, so that we are seen as a credible and stable organization, making sound financial decisions, and leading our work with a strong Board of Directors, well trained team and transparent practices and policies in the work that we do.

We are doing this by:

- Developing a financial plan that focuses on creating innovative and successful grant proposals, grant collaborations and widening our fundraising strategy with a diverse suite of partnerships and relationships that support us.
- Building a financial infrastructure that aligns with our growth as an agency and is responsive and adaptive to the environment we work in, with well trained staff, supported by thorough organizational policies and procedures in human resources and financial management that supports control over finances.
- Ensuring that our Board of Directors is well informed and well trained, with knowledge of their important legal responsibility and governance roles within the organization when it comes to fiduciary responsibility.
- Honoring accountability to our community, team, and funders by being transparent with our financial plans and health, so that we are trusted by and there is confidence in what we do.

