



Revitalization of Anishinabek Legal Traditions

Regional Sessions
Final Summary Report

Facilitated by the Anishinabek Nation Legal Department
Winter, 2018



 **The Law
Foundation
of Ontario**
Advancing access to justice



Anishinaabek

NGO DWE WAANGIZIDANISHINAABE

**Debenjiged gii'saan anishinaaben akiing giibi dgwon gaadeni
mnidoo waadiziwin.**

Creator placed the Anishinaabe on the earth along with the gift of spirituality.

**Shkode, nibi, aki, noodin, giibi dgosdoonan wii naagdowendmang
maanpii Shkagmigaang.**

Here on Mother Earth, there were gifts given to the Anishinaabe to look after
fire, water, earth and wind.

**Debenjiged gii miinaan gechtwaa wendaagog Anishinaaben
waa naagdoonjin ninda niizhwaaswi kino maadwinan:**

The Creator also gave the Anishinaabe seven sacred gifts to guide them. They are:

**Zaagidwin, Debwewin, Mnaadendmowin, Nbwaakaawin, Dbaadendiz-
iwin, Gwekwaadziwin miinwa Aakedhewin.**

Love, Truth, Respect, Wisdom, Humility, Honesty and Bravery.

Debenjiged kiimiingona dedbinwe wi naagdowendiwin.

Creator gave us sovereignty to govern ourselves.

**Ka mnaadendanaa gaabi zhiwebag miinwaa nango megwaa ezhwebag,
miinwa geyaabi waa ni zhiwebag.**

We respect and honour the past, present and future.

Acknowledgement

The Anishinabek Nation gratefully acknowledges the financial contribution from the Law Foundation of Ontario for this project. While financially supported by the Law Foundation of Ontario Family Law Access to Justice Fund, the Anishinabek Nation is solely responsible for all content herein.

Copyright

©2018. Union of Ontario Indians. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized reproduction of any of this material without written permission of the Union of Ontario Indians is strictly prohibited.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary..... | 4 |
| Our Funder..... | 5 |
| The Significance of Anishinabek Legal Traditions and The Goals of this Anishinabek Nation Initiative..... | 6 |
| Outcomes of the Regional Sessions..... | 9 |
| Summary of the Dialogue and Knowledge Shared..... | 11 |
| Closing Remarks and Next Steps..... | 22 |
| Chi Miigwetch..... | 23 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since time immemorial, and long prior to European contact with Turtle Island, our Anishinabek nations had our own organized societies and distinct legal principles and structures based on our culture, values and beliefs. These principles and structures were in place to prevent disputes and to resolve conflict in ways that produced healthy relationships and outcomes for our societies and citizens.

Despite the fact that our nations have never relinquished jurisdiction over our lands and governance systems, centuries of imposed foreign colonial laws and policies displaced our nations from our land bases and prohibited our people from practicing our culture and traditions. This has negatively impacted the fulsome practice of our traditional laws and customs and has eroded our traditional legal principles and structures over time.

The revitalization of Anishinabek legal traditions and structures is of utmost importance to our Anishinabek First Nations. It is clear that imposed colonial legal principles and structures do not work for the best interests of our societies and communities. This is clearly illustrated with the high levels of overrepresentation of our First Nations peoples in the mainstream Canadian criminal justice and child protection systems. The continued existence of Anishinabek laws and customs is crucial to the ongoing health and wellness of our Anishinabek First Nation communities, and it is imperative for our First Nations to be empowered to revitalize these traditional laws and customs to be implemented in contemporary contexts for future generations.

The objective of the Anishinabek Nation Legal Department's Revitalization of Anishinabek Legal Traditions initiative was to bring together knowledge keepers from each of our Anishinabek First Nations to share knowledge to identify traditional Anishinabek laws and customs and to dialogue as to how such laws and customs may be successfully revitalized and implemented into a modern context. The ultimate goal of this sharing was to provide our Anishinabek First Nations and various departments with a summary report of the knowledge sharing sessions which they could be utilized to inform future initiatives surrounding justice, policy, and program reform with a view towards empowering and revitalizing our Anishinabek traditional laws and customs in all areas of importance to their nations (ex. general governance, lands and resources, health, education, child welfare and other social matters, policing, matrimonial real property, etc.).

“Since time immemorial, and long prior to European contact with Turtle Island, our Anishinabek nations had our own organized societies and distinct legal principles and structures based on our culture, values and beliefs. These principles and structures were in place to prevent disputes and to resolve conflict in ways that produced healthy relationships and outcomes for our societies and citizens.”

OUR FUNDER – THE LAW FOUNDATION OF ONTARIO (LFO)

The Anishinabek Nation gratefully acknowledges the financial contribution from the Law Foundation of Ontario for funding this project.

The Law Foundation of Ontario is a non-profit organization with a unique mandate to improve access to justice for the people of Ontario. It provides funding that enables a wide range of organizations to: Help people to understand the law and the justice system; Help people to use the law to improve their lives; and Foster excellence in the work of lawyers, paralegals and other legal professionals. A priority for the Law Foundation of Ontario is improving access to justice for disadvantaged groups.

For more information about the Law Foundation of Ontario please visit <http://www.lawfoundation.on.ca/what-we-do/>

Chi Miigwetch to the Law Foundation of Ontario for its support of this very important initiative!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANISHINABEK LEGAL TRADITIONS & THE GOALS OF THIS ANISHINABEK NATION INITIATIVE

Since time immemorial, and long prior to European contact with Turtle Island, our nations have had our own successful organized societies and distinct legal principles and customs based on our culture, values and beliefs. These principles and customs were in place to prevent and address disputes and conflict in ways that produced healthy relationships and outcomes for our societies and citizens.

Our nations have never ceded our inherent jurisdiction surrounding law making and our traditional practices and customs. Foreign, western-based colonial systems of justice and governance have been imposed upon our nations for centuries. These foreign-based systems do not respect our inherent jurisdiction regarding law making for our nations, do not respect the spirit and intent of our treaties with the Crown, and fail to respect or implement our Anishinabek laws and structures which had sustained the health of our nations prior European contact. True reconciliation requires Anishinabek laws and customs to be respected by all levels of government and fully empowered to be successfully revitalized within our nations to ensure the health and vitality of our nations' citizens and our future generations.

Within the international law context, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* has recognized the inherent rights to self-determination and the importance of the protection of this jurisdiction. Article 3 states¹ “*Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*” Article 4 states² “*Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.*” Article 5 states³ “*Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.*” Lastly Article 8 states the following⁴:

- 1) *Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.*
- 2) *States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:* a) *Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;* b) *Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;* c) *Any form of forced population*

¹ United Nations. (2007). United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/61/295. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.18_declaration%20rights%20indigenous%20peoples.pdf

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

transfer which has the ai or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights; d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration; and e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

In the domestic Canadian legal context, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action outline the expectations placed on the Canadian legal system and the Government of Canada to redress the legacy of residential schools and to advance the process of reconciliation in Canada, including the following:

- Various Calls to Action recognized that Aboriginal rights in Canada include Aboriginal language rights and the urgency to protect Aboriginal languages in Canada⁵.
- Call to Action number 42⁶ calls upon “...*the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to the recognition and implementation of Aboriginal justice systems in a manner consistent with the Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Aboriginal peoples, the Constitution Act, 1982, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by Canada in November 2012.*”

- Calls to Action speaking specifically to Reconciliation⁷ call on all levels of government to fully implement UNDRIP and to “*build on the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764, and reaffirm the nation-to-nation relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown*” through various measures, including to “*Repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius...*”

It is clear within both international and domestic law contexts, that the respect for Indigenous inherent law-making jurisdiction and the implementation of traditional laws and customs is crucial to the health of our nations and to all of Canadian society. It is crucial that our Anishinabek First Nations have opportunities to dialogue about our traditional laws and customs and about how best to empower, implement, and preserve our laws and legal structures in ways that will meet the contemporary demands and needs of our nations and future generations. Providing an opportunity and forum for this dialogue and knowledge-sharing to occur was the main goal of this Revitalization of Anishinabek Legal Traditions initiative.

⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2012). Retrieved from Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf Calls to Action 13-17.

⁶ Ibid. Calls to Action 42.

⁷ Ibid. Calls to Action 43-47.

The Revitalization of Anishinabek Legal Traditions initiative aimed to meet the above mentioned goal through the Anishinabek Nation Legal Department coordination and facilitation of four (4) regional level dialogue sessions regarding revitalization and empowerment of our Anishinabek legal traditions and structures. Coordination of these sessions would involve the invitation to each of our forty (40) Anishinabek First Nations to send each's own knowledge keepers to attend the sessions to share and dialogue about this important topic. As well, the members of the Anishinabek Nation Getzidjig Advisory Council (Elders Council), Kwe-Wuk Advisory Council (Women's Council) and Weshkiniijig (Youth Council) would also be invited to attend to share knowledge at these sessions. The regional dialogue sessions would seek to pose questions that will help to facilitate dialogue about what our Anishinabek legal traditions and customs were and how these can be incorporated and empowered into modern contexts.

The ultimate goal of the project was to take the dialogue from the regional sessions to be summarized into a final report that would be delivered to the participants, each of our Anishinabek First Nations and each of our Anishinabek Nation departments. It is hoped that the summary report will spark further dialogue about this topic and will be utilized by our First Nations and departments to revitalize and implement our Anishinabek legal traditions and customs into modern day programs and initiatives.



OUTCOMES OF THE REGIONAL SESSIONS

As planned, during the winter of 2018, the Anishinabek Nation Legal Department coordinated and facilitated one-day Revitalization of Anishinabek Legal Traditions sessions held within each of our four (4) Anishinabek Nation regions (Lake Huron Region, Northern Superior Region, Southeast Region and Southwest Region).

The Southwest regional session was held in London, Ontario and took place on April 24, 2018. The Southeast regional session took place in Rama, Ontario on April 26, 2018. The Lake Huron regional session was held in Little Current, Ontario and took place on May 8, 2018. The Northern Superior regional session was held in Thunder Bay, Ontario and took place on May 10, 2018.

Invitations for each of the sessions were sent out to each of our forty (40) member First Nations to send two (2) knowledge keepers from each of their First Nation communities to attend a session in each's respective region. Each of our Anishinabek First Nations decided for themselves whom each would send as a knowledge keeper to attend these sessions. Our First Nations chose various knowledge keepers to attend the sessions such as leadership, Elders, Youth or others from the community who are knowledgeable with customs and traditions from the past and citizens with a legal background. As well, members of the Anishinabek Nation Getzidjig Advisory Council (Elders Council), Kwe-Wuk Advisory Council (Women's Council) and Weshkiniijig (Youth Council) were invited to attend to conduct opening and closing ceremonies, as well as to share knowledge and dialogue about the way forward.

The regional sessions were attended by the following Anishinabek First Nations:

Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
Serpent River First Nation
Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
Aamjiwnaang First Nation
Beausoliel First Nation
Nipissing First Nation
Curve Lake First Nation
Chippewas of Rama
Wahnapiatae First Nation
Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory
Sagamok Anishnawbek
M'Chigeeng First Nation
Sheshegwaning First Nation
Atikameksheng Anishnawbek
Lake First Nation Sheguiandah
First Nation
Biigtigong Nishnaabeg
Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek
Mississauga #8 First Nation

Please note that some of our participants had not left details on our sign in sheets about which First Nation they were from, and, thus, some of our First Nations who had participated in the sessions may not be listed above.

“Our nations have never ceded our inherent jurisdiction surrounding law making and our traditional practices and customs.”

There were also a few attendees who requested to attend our sessions as observers from Waterloo Regional Community Legal Services and the Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic to learn more about Indigenous legal traditions. With the permission of our knowledge keepers at the sessions, these folks were permitted to attend to observe and to share in the discussions. As part of the empowerment of our Anishinabek legal traditions and structures, it is important to educate mainstream governments and agencies about our inherent jurisdiction, our laws and the importance of respect for our laws and customs.

The morning portions of each of our sessions involved opening ceremonies conducted by our Elders and/or Youth; opening remarks by our Grand Council Chief and Deputy Grand Council Chief; an overview of the initiative and its goal; and presentations from guest speakers, Laura Mayer and Crystal Stevens. Laura Mayer is a member of Mississauga First Nation. She is a law school graduate and has recently been assisting her First Nation community with its Mississauga Naakinagewin Project which aims to revitalize traditional governance structures and dispute resolution mechanisms for Mississauga First Nation. Crystal Stevens, also a law school graduate and from Nipissing First Nation, was invited as guest speaker to present on the teachings she had received surrounding Wampum and the importance of stories with respect to ongoing legal traditions. Both of these guest speakers were very helpful to providing a background about legal traditions that would lead into the afternoon dialogue and knowledge sharing portions of the sessions. If you wish to review a copy of the PowerPoint presentations of each of our guest speakers please contact our Anishinabek Nation Legal Department to request a copy.

The afternoon portions of each of the sessions were dedicated to knowledge sharing and dialogue surrounding the following topics of discussion:

- 1) *What are your key traditional resources (personally, community level or other)?*
- 2) *What are some of the ways that we used to care for our families traditionally... At the individual level? At the family/community level? At the nation-nation level?*
- 3) *How did we respond to harms/disputes at the community level/traditionally?*
- 4) *What are some of the traditional activities, teachings, stories, ceremonies, other events you recall regarding community safety and wellness (safety and wellness for individuals, children, families, community)?*
- 5) *What are some ideas you have for practicing and promoting our Anishinabek traditions from the past in today's modern world and in the future?*

The knowledge keepers who attended the regional sessions shared very significant and valuable knowledge and experience with our Legal Department and with fellow knowledge keepers who were present. The participants shared how positive an opportunity it was for them have a forum such as our regional sessions to be able share with others about their traditional practices and customs, to share stories from their nations and to share ideas about how to empower and protect our laws and customs into the future.

SUMMARY OF THE DIALOGUE & KNOWLEDGE SHARED

Examples of Traditional Anishinabek Laws and Customs:

Nokomis Elsie Bissaillion spoke about our tradition where children were born and welcomed into the world and our communities by ceremony. The first language our children heard was Anishinaabemowin and this was important. Nokomis Elsie helped her granddaughters make their medicine bundles and her family was part of ceremonies and chose to walk that life. Nokomis Elsie spoke of the need to guide our children and as adults we have a responsibility to listen to our children and to gift them the teachings from Creator as they grow.

Anishinaabemowin:

At each of the regional sessions there was much discussion about the tremendous importance of Anishinaabemowin and the fact that there are many details and teachings in Anishinaabemowin that, unfortunately, do not come through when translated into the English language. It was stressed by our knowledge keepers how very important it will be to revitalize Anishinaabemowin within each of our communities, as Anishinaabemowin is a vital aspect of the health and continued existence of our laws, legal structures and our nations.

Abinoojii:

Knowledge was shared at each of the regional sessions about the importance of children and the laws and customs which relate to children. The traditional legal principle regarding the term *abinoojii* (which translates child in the English language) was shared. There is the traditional legal principle that children are

gifts from Creator and are the closest to the spirit world and how each child's spirit has an important purpose when they are born to this world. The principle in a broader context teaches that all of us and all of creation are a gift from Creator and all have a purpose. We are never to look down upon others, as everyone and everything is a sacred gift from Creator with a purpose here in this world.

Mino Bimaadiziwin and the Seven Grandfather Teachings:

Knowledge was shared about the significance of our seven grandfather teachings and *mino bimaadiziwin* (a good life) as gifts from Creator and sacred laws that our people respected and lived by. The principles of *Minwaadenamowin* (Respect), *Zaagi'diwin* (Love), *Aakode'ewin* (Bravery), *Nibwaakawin* (Wisdom), *Dibaadendiziwin* (Humility), *Gwayakwaadiziwin* (Honesty), and *Debwewin* (Truth) are all legal principles to be followed in our daily lives to achieve *mino bimaadiziwin* (a good life or living in a good way). *Mino bimaadiziwin* is a traditional legal principle that is rooted within each of us since the time of being born. Knowledge was shared that *mino bimaadiziwin* is much more than a law...it is a way of life. It was shared that our people lived and practiced these principles in our daily lives and respected these as gifts from Creator to guide healthy relationships and health ways of living. Because these particular legal principles were at the foundation of our everyday philosophies, world views and activities, there were low levels of disputes and violence amongst our citizens prior to European contact.

"We are never to look down upon others, as everyone and everything is a sacred gift from Creator with a purpose here in this world."

Dodem:

Knowledge keepers shared that dodems (clans) were a foundational and core aspect of our traditional governance structures and that the dodem system is based upon our traditional laws. Within the dodem system of governance, each individual is born into a specific clan (dodem), and each dodem possesses certain sacred responsibilities to Creator, all of our relations and within our nations. These responsibilities are critical to decision-making, resolution of disputes and to the overall well-being and governance of our nations. The Anishinaabe dodem system has been very negatively impacted by the forced imposition of colonial laws and governance systems such as *Indian Act* Band elections and Councils.

All Our Relations:

The traditional legal principle of “*all our relations*” is a sacred law that all things in the universe are gifts from Creator and have meaning and purpose. All beings (people, plants and trees, insects, birds, fish, four-leggeds, etc.), all elements (earth, fire, wind, and water), Mother Earth and our land bases are to be considered to be alive and to possess each’s own purpose. The law also provides that all things are interconnected and, in various ways, important to one another. Based upon this sacred law, respect is to be afforded to all of Creation for balance of all things and to achieve *mino bimaadiziwin* (a good life or living in a good way). It was shared that Creator had created all other things to care for us before creating humans, and that we are the babies



“Knowledge keepers shared that dodems (clans) were a foundational and core aspect of our traditional governance structures and that the dodem system is based upon our traditional laws.”



of Creation and reliant on all other things for our survival. We are to look up to and respect all of Creation and all of our relations which sustain us and care for us. From this sacred law stems other legal principles such as taking only what we need from Mother Earth and using our sacred medicines (such as semaa - tobacco) to give thanks to Creator and the spirits of all living things when harvesting from our lands. As well, there is the principle that Anishinabek were caretakers of the lands and that various areas (territories) of lands were passed down through generations via families to ensure the continuation of these caretaking responsibilities. Seeking permission before proceeding through or harvesting from another family's land base is an important traditional legal principle.

The sacred law of interconnected relationships in all of creation was very present in dispute resolution of our nations. Traditional dispute resolution involved all levels of community participation. Certain dodems had responsibilities with regards to various aspects of dispute resolution, ceremony and medicines were an important aspect of dispute resolution, and reciprocity and restitution were key principles involved in our traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. If a dispute arose, or if a citizen wronged another fellow citizen, this would create imbalance to the relationships and the health and well-being of the whole community. This being the case, disputes were handled with the participation and assistance of the whole family and community.

“... as taking only what we need from Mother Earth and using our sacred medicines (such as semaa - tobacco) to give thanks to Creator and the spirits of all living things when harvesting from our lands.”

As well, it was discussed that all things are interconnected and circular and that if we did not help one another that we may not receive help in return when needed. As Nokomis Donna Debassige had shared, restitution was an important part of dealing with disputes and offences. In accordance with the Seven Grandfather teachings, truth was important and it was important for an offender to be truthful and accept any guilt. Restitution was important for peace and it was important for the offender and victim to address the issues through truth and the help of the community (ex. Dodem, Elders, ceremony, etc.).

Anishinaabe Kwe:

Another of our very important traditional laws was the sacred law that women are to be highly respected as life givers and caretakers of our people. Women are also protectors of the waters which are critical to sustaining life. Anishinaabe law recognized that life could not continue or be sustained without women. It was important to our peoples to respect this law regarding our women to ensure continued balance and sustained health of our nations.

Rites of Passage:

Certain customs and principles were passed on to our people through particular ceremonies when our people transitioned through different phases of life. These ceremonies were critical aspects of our traditional laws and customary practices.

As mentioned above, welcoming and naming ceremonies were conducted when babies were born into this world. The first language that was spoken to our children at birth was Anishinaabemowin. Also, newborn babies received drum songs which welcomed them to the world and which relayed to them important principles embedded within the songs.

Rites of passage ceremonies were practiced when youth transitioned from childhood to adulthood. Moon time teachings and ceremonies were practiced when a girl would receive her moon time and was transitioning to womanhood. Moon time was celebrated as it was a very sacred time which reminded our people of the sacred law that women are life givers. It was a time to be celebrated rather than looked upon negatively as is often so in mainstream society. There were moon lodges of women who would perform these sacred teachings and ceremonies and through these lodges, women would care for one another. As well, youth transitioning for both young men and women involved fasting and visioning.

Death and the transition to the spirit world also involved very sacred ceremonies with involvement from the entire community. Sacred fires were lit, specific songs were sung and ceremonies were conducted to assist the deceased on his or her travels to the spirit world. Feasts for the dead were held. All of the community would come together to help and support the family of the deceased in various ways.

Lands & Nature:

As touched upon above regarding All Our Relations, lands and nature held sacred and natural laws and principles for our societies. Unlike mainstream, colonial societies, Anishinabek societies were based upon the principle that we are a direct part of nature and that all of nature is interconnected and must be kept in careful balance for the health of our people and all of Creation. It was shared that our lands and nature held various natural laws and teachings that were highly respected by our people and which we depended upon for survival. Various locations within a nation's land base held specific teachings and stories that were crucial to that nation's survival in

the local area and to maintaining balance in nature. For example, certain specific locations or structures within a nation's land base had place names which held specific stories and teachings that were associated with these places and were to be passed on through generations to ensure the safety and survival of the citizens of that area. An additional example of these natural laws is the change of seasons and the importance that this law of nature be respected. Various land based activities followed laws of nature and various preparations were based upon the timing of the seasons. This was a crucial aspect of our nations' daily lives and survival. For example, depending on the land base of the nation, certain medicines were picked in certain ways and at certain times and certain animals were harvested only at various times of the year based upon the seasons and the moons.

Other Laws and Principles:

As is illustrated above, our Anishinabek First Nations possessed many very important and sacred laws and principles that were crucial to balance and well-being in our nations. Although many of these laws and principles have been eroded over time due to negative impacts of imposed colonial laws and jurisprudence, our knowledge keepers shared that these sacred laws have continued to be passed down through the generations and it is imperative that we empower and implement these sacred laws in modern day for the health of our contemporary communities and societies. Below are a few more Anishinabek laws and principles that were shared during our sessions:

"It was each of our own personal responsibility to strive to implement our laws and teachings within our day-to-day lives to achieve mino bimaadiziwin (a good life or living in a good way) and each of us had a responsibility to pass these laws and principles on to our children and grandchildren."



- Community as a whole were involved with raising our children. For example, aunts and uncles were directly involved with enforcement of standards of good behavior for our children. Parents and grandparents had the responsibility to ensure laws, principles and teachings were passed down to the children to ensure balance and continuation of these to future generations.
- It was each of our own personal responsibility to strive to implement our laws and teachings within our day-to-day lives to achieve *mino bimaadiziwin* (a good life or living in a good way) and each of us had a responsibility to pass these laws and principles on to our children and grandchildren.
- Our citizens rotated taking care of our vulnerable citizens and customary adoptions occurred in accordance with the customs and norms of each of our nations.
- Banishment did occur at times for very serious offences; however, very serious offences were rare historically.
- A custom was shared that, if a murder had occurred, the offender was required to relocate to live amongst the family of the victim and to serve that family in functions as the deceased victim once had in his/her life. Historically, every member of a family had specific responsibilities to carry out to ensure the family's survival (ex. hunting, gathering, cooking, etc.). If a family member died, his or her death and absence could seriously impact the family's survival. Principles of reciprocity and restitution provided that the offender would serve the victim's family in the place of the deceased victim to ensure that families continued survival.

Recognition of Key Traditional Resources in Our Communities:

During our sessions there was dialogue and knowledge shared about some examples of key traditional resources in our Anishinabek First Nation communities. The following is a list of the key traditional law resources that were identified by our knowledge keepers:

- Speakers of Anishinaabemowin are a key foundational and key traditional resource;
- Elders and other knowledge keepers who conduct our traditional ceremonies and share our traditional teachings;
- Family members;
- Midewiwin and the lodges;
- Seven Grandfather Teachings;
- The community as a whole;
- Leadership, committees, staff and other groups (women's groups, drum groups, language groups, etc.);
- My mother – She knows who is related to whom and where people lived, etc.;
- Our citizens who are active on the land base... they know our territories, our maps, histories and the natural laws;
- Community cultural workers;
- Language conferences to network and learn Anishinaabemowin with others;
- Google (through reputable sources) and other online tools such as social media;
- Literature;
- Connections with nearby communities;
- Resources outside our communities to have access to different world views and connect with other societies to educate about our jurisdiction, laws and teachings;

- Documentaries;
- Networking;
- Oral history;
- Land marks on the land and learning from the land by observation and practice;
- Moccasin telegraph (finding resources through family and friends and visiting with one another); and
- Anishinaabe stories – They have teachings, laws, and principles embedded within them like our language.

How to Empower and Revitalize our Anishinabek Legal Traditions for Future Generations?

As per the dialogue at each of the regional sessions, our nations have endured centuries of imposed colonialist policies and laws that aimed to assimilate our people and to destroy our culture; however, we are still here and have survived! It was discussed by our knowledge keepers that we need to acknowledge and celebrate that resiliency of our people! As well, it was shared that it may take us time to fully revitalize our tradition laws and customary practices again, and it is important to understand that this will take time. A knowledge keeper had shared during one of the sessions that *“Colonialism didn’t happen overnight and healing from the impacts won’t happen overnight either. Positive change, although slowly, is occurring.”*

“Colonialism didn’t happen overnight and healing from the impacts won’t happen overnight either. Positive change, although slowly, is occurring.”

Outlined below are some of the elements and avenues that were shared at our sessions that will be important to the empowerment, revitalization and protection of our Anishinabek legal traditions and customs for future generations.

Anishinaabemowin:

It was stressed greatly during each of the regional sessions that Anishinaabemowin (our language) is an utmost crucial aspect of our traditional laws and legal structures. Anishinaabemowin was identified as a key traditional resource in our communities to teach us about our traditional laws, values and customs. Each word in Anishinaabemowin has specific meanings, principles and teachings that often do not come out when translated to the English language. It is important to know Anishinaabemowin in order to learn the true meaning of our laws and customs.

“Learning our language from those who continue to speak Anishinaabemowin is critically important to the future survival of our language.”

As Anishinaabemowin is a key resource of our traditional laws and customs, if there are secondary resources (ex. elders, teachers, etc.) in our communities that can help us to revitalize and protect Anishinaabemowin for future generations, we must support these resources. Learning our language from those who continue to speak Anishinaabemowin is critically important to the future survival of our language, and to the passing forward of our traditional laws and customs to future generations.



Land-based Activities:

As discussed in further detail previously, our Anishinabek First Nations people have always respected the natural laws and these come from nature and Creator. Our connection with the land and nature is foundational to our values and customs.

In order to truly revitalize our legal traditions and pass our laws on to future generations, it will be imperative that our nations continue to nurture and protect our citizens' regular connections to the lands through land-based activities and to keep our lands and environments healthy to be able to ensure that these connections to the land are able to continue for future generations.

Ceremony and Medicines:

As with the importance of Anishinaabemowin

Our Elders, Youth and knowledge keepers at each of our regional sessions expressed the crucial importance of ceremonies and medicines to the health and well-being of our citizens and our nations. It was discussed that due to the impacts of residential schools and other colonial regimes that had prohibited the practice of our ceremonies and considered our ceremonies to be evil, over time, many of our citizens and generations lost connections to our ceremonies and the teachings that coincide with them. On a positive note, knowledge and practice of our ceremonies was not lost completely and our various ceremonies and the use of our traditional medicines is slowly being revitalized within our nations. As was shared during one of our sessions, the living have a sacred obligation to the spirit world... even the animal spirits. We can tend to forget that what we see in this physical world isn't



“Ceremony is a critical resource for the revitalization and continuance of our traditional laws, values and customs for our future generations, and we must celebrate and learn from those in our communities, such as Elders and others who hold knowledge of our traditional ceremonies, who hold these teachings from the past to continue to implement those teachings into the future.”

It has been illustrated that each of our Anishinabek First Nations has shared ceremonies and medicines which we use, as well as ceremonies and practices that may be conducted in ways based upon the customs and norms of a specific community.

As was shared during one of our sessions, *“Ceremony is a critical resource for the revitalization and continuance of our traditional laws, values and customs for our future generations, and we must celebrate and learn from those in our communities, such as Elders and others who hold knowledge of our traditional ceremonies, who hold these teachings from the past to continue to implement those teachings into the future.”*

It is clear from the dialogue at all of the regional sessions that in order for our Anishinabek legal traditions to be revitalized and empowered, it is crucial that ceremony in our communities be embraced and practiced regularly, as ceremony is a foundation of our legal and governance structures.

Respect for Our Women and Children:

As was discussed in detail above, our traditional societies held women in a very high regard as life givers and caretakers of our communities. Due to centuries of imposed hierarchical colonial norms which considered women to be lesser than and lower class, much of our traditional laws and teachings about the roles and importance of women have been eroded over time. This is clearly illustrated in various national statistics which report on the high levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Alike the situation with regards to our women, our traditional laws and teachings regarding our children have been eroded over time due to colonial law and influence. Our traditional laws and teachings revered our children as very sacred gifts from Creator and those closest to the spirit world. However, decades of imposed residential schools and mainstream child protection systems, have caused many of our traditional laws and teachings for and about our children to have been eroded over time. This is starting to change and our nations are asserting our laws regarding our children and our inherent jurisdiction over the well-being of our children.

It was illustrated from the dialogue about women and children at the regional sessions that protecting and empowering our women and children will play a very important role in revitalizing and empowerment of our traditional laws and customs. We need to provide our women and children with safe spaces and voices in our governance and decision-making systems and promote the important roles and responsibilities of women and children within our nations.

Cultural Identity; Connection to Community; and the Importance of Visiting:

Our communities as a whole should be considered to be a key traditional resource for our traditional laws and customs. If we look within our communities, the resources are there and we must seek to pass this knowledge to future generations. For example, there may be women's groups, drum groups or language groups within our community and the people who participate in these groups are excellent traditional resources. We need to empower and support these groups and committees.

As discussed above, part of the knowledge shared at our regional sessions explained the important responsibility of each of our individual citizens to follow the teachings, practice our ceremonies and to strive to live *mino bimaadiziwin* (a good life; live in a good way). This being said, in order for our individual citizens to strive for these ways of life and to nourish their cultural identities, they need the support of the community as a whole to revitalize the laws, teachings and practices and to help our citizens, many of whom live outside our First Nations to return to the communities regularly to learn about their culture and traditions and to pass those principles and teachings down to their children and grandchildren.

During one of the regional sessions, a knowledge keeper shared about the importance of visiting to the health of our communities and culture. We used to visit a lot with our family and friends. We would have tea and talk about many issues which related to our practices and traditions. Many times, these visits were women visiting with other women while their children and/or grandchildren tagged along and were privy to the discussions. Through visiting our language and traditional practices were passed on to one another and down to our children through direct observation. Visiting promoted connections amongst community and family members and promoted learning about our traditions and customs.

In addition to the above, it was shared during our sessions that often times those who are faced with a dilemma have the solutions and answers to their own problems and simply need others to give them time and to really listen to them. This can be helpful and supportive to positive change. In this fast-paced world that we live in, it is crucial to nurture face-to-face human connections and to take the time that is needed out of busy everyday schedules to lend an ear to listen to our people who may be in need of support and guidance.

It is important to foster visiting and community connections with and amongst our citizens to assist with empowerment of our laws for our nations.

"We used to visit a lot with our family and friends. We would have tea and talk about many issues which related to our practices and traditions."

Education:

Knowledge keepers shared that, although western-based education has importance for our people, it is also very important for our people to learn in our traditional formats through direct observation, practice, and through listening to our Elders and other knowledge keepers from our communities who carry wisdom about different various subject areas (ex. Political leaders, hunters and gatherers knowledge about specific land bases and natural laws, Elders who can teach us our specific ceremonies and about the medicines that may be available in our local areas, etc.).

Additionally, our Anishinabek First Nations had our own inherent systems of teaching and learning through ceremony, stories and oral histories and through direct observation and practice. It is well known that colonial government residential schools, land regimes, and criminal justice and child protection systems have eroded our traditional educational structures over time. Our knowledge keepers at the sessions shared about the significance of truth (Debwewin) as one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings and how truth is very significant to our traditional ways of dispute resolution. It is important for those involved with a dispute to speak each's truth about the situation in order to get to the root of the issue and to find possible solutions for resolution. Furthermore, it was shared that mainstream education systems have failed to teach our children and other Canadians the truth (Debwewin) about our histories and the true spirit and intent of the treaties that our ancestors entered into with the Crown to protect our laws, lands and our societies. We heard from our sessions about the critical importance of truth telling and how it is critically important for the truth about our pasts and the importance of our laws and customs to become knowledge both within our own nations and in mainstream.

“The teachings and stories tell us how to live in a good way. We were taught the values and how to behave in the world.”

As shared during the regional sessions, “*The teachings and stories tell us how to live in a good way. We were taught the values and how to behave in the world.*” The teachings are slowly making a comeback within our nations, and we need to learn about those traditional laws and practices and protect them for future generations. As well, to protect and empower our laws, we need to make every attempt to education mainstream societies about our true histories and educate these mainstream societies about our laws and customs.

Modern Technology:

During the regional sessions there was discussion about the use of modern technology as an important avenue to revitalize and educate about our traditional laws and customs. Our citizens, particularly our younger generations, are using modern technology (such as texts, social media apps, email) as main formats for communications. Our knowledge keepers discussed that if we truly want to revitalize our traditional laws and customs with our younger generations, that we may need to do so with the help of modern technology tools for sharing information and communicating. This being said, there was important dialogue about the importance of the use of modern technology to be balanced with the crucial aspect of learning and passing on traditions through direct observation, personal connections with family and communities and direct participation in ceremony and land-based activities.

CLOSING REMARKS & NEXT STEPS

Centuries of colonialist policies and laws imposed onto our societies have attempted to destroy our laws and to assimilate our people into colonial society; however, our people have been resilient and powerful enough to survive and have endured through it all. Our Anishinabek First Nations and citizens should be very proud of this resiliency! Through continued dialogue and support for one another, we can continue to take steps to empower and advocate for the respect and implementation of our traditional laws in modern day and for future generations.

The Revitalization of Anishinabek Legal Traditions initiative was successful in providing a forum for our Anishinabek knowledge keepers to dialogue and share knowledge about the very important topic of empowerment and revitalization of our

legal traditions and customs in modern day and for future generations. We hope that this report will be helpful in sharing knowledge that will be empowering for our Anishinabek First Nations' communities and our internal Anishinabek Nation departments in any future development and/or reform of laws, programs, services and policies.

The Anishinabek Nation will continue to advocate on behalf of our Anishinabek First Nations with regards to inherent rights and jurisdiction. We heard from our knowledge keepers at our regional sessions that it is hoped that there can be follow-up sessions to this project to meet and dialogue further about this very important topic again. The Anishinabek Nation Legal Department will continue to seek funding with the hopes of coordinating follow-up sessions in the future surrounding these topics to be able to continue with this very important sharing and dialogue for generations to come.



CHI MIIGWETCH!

Chi Miigwetch to all of our Anishinabek First Nation communities who sent knowledge keepers to attend our regional sessions and to each of those representatives for sharing all of your knowledge. Special miigwetch to Laura Mayer (Mississauga First Nation) and Crystal Stevens (Nipissing First Nation) for your guest presentations and sharing of your knowledge and experience with these topics based upon work you have undertaken in your own communities.

Chi Miigwetch to our Elders Nokomis Elsie Bissaillon of Serpent River First Nation, Nokomis Donna Debassige (Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory), and Nmishomis Mike Esquega (Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek) for attending to conduct ceremonies at our sessions and for sharing your wisdom and knowledge.

Chi Miigwetch to our Anishinabek Nation Youth Representative, Quinn Meawasige (Serpent River First Nation), for your attendance at our regional sessions to assist with ceremony and for sharing your perspectives and knowledge. It was so great to have a Youth Representative attend. Hearing from our youth on these significant issues is so very important! Keep up with your great work for our youth!

CONTACT US!

If you have any questions about the Anishinabek Nation Legal Department or this initiative, please do not hesitate to contact us!

Attn:
Leanna Farr,
Legal Counsel
or Linda Newhook,
Legal Coordinator

Anishinabek Nation Legal
Department
Tel: 705-497-9127
Head Office:
Nipissing First Nation
1 Migizii Miikan
P.O. Box 711
North Bay, ON
P1B 8J8

A large, stylized Anishinabe symbol, also known as the 'X' or 'W' symbol, is centered in the background. It is composed of multiple overlapping geometric shapes, primarily triangles and diamonds, in various shades of purple and magenta. The symbol is symmetrical and has a complex, layered appearance.

Anishinabek Nation Legal Department

Tel: 705-497-9127

Head Office:

Nipissing First Nation

1 Migizii Miikan

P.O. Box 711

North Bay, ON

P1B 8J8