



# OPTIONS NORTHWEST

2024-2025  
Annual Report

*Live  
Life  
Your  
Way*

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Thunder Bay, ON P7A 4M1  
807-344-4994  
[optionsnorthwest.com](http://optionsnorthwest.com)



## *Our Purpose*

Within the City and District of Thunder Bay, our purpose is to support people with development disabilities in their quest to live life their way. We recognize that 'living life their way' is unique to each individual and that we live in a very diverse community.

## *Our Mission*

We provide high quality, professional and ethical service, ensuring safety for all that:

- Builds skills, capabilities, and confidence of people.
- Assists people to reach their goals and live their dreams.
- Promotes wellness, independence, empowerment, and informed choices.
- Ensures that quality, and continuous improvement is embedded in everything we do.

## *Our Values*

We will:

- Be respectful, compassionate, inclusive, and fair.
- Collaborate with people and the community.
- Be accountable to the people we support, ourselves and our teams, to our communities and funders.

OPTIONS NORTHWEST, its employees, students, volunteers, and the Board of Directors want to formally acknowledge that we are in the Robinson-Superior territory of 1850 and the land on which we live, work and support families and people with disabilities is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabek and Fort William First Nation.

## Message from the Executive Director and the President of the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Leadership Team at OPTIONS NORTHWEST, we are proud to present our 2024–2025 Annual General Report.

It is truly wonderful to see everyone come together for our Annual General Meeting. Whether you receive services, work alongside us, or support us from the broader community, thank you. Your presence reminds us of who we are, not just as an organization, but as a vibrant, connected, and ever-growing community. Today, we reflect on the past fiscal year, a year defined by growth, resilience, and a deepened commitment to our mission, values, and purpose. We've made real progress together, not only in the services we deliver but in the way we support, uplift, and show up for each other.

This year, the people we support have been more engaged with our beautiful community than ever before. From trying new experiences and building confidence to forming meaningful connections, these moments have made a lasting impact across our organization.



To our incredible staff: Thank you. Your dedication, professionalism, and compassion continue to inspire us all. Every day, you bring your whole selves to this work, and it shows. Through your skills, creativity, and teamwork, you empower the people we support to pursue their goals, make informed choices, and live their lives with independence and purpose. We are deeply grateful for the vital work you do and the heart you bring to it. You are the reason we continue to create meaningful and lasting change.

Throughout the year, we have also kept Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the forefront of our efforts. A heartfelt thank you to our EDI Committee, your leadership has played a key role in creating a stronger, more inclusive, and more compassionate organization.

We have grown, not only in numbers and services, but in how we understand and support each other. Every achievement this year is a shared success. Every challenge was met with unity and determination.

This past year has been eventful; we have shared a few highlights below:

**April:** ONW launched the Driving Program. Our AIMS Administrators participated in additional training to utilize more of the resources AIMS has to offer. CRT worked with Angie Nethercott to increase knowledge in challenging behaviours related to sexuality and assessment/training tools. We recognized Autism Awareness Month.

**May:** We celebrated National AccessAbility week. CRT hosted medical students on placement. Snoezelen trainings started and continued throughout the year. A CRT Satisfaction Survey was conducted. The Director of Clinical Services was involved in reviewing the document “Innovative Practices Across Ontario Supporting Transitions of Alternative Level of Care Patients with Dual Diagnosis”. David Giba had a party at the office to celebrate the 3 medals he won in swimming at the Special Olympics in Waterloo!



**June:** We celebrated Pride Month with guest drag performers Amber Ail and Ivan Love. The agency got together at Italian Cultural Centre for our AGM. Peer Connections hosted the agency wide barbecue at Boulevard Lake. We changed the AIMS pin to increase our cybersecurity.

**July:** CRT began running the summer social skills group. The annual quality assurance mail out was prepared. Simeon Ostap from CRT did his first Board Certified Behaviour Analyst contract as a Registered Behaviour Therapist.

**August:** CRT ran a social skills group and did another satisfaction survey.

**September:** Staff attended the Community Living Ontario conference. Book Club started on the topic of equity diversity and inclusion. Board members, supervisors and the leadership teams were invited to participate in reading “The Wake Up” by Michelle Mijung Kim. The agency participated in the Truth and Reconciliation Walk. We welcomed Jacob Javor to our Board of Directors!

**October:** We hosted our annual Trunk or Treat event. CRT participated in the DSW program standards review and hosted an activity night with our Registered Behaviour Analyst. CRT conducted training on emotional regulation. The agency completed the annual Compliance Inspection.

**November:** The agency participated in the PACE backpack campaign. Suzanne Posthumus (CRT) was sent to Community of Practice training related to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. CRT did advocacy on the Post Graduation Work Permit with Confederation College and the federal government. The agency hosted the Children’s Holiday Party for families of employees of ONW.

**December:** The agency got together for our Annual Holiday Luncheon. Synergy North graciously donated monies for the agency to be able to give each person supported in Group Living and SIL a gift card for the holidays. The Spirit of Holidays project was once again a great success. CRT hosted a Whoville Night.

**January:** Student placements were hosted in partnership with Confederation College. Community Links event to advertise the agency was held at Intercity Mall. We welcomed AJ Bylund to our Board of Directors! Two Town Hall sessions were held, and agency wide feedback and surveys were conducted.



**February:** The Operational Plan for the Hub was developed. Hub satisfactions surveys began. Winter Carnival was held.

**March:** We participated in Pink Shirt Day to raise awareness against bullying. Support Workers were re-classified as Life Skills Counsellors. Town Hall results were analyzed and an action plan developed to address areas that needed change. Wake the Giant training was implemented. The Human Resources department evaluation was started. Many medication policies were updated to improve services. Some staff were sent to Ontario Association for Developmental Disabilities training.

As we look to the future, let’s keep striving, keep connecting, and keep building OPTIONS NORTHWEST into a community that reflects our highest hopes and values.

We extend our deepest thanks to everyone who stood with us this past year:

The amazing people we support, and their families and loved ones, our dedicated employees, our union partners at UNIFOR and ONA, our community partners across adult and children’s service agencies, The Thunder Bay District Health Unit, St. Joseph’s Care Group, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, our provincial partners: OASIS, OADD, GLS, CLO, and the Provincial Network, our funder; the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, our committed Board of Directors, and our exceptional Leadership Team

Now, let’s celebrate everything we’ve accomplished, and get ready for what comes next.

With gratitude,

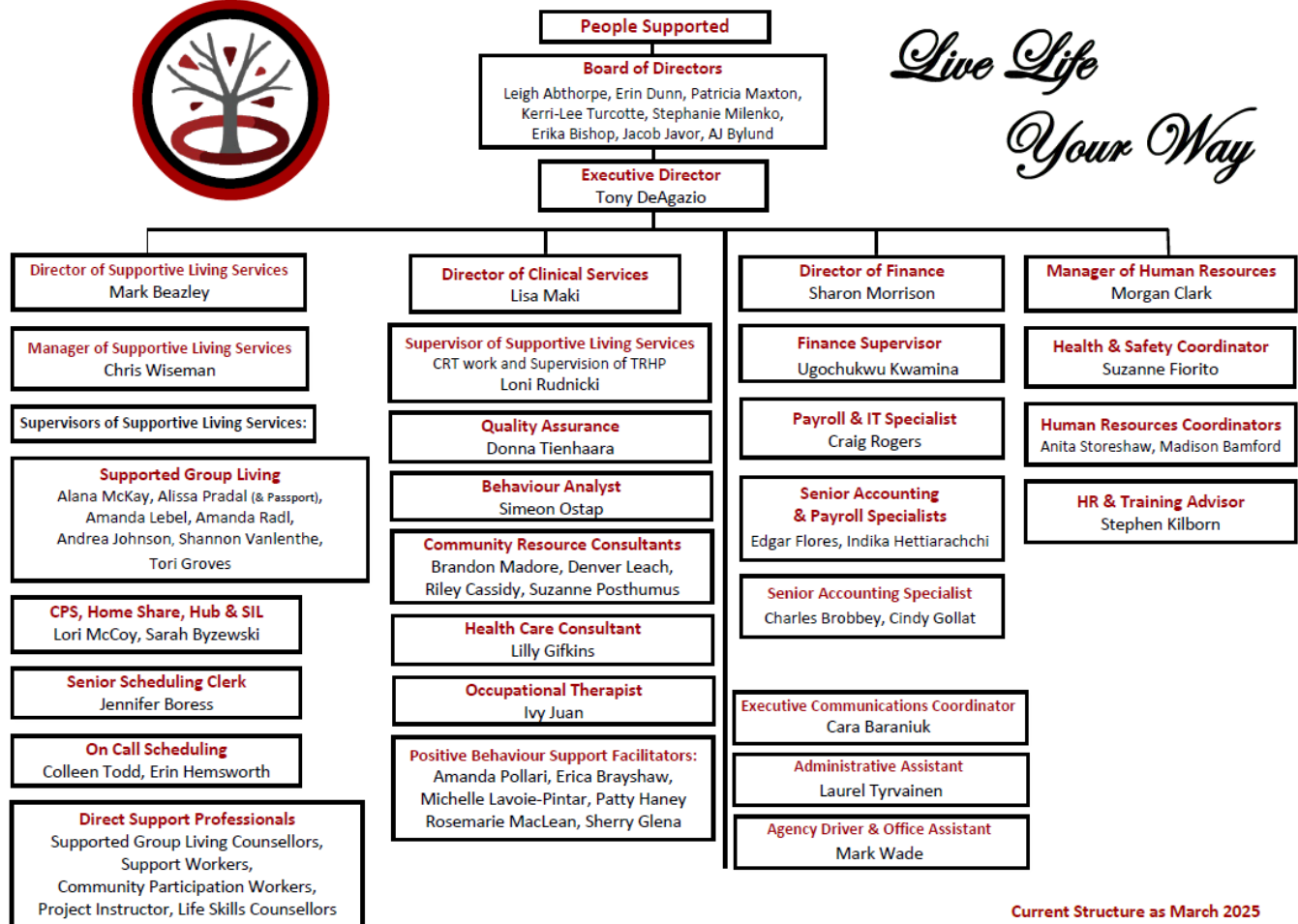
  
Leigh Abthorpe  
Board President

  
Tony DeAgazio  
Executive Director

# OPTIONS NORTHWEST ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



*Live Life  
Your Way*



The Leadership Team at OPTIONS NORTHWEST would like to thank:

- People receiving services and their families.
- Employees, students, volunteers, and community partners.
- Everyone who submitted photos and stories for this report.
- The Board of Directors.
- Everyone who participated in OPTIONS events throughout the year.
- Everyone who submitted photos and stories for this report.

**IT IS OUR PRIVILEGE TO SUPPORT AND PARTNER WITH ALL OF YOU!**



# Employee Recognition



## 35 Years

Susan Mihalus

## 30 Years

Bill Boucher, Jennifer Kukkee, Sharon Belanger, Lesley Parker

## 25 Years

Lori McCoy

## 20 Years

Laura Plexman, Amanda Lebel, Mike Beyer, Honor Wallace, Fortunato Bossio,  
Deborah-Anne Ward

## 15 Years

Deanna Bailey, Simeon Ostap

## 10 Years

Cyndy Eaton

## 5 Years

Alexis Pratola, Rachelle Davidson, Mary Varghese, Jillian Fiorito, Geethu Saneesh,  
Renee Furlotte, Pamela Cain, Sharise Budd, Joseph Byzewski, Uzma Shaikh,  
Ryley Vescio, Loni Rudnicki, Sanjay Modhavadiya, Ritty Cherian, Carisa Steinhoff,  
Chantel Coates, Julian Underwood, Annette Pugh, Glenda Carleton,  
Brandon Madore, Amanda Pollari, Vineetha Girilal, Damanpreet Kaur

## Retirements

Leigh Neilson, Angela Campbell, Luke Doyle, Sharon Belanger, Monica Pawson,  
Jamie Ward, Dawn Munro, Mike Chung, Mike Cambley, Kelly Robertson



**Congratulations to all employees who celebrated a milestone year of service with OPTIONS NORTHWEST. Thank you for everything you do!**



# In Memory

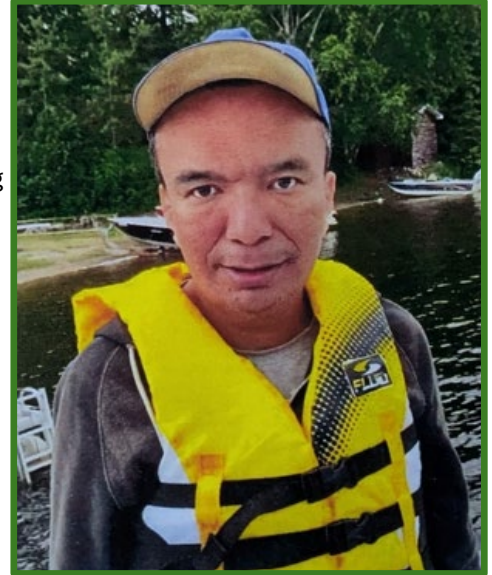
## Ananias (Annie) George Oombash

November 5, 1975 – February 22, 2025

Ananias was a sweet, curious and sneaky fellow who brought a smile to many people's faces...unless he stole your coffee. He had a love for car rides, peanut butter sandwiches, rock n' roll music and motorcycles. He would greet everyone with cheer, a handshake and a request for a ride to get a pop or coffee. He enjoyed the ability to show off his knowledge about vehicles by pointing to parts and saying them out loud until you repeated them back. Ananias had lived at the Nicholetts group home since 2011, and the absence of his presence is missed.

Recently, Annie's family contacted OPTIONS NORTHWEST to see if they could reconnect with him. This brought him lots of joy, seeing familiar faces. Their plan was to arrange visits to his home community in Cat Lake First Nation. Unfortunately, these plans did not work out and Annie's family along with our dedicated staff stayed with him until his final moments at the hospital.

There was a funeral service and burial held for Ananias on February 25, 2025, surrounded by his family at the Cat Lake Cemetery in Cat Lake, Ontario.  
Written By: Courtney Koetter



## Ruth Simonsen

Ruth moved into Tarbutt Home in 1988. In 1992 she moved into Skyline Home with five other people. In 2019 she moved for the last time to Tuscany Home.

Family was the centre of Ruth's world. She loved it when her parents would visit the home every Wednesday and bring some of her favourite treats. There were many fond memories made at the family camp. She spent her time sitting outside listening to her favourite country music, which included a lot of Johnny Cash.

Ruth had a special fondness for her brother "Butchie". After her mom passed, he would pick her up every Sunday and take her home or to camp. He would cook all her favorite foods, steak and bacon. He learned to play "Froggy Went a Courtin'" on his guitar and would sing it to her. She looked forward to every Sunday. When Butchie arrived, she hopped out of her chair and was ready to go with a huge smile on her face.

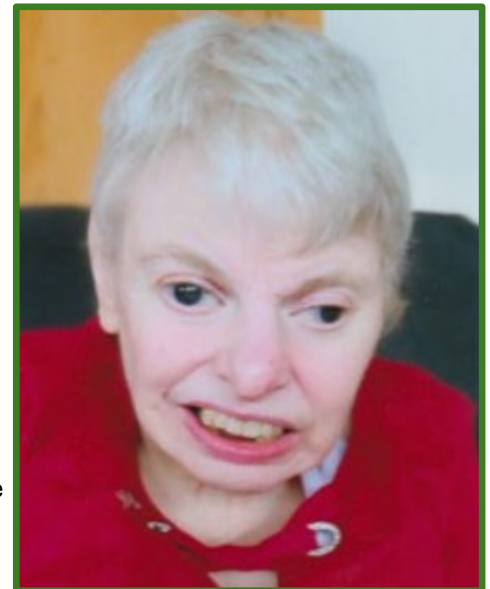
Hats were a favourite of hers. She would wear them, sleep with them and hold them. If someone came into the house their hat was not safe, Ruth would scoop it.

Everyone would go out when it was someone's birthday in the home. They would go to dinner and share a pitcher of beer. Ruth always called it Molson Canadian Lager Beer and enjoyed every sip. She loved the special birthdays that were held at the Landmark or Victoria Inn where she could go swimming.

Ruth received Employment Support from Avenue II. She worked at Grandview in the laundry department and also at a hotel folding towels. She also worked in the Avenue II office shredding paper and socializing. Closer to retirement it was mostly socializing. After retirement she spent her time swimming or having tea at the mall.

Ruth was a beautiful, resilient lady. She loved a good chat about Mom, Butchie and bacon. She loved to laugh. She was a spirited person and knew what she wanted, even if it got her into trouble. Ruth brought a smile to many that met her.

Written By: Twyla Oleksuk and Leigh Neilson





*Each time we embrace a memory; we meet again  
with those we love...  
for the heart never forgets*

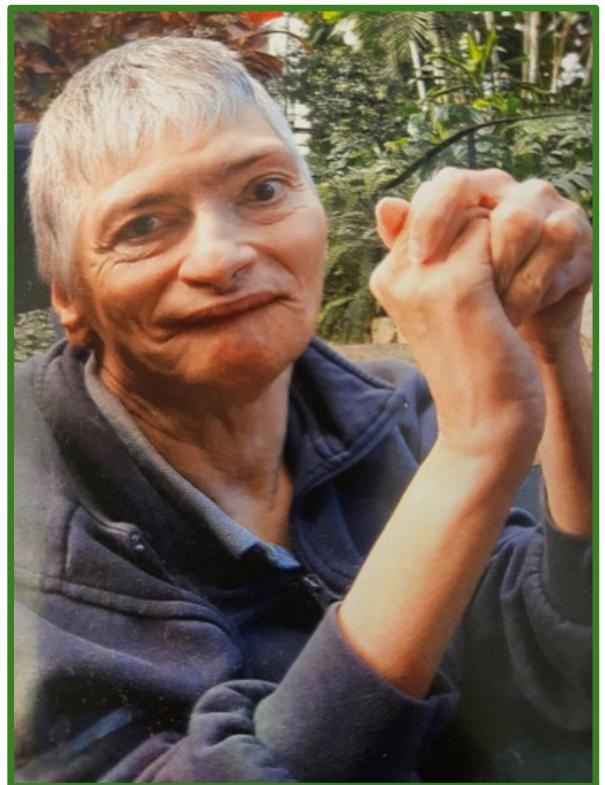
#### **Dirk Noetzel**

Dirk was born on June 9, 1957, he was a long-term resident at OPTIONS NORTHWEST Rosslyn Road group home, prior to that Hogarth Westmount Hospital. Although Dirk faced many challenges, he lived a long and fulfilled life living until the age of 67.

He will be greatly missed by staff and roommates. The house sits quiet without the sound of his tambourine.

He was a kind and gentle soul and had a beautiful smile that would warm your heart. He enjoyed being outdoors, listening to music and participating in many activities with his roommates and staff we will miss him holding our hand while we assisted with feeding. Forever in our hearts.

Written By: Alissa Pradal





## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at OPTIONS NORTHWEST: A Commitment to Meaningful Change

At OPTIONS NORTHWEST, we believe that inclusion is not just a policy—it's a promise. A promise to create a space where every person is seen, heard, and valued. With this commitment in mind, we are proud to introduce our newly formed **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee**—a passionate group dedicated to fostering positive change within our organization and the community we serve.

## A New Chapter in Our Journey

This committee represents a powerful step forward in our mission to empower people with developmental disabilities and OPTIONS NORTHWEST employees. We recognize that the journey toward true inclusion is ongoing, and this team will work tirelessly by implementing targeted initiatives such as inclusive policy development, regular training sessions, mentorship programs, and Active collaboration with diverse community partners. Through these concrete actions, we aim to ensure that OPTIONS NORTHWEST becomes a beacon of equity, understanding, and opportunity for all.



*“When Everyone is Included,  
Everyone Wins”  
– Jesse Jackson*

## Why EDI Matters

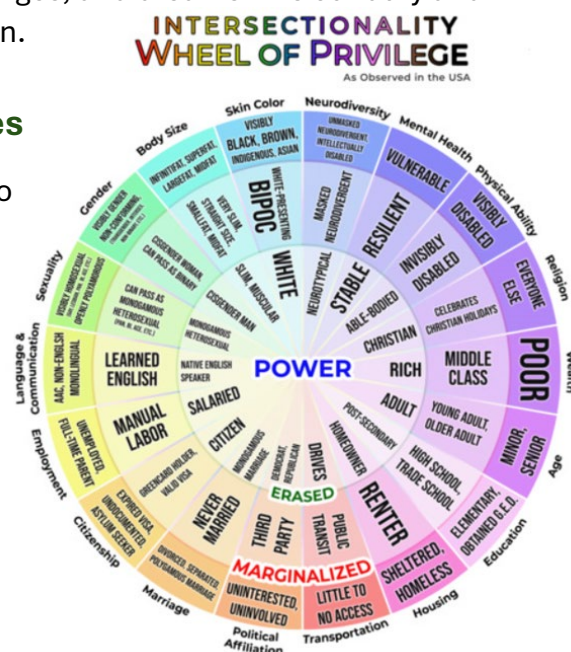
EDI is more than just a set of principles—it is the heart of everything we do. We know that for real change to happen, we must listen deeply, learn continuously, and act with purpose. Each person we serve comes with unique experiences, challenges, and dreams. It is our duty and privilege to ensure that no one feels left behind or unseen.

## Equity: Ensuring Fair Access and Opportunities

We believe in fairness and providing resources tailored to individual needs. Our commitment means actively removing barriers and advocating for those who need support the most.

## Diversity: Embracing Differences

Diversity is our strength. We are committed to building a culture that celebrates different backgrounds, perspectives, and identities—because every voice adds richness to our community.



## Inclusion: Creating a Welcoming Environment

Belonging matters. When people feel valued, they thrive. Our EDI Committee is committed to fostering this sense of belonging through open dialogue, mentorship programs, cultural celebrations, and inclusive decision-making. By actively listening to diverse voices and addressing concerns, we ensure that every person at OPTIONS NORTHWEST feels empowered and included. Our EDI Committee is dedicated to making OPTIONS NORTHWEST a place where everyone—clients, staff, and families—feels truly included and respected.

## What Our EDI Committee Is Doing

- **Ongoing Training and Education**  
We are implementing meaningful EDI training for staff to deepen awareness, challenge biases, and foster cultural competency.
- **Accessibility Enhancements**  
We are improving physical and digital accessibility, ensuring no one is excluded from the support they need.
- **Community Engagement and Partnerships**  
We are working closely with Indigenous communities, LGBTQ2S+ organizations, and advocacy groups to foster meaningful connections and shared learning.
- **Client-Led Initiatives**  
We are empowering those we serve by incorporating their voices into our decision-making processes.



## A Call to Action

This is more than a committee—it is a movement. A movement built on hope, resilience, and the unwavering belief that everyone deserves to belong. We invite each member of our staff to stand with us, to be allies in this journey, and to help shape a future that is fairer and more inclusive for all.

Change begins with us. Let's make this commitment together.

With open hearts and a shared purpose, we will build a brighter tomorrow—one where equity, diversity, and inclusion are not just ideals, but lived realities achieved through active listening, continuous education, inclusive policies, and community-driven initiatives.

## The Team Behind the EDI Committee

Tony DeAgazio, Brandon Madore, Indika Hettiarachchi, Lisa Maki, Loni Rudnicki, Mark Beazley, Michelle Lavoie-Pintar, Sharon Morrison, Surya Chekuri, Deepak Babu, Ugochukwu Kwamina, Valentina Donoso and Vignesh Vishwanathan

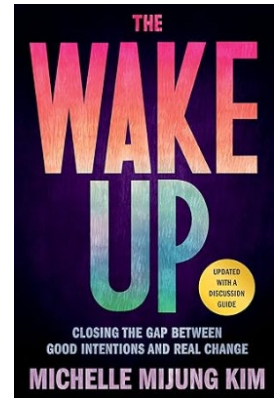
Together, we are shaping a more inclusive future for OPTIONS NORTHWEST and beyond.

Written By: Surya Chekuri

## Update from Supportive Living Services

This past year has been one of growth once again in our SIL programs. This included a new housing model for three individuals being supported in this program. OPTIONS NORTHWEST was able to secure an apartment that includes four separate bedrooms and bathrooms with a shared kitchen and living area. This model enables supportive living for three individuals that we support under one roof. This initiative thus far has been a success. It is our hope to open another similar model of living this coming year.

The EDI committee was officially formed this past year. The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee members represent staff from throughout the agency to lead change through the eyes of an EDI lens. The committee has started to present during general orientation for new onboarding staff and will also make a presentation at our AGM. It is the hope of the committee to represent change and for our policies to include EDI, as well as educate and include EDI when making decisions. The Leadership Team, Supervisors, and some members of the Board attended training for EDI as they participated in reading a book called “The Wake Up”. Sessions were facilitated by Sarah LalDin and it was an opportunity to start the process of conversing about EDI.



OPTIONS NORTHWEST completed the annual Compliance Audit in October of 2024. We were very successful with only a handful of items that needed correction out of over 300 indicators that were looked at in each one of our homes and programs. This is truly something to be proud of as it shows the seriousness of the care and supports that OPTIONS NORTHWEST provides to the people we support. The letter of Compliance from the Ministry can be found on our website.



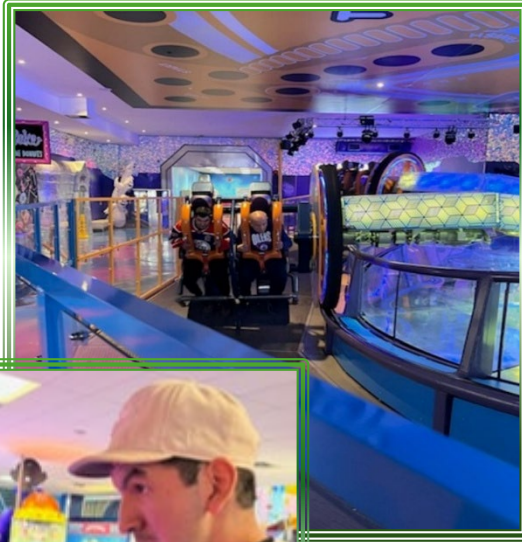
OPTIONS NORTHWEST is committed to training and development and this past year we were fortunate enough to send staff to two different conferences. Eight staff attended the Community Living Ontario Conference held in Richmond Hill this past September, and four staff attended the OADD conference specifically for people supported with dual diagnosis. It is our hope that we can continue this level of opportunity for others this coming year.

In closing, it is both an honour and a blessing to know that we have such dedicated and compassionate staff supporting the individuals that rely on us the most. Your unwavering commitment to their safety and well-being is deeply appreciated. Words cannot fully express my gratitude for the hard work, dedication and ongoing care that you provide every day.

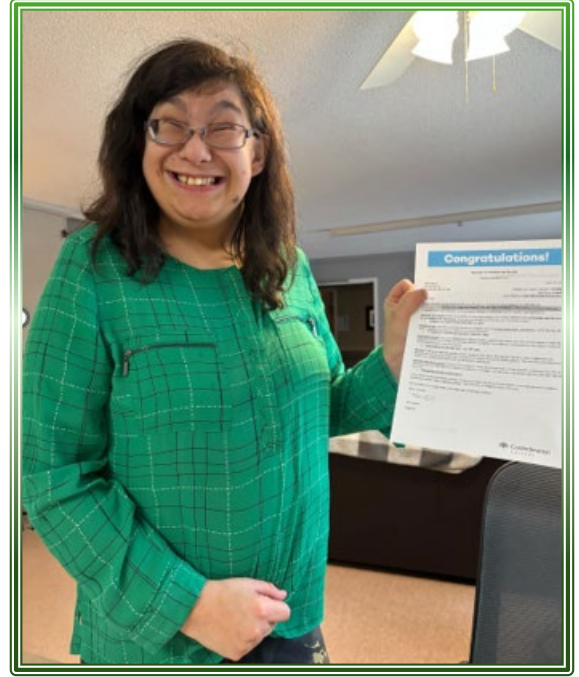
**Please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed. Thank you.**

Written By: Mark Beazley, Director of Supportive Living Services





Dave and Ryley took a trip to Edmonton together through Passport. They visited the aquarium and the amusement park at West Edmonton Mall.  
Fun Fact: Dave loves roller coasters!



Sadie was accepted into the CICE program at Confederation College for this upcoming school year. We look forward to hearing what she decides to pursue.

**Congratulations Sadie!**



Kyler has been a busy guy these days, but between all his work, school, (and agent) duties, he still makes time for some fun adventures. This past summer, he crossed off a bucket-list item by visiting Canada's longest suspension bridge!

Kyler and Jillian packed up some snacks and hit the road to brave the heights and take in the stunning views at Eagle Canyon. It was a beautiful, sunny day to walk both bridges and explore the trails.

Thankfully, there's no shortage of cool spots to discover in Northwestern Ontario, so I'm sure there will be more excursions to come this summer! Written By: Kyler and Jillian





In May 2024, Dave competed in swimming at the Special Olympics in Waterloo. He won one gold and two silver medals. A celebration was held for Dave to celebrate his wins. His friends and ONW staff joined to congratulate him!



Sandra had a blast taking a trip to Duluth, Minnesota with Passport. She visited the Duluth Zoo and went on a scenic train ride. She has been looking forward to visiting Duluth quite some time and she made it happen this year!



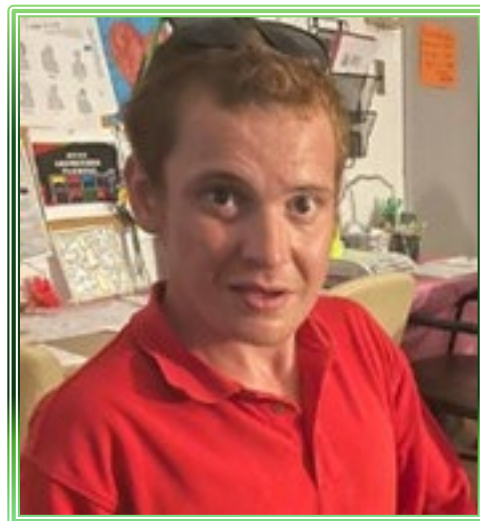
This past September we celebrated a milestone for Michael S - his 60th birthday! We had family over for a party, had coffee, tea, cake, presents and lots of fun! We sang Happy Birthday and blew out the candle and Michael couldn't stop smiling the whole time. He loves any opportunity to hang out with his big brother. So much fun.

Written By: The Glengary Team

SIL is excited to share a special moment about Damian who recently moved into a new shared home with two roommates. This move marks a big step in his journey toward independence, and he has embraced it with his usual positivity and warmth. His friendly, sociable nature has made him a great fit in his new home and a joy to support.

Recently, he had the chance to visit Mission Marsh, where he loved feeding the deer and soaking in the peaceful surroundings. It was a simple but joyful experience that reminded us how meaningful these everyday moments can be.

We're proud to see him thriving and look forward to more great moments ahead! Written By: Jillian Fiorito



Last summer Joe B and Jane H had the opportunity to spend a few days camping out at Wilderness Discovery with staff.

They were able to experience many camping activities such as hanging out on the deck enjoying the nice weather listening to music and watching staff BBQ. Spent an afternoon down at the beach. Went for a pontoon ride and were able to enjoy the sights and sounds of Shebandowan Lake! Also, Joe was able to try out a pedal boat with staff and enjoyed a bit of time sitting on the beach playing in the sand with some beach toys.

They both enjoyed snacks like chips/chocolates and popcorn to name a few. Joe enjoyed his near beer and Jane loved her pop!

They both had an incredible time out at Wilderness and hope to get out there again .

Written By: Karen Leveque





ONW staff and people supported donated clothing and essential items to P.A.C.E. We donated 12 backpacks filled with items to help those in need during the cold months. Liz (pictured) helped pack all of the bags and Sadie and Michelle dropped the donations off at the organization.

**Way to go ONW!**



Darlene S. has had an exciting year. She spent her summer months putting smiles on many happy customer faces as she scooped cold, creamy ice cream for them at Bannon's Gas Bar. She took time off to attend the CLE with friends in August. Her dog, Mork, was happy to join in on several long walks as Darlene explored the many trails in and around our city. The highlight of the year was probably when she bravely made the decision to move out of her parent's house and now is living independently with her dog in her cozy little apartment. Written By: Pamela Cain



Maryanne and Alison were fortunate enough to spend an evening with Patrick Hunter Art & Design. Patrick is a very talented artist originally from Red Lake, ON. The ladies had a fabulous time painting with him!



The HUB staff put on a fabulous Diwali celebration for all to participate in;

Diwali, also known as the "Festival of Lights," is a major religious holiday celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains. It is a five-day festival that symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Diwali is celebrated in various ways, including lighting lamps (diyas), decorating homes with rangoli and lights, exchanging gifts, and enjoying fireworks.

Thank you to all involved for putting on an amazing celebration and sharing your traditions with us.



Friday nights at the Hub have been dedicated to Karaoke. It is a crowd favourite and great start to the weekend!



# Trunk or Treat!

## Spooks we did it again...

ONW held its 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Trunk or Treat event again in October. Volunteers and staff of the agency got together to decorate their vehicles or a table to hand out treats to those who receive services, their loved ones, families, staff of ONW, and people from the Balsam Street neighbourhood. The event was a huge success. We played games, drank hot chocolate, took lots of pictures, and of course collected a whole bunch of treats. We can't wait to see what spooks and treats the ONW Crew brings to the parking lot next time!











February 4th was a special day at Kenwood! Alan was going to be celebrating his 40th Birthday!

Staff wanted to make sure Alan had the BEST birthday ever and planned a party to celebrate his special day along with family and friends!

The turnout was incredible!! The number of Friends and Family who showed up to celebrate with him just shows how much he means to everyone! Alan always has a smile on his face but that day he was over the moon with how many people came! We almost ran out of room for everyone!!

It was a day he still talks about and will remember forever. Big thanks to everyone for coming out!

You're only 40 once!

Happy Birthday Alan and keep smiling!



Tannia loves animals and this year she met a new fur buddy. Sweet little Pip joined Amanda Lebel's family this year so naturally she had to meet some new friends at ONW!



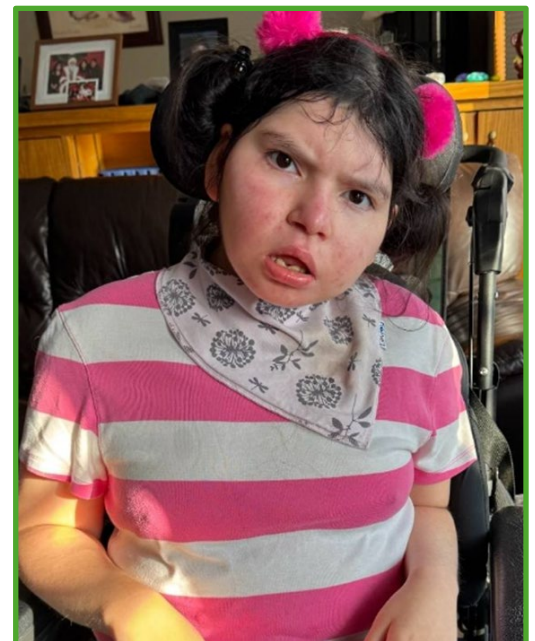
Dawn has always been an enthusiastic in the kitchen. This year she learned more recipes which allowed her to cook and bake a smorgasbord or delicious food!





### Community of Kindness

In March we took participated in Pink Shirt Day. It is a national day to speak up and help raise awareness about bullying. At ONW we have a zero tolerance policy against bullying, and we take it very seriously. There is no place for it at our agency, and we will stand against it again next year!







This year we held a winter carnival. Attendees enjoyed games, s'mores, maple syrup lollipops, and a hot chocolate bar. OH! And we can't forget everyone's favourite part! Sadie, Tannia, and Maryanne were lucky enough to get to smush plates of whipped cream into Mark Beazley's face. Thanks, Beazley, for being such a good sport!



Last summer for the first time we planted a garden at the 95 office. We invited everyone from the agency to join us in planting vegetables. People were able to take their plants home. Everyone had a great time. Michelle was very proud of the cucamelons we grew. We were able to harvest enough veggies to make a few good salads!





Every year at ONW, volunteers from our Administrative Office take part in our Spirit of Holidays project. We shop for people supported within our agency to add some extra cheer to their holidays. A special thanks to Andrea, Alissa, Cara, Suzanne P, Michelle, Lisa, Stephen, Anita, Donna, Jenn, Laurel, Mark W, Patty, Madison, Alana, Amanda L, Brandon, and Tori for being part of the SOH Committee this year. Thanks to the 95 office for collecting money throughout the year to help support part of the SOH. A HUGE thank you to our Wonderful Board of Directors for helping with the remaining funds to provide holiday cheer to people at ONW!



Our Annual Holiday Luncheon was a huge success this year. We had over 200 people attend. People supported, their loved ones, staff, and Santa joined us for lunch and entertainment from or PEER Connections Committee.



ONW lent a hand in volunteering with the Salvation Army Kettle Ball Campaign as we do every year. Elton dressed the part to represent the agency his famous smile!





This past year we joined with Dilico to participate in their annual "Honouring our Children Run" on September 30th, which coincides with Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This run is a way for the community to honor the Indigenous children who were taken to residential schools. Orange Shirt Day is a day to remember the harm caused by the residential school system and to reaffirm that "Every Child Matters". With all we can make a difference with showing our support for a great cause and this year we had many people participate! Thank you all for joining us and we hope will all participate again this year 😊 Written By: Sarah Byzewski



The Hub continues to hold Cultural Days weekly through our partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group. People who attend the activities have learned a lot and participated in cooking, crafting, drumming, story telling and lots of learning.





In September we gave away packages within the agency that were made up of a t-shirt, beaded key loop, and an art print from various Local Indigenous Artists. David G, Sadie N, and Suzanne P were all picked to receive one of the packages. Below we have included profiles on the very talented local artists that we connected with.



#### Ryan Pooman

Ryan is an Ojibwe Painter and Tattoo Artist in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Ryan is Bear Clan and a member of Fort William First Nations. His art is inspired by traditional woodland paintings, stories, and his tattooing style, creating digital and painted pieces.



Christian Chapman (b. 1975) is of Anishinabe heritage from Fort William First Nation, Ontario. Christian uses storytelling as a main theme in his practice to create his images. The act of storytelling has been an important part of his life: it has informed him of his culture by shaping his identity, personal experiences, and worldview. Recent exhibitions include "Zibaaska/iganagoodayan-jingedresses," Station Gallery, Whitty, ON (2019) and "Anishinaabeg: Art and Power," Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, ON (2017). He has received numerous awards, such as the Hnatyshyn Foundation Reveal Art National Award Prize (2017), the Ontario Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts as Emerging Artist of the Year (2016), and the K. M. Hunter Artist Award of the Ontario Arts Foundation (2016). His work can be found in the art collections of the Library and Archives Canada, the Government of Ontario Art Collection, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, as well as in several private collections.



#### Angela Jason (Starbeam Woman)

Growing up I had very little access to brushes, paints, and canvas due to my location, the cost of materials, lack of available space, and the limited income of my family so it was not until 2010 that I finally decided to purchase these items for myself and begin exploring the world of acrylic painting. Most recently, I have begun exploring the stained glass medium.

I am a self-taught artist and the work I am currently doing is inspired by the people in my life. I start each new piece with a friend, family member, or specific person in my thoughts and continue thinking about them throughout the painting process. As a result I am always happy with the final image. While I am still developing my own style as an artist I would describe it as influenced by First Nations/Woodland styles but with my own feminine twist to the colours, lines, and forms.

[starbeamwomanart](https://www.instagram.com/starbeamwomanart)



#### Kevin feels that he has been given a gift from The Creator.

Kevin Belmore is an Ojibwe Artist from Gull Bay First Nation located in the Thunder Bay District in Northwestern Ontario. Kevin joined The Creative Company as a collaborative artist in 2020. He has felt the need to express himself artistically since he was a young boy, believing he was given his gift from the Creator. At the age of 16, Kevin found himself in a workshop with Roy Thomas, who in turn was inspired by Norval Morrisseau, one of the founding members of the Woodland School of Art. This workshop is where he learned how to paint in the Woodland Art form, one that captures spiritual tradition as it shines through in the everyday, exploring the relationships between people, animals, and plants. His original acrylic paintings are brought to life with his brilliant use of balance, colour and the way in which he is able to capture emotion in the stories he is translating onto canvas. His pieces are highly sought after and grace homes across the country.

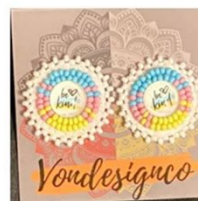
His work has been purchased by many and featured in Toronto Home Magazine and Canada's Maclean's Magazine.

[www.kevinbelmore.ca](https://www.kevinbelmore.ca)

#### Vondesignco

Kaydee is a 17 year old Metis artist in Thunder Bay. She specializes in beadwork and print work. You can check her out here!

<https://vondesignco.ca/>



## CRT and Quality Assurance Service Summary

The Community Resource Team (CRT) supported 311 individuals with developmental disabilities in Thunder Bay and the surrounding district, including 300 adults and 31 children. Many individuals received multiple CRT services.

### Support Areas:

- Speech Language
- Health Care
- Social Work
- Child and Adult Positive Behavioural Supports
- Single Plan of Care Planning (in partnership with the children's sector)
- Forensic Behavioural Support (in partnership with Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre)
- Occupational Therapy
- Behavioural Consultations/Registered Behaviour Therapist (RBT) Services
- Eligibility Assessments for developmental services
- Access to Specialized Services through the North Community Network of Specialized Care, including specialized accommodation funding (one funding contract during this period)

### Field Work Placements:

- 8 Northern Ontario Medical Students
- 1 Developmental Service Worker Student

### Group Activities:

- Peer Connections
- Snoezelen Training
- Summer, Winter and March Break Skill Building Groups
- Whoville Night
- Trunk or Treat
- Plant Pals



We also hosted a night with RBT Clinicians, provided training in General Orientation for new hires, and offered feedback on micro-credential courses. Additionally, we contracted services to Dilico for a youth requiring RBT services.

### Collaborations and Highlights:

- Worked with Angie Nethercott on topics of sexuality and challenging behaviour
- Featured in the document "Innovative Practices Across ON Supporting Transitions of ALC Patients and Dual Diagnosis"
- Collected ongoing feedback to continuously improve services
- Supported staff with ongoing education and training

### Committee Involvement:

- Peer Connections
- Speak Up
- DSW Advisory
- Special Education Advisory Committee
- ONW Rights Review
- Third Party Reviews of Behaviour Support Plans
- Northern Community of Practice Applied Behaviour Analysis
- Fetal Alcohol Community of Practice
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion



### Advocacy:

- Increased provincial and federal advocacy for the DSW Program to reinstate it on the Post Graduation Work Permit List

### Quality Assurance:

- Added oversight of the Quality Assurance area under CRT program
- Updated medication policies
- Created grab-and-go binders
- Developed staff orientation checklists
- Implemented compliance audit checklists

I am blessed to work with such hardworking and talented people who strive to help people live life their way!

Lisa Maki, Director of Clinical Services



### March Break Social Skills Group

Over the past March Break, a Social Skills was offered out of 95 Cumberland. We had 3 teens attend the program. The focus of the group was around building friendships, how to initiate conversations with new people, how to find connections through common interests and education around the impact of bullying. Music, team building activities and games were enjoyed as well as preparing various snacks for the week. One of the participants had her birthday during the group so we were able to celebrate the milestone with her with cupcakes and decorations. Those who attended really enjoyed the group and the only complaint seemed to be it was only offered 3 days instead of 5 days that week. A lot of fun was had, and meaningful connections were fostered.

Written By: Jen Hamilton



### Some insights from our members of PEER CONNECTIONS!

Why is PEER CONNECTIONS so important to you?

"I learn new things about what's going on in the agency" – Sadie

"The Annual BBQ is important as it brings people together" – Kyler

"You get to meet new people, and I want to make new friends" – Liz

"We get to help organize agency events and help with the AGM" – Sandra

"Cuz, you get to come hang out & have snacks"!! – Ryley

"We're very welcoming" – Joe

The First BBQ was such a success that PEER CONNECTIONS would love to continue this as an annual event.

Members enjoyed putting center pieces together for the AGM!!

A message from Brandon: "The group is gaining their confidence and beginning to voice their opinions – this brings unity and a sense of Inclusion within our Agency."

A message from Michelle: "People supported want to feel included and valued in the work that they bring to the table, this group gives them the opportunity to do so."

Want to join our Group?? Contact Brandon at [brandon.madore@optionsnorthwest.com](mailto:brandon.madore@optionsnorthwest.com)

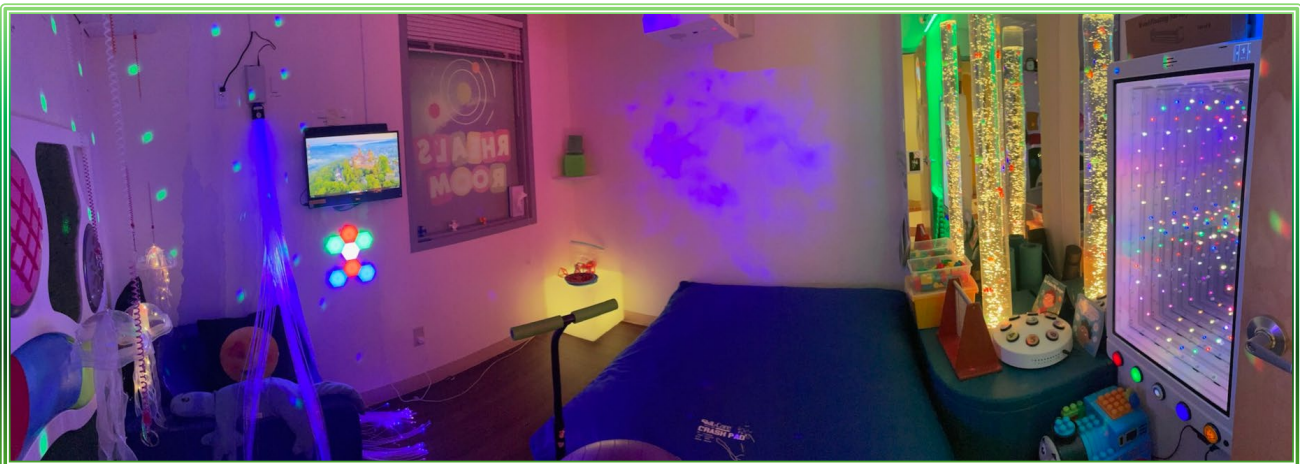
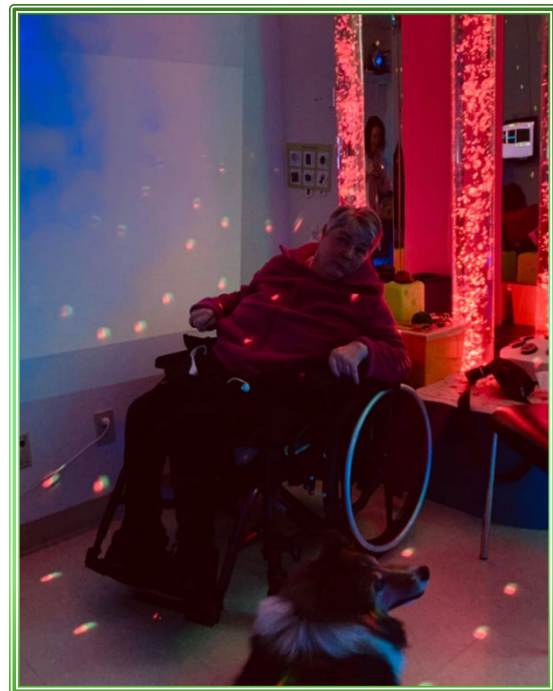
## Rheal's Room – Building Capacity

OPTIONS NORTHWEST has been busy this past year training many staff within our agency on how to use the Snoezelen Room to its full potential. As you may already know, Snoezelen Rooms, also known as multi-sensory environments, have proven to benefit people of ALL ages by promoting relaxation, reducing anxiety, and enhancing sensory exploration.

We've also trained many community agencies such as Children's Aid Society, Community Living Thunder Bay, Children's Centre Thunder Bay as well as DSW students with Confederation College. Some private providers such as HAEPI SLP choose to run their clinical sessions in Rheal's Room as it provides a calming and safe place for learning. Michelle with the Community Resource Team explains that providing a safe and inclusive space for education is important for everyone's well-being and promotes healthy development. "Teaching self-regulation skills in this kind of environment really does impact social interactions and academic performances in many positive ways".

ONW continues to encourage the use of the Snoezelen Room, please feel free to reach out for training at any time!

Written By: Michelle Lavoie-Pintar





## Finance Department Update

The just concluded fiscal year saw the Finance department focus on improving efficiencies across its functions:

**IT:** As we continue to work towards improved integration with UKG and increase its adoption by staff, we rolled out UKG's Advanced Schedule module in October of 2024; this was successfully implemented across all Supported Living Services locations in January of 2025. We then proceeded to implement the UKG's SMS Shift Fill module which allows all available shifts to be filled through the system, thereby eliminating the bottleneck faced by Scheduling. We've been working closely with the Supportive Living Services' Scheduling department to troubleshoot issues that may arise and have been making programming enhancements to improve efficiencies in their day-to-day activities.

**Finance Core:** We have improved communications both within and externally; this has translated to swift financial operations, rapid issues' resolution, and strengthened accountability.

**Payroll:** By introducing the option for employees to review and approve their own timecards prior to processing, payroll accuracy and employee satisfaction have been significantly improved

Overall efficiencies gained have strengthened the department, enhanced accuracy of our Financials and positioned the Organization for better prospects. Written By: The Finance Department



## What a Year for the Human Resources Department!

This past year has been a rewarding one for the Human Resources team. Though small in size, our team has accomplished a great deal, and we would like to take a moment to celebrate our shared successes.

We were proud to welcome 79 new employees to OPTIONS NORTHWEST through five General Orientation sessions. Of these new team members, 74 joined us as front line staff, and five joined as non-union staff. We also continued our valued partnership with Confederation College, supporting the placement of 10 Developmental Service Worker students and 1 Recreational Therapy student. We were thrilled that six of these students chose to continue their journey with OPTIONS NORTHWEST after their placement.

Our efforts extended to the community through participation in two career fairs—one at Confederation College, a key source of Human Services talent, and another at the Opportunities Northwest Job Fair, where we had the chance to engage with other agencies and explore future partnerships.

Health and safety remained a top priority, and throughout the year we shared valuable information on topics such as safe needle disposal, eclipse safety, hand hygiene, Lyme disease awareness, heat safety, COVID-19 and flu prevention, safe food handling, CPR, Autumn safety, and festive alcohol-free seasonal recipes. We also launched and supported a number of initiatives and staff engagement activities, including:

- Mental Health Week – with four staff prizes awarded
- Hand Hygiene Day – featuring an interactive staff activity
- World First Aid Day – with two staff prizes awarded
- Healthy Workplace Month – with one staff prize awarded
- Wear Red for Heart Health – with one staff prize awarded

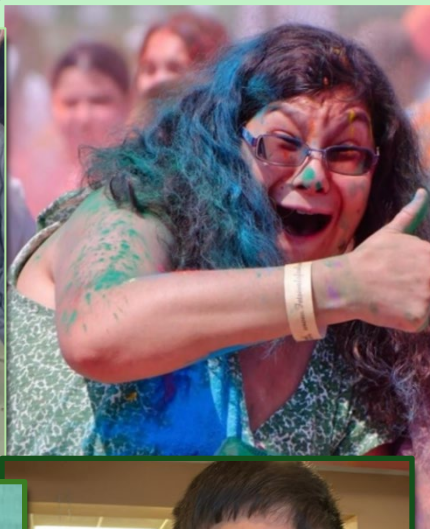
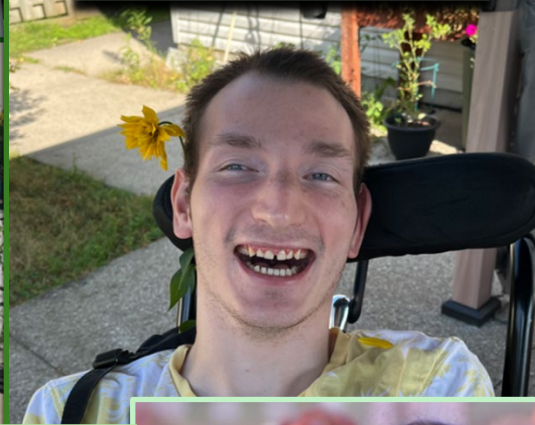


In addition to recruitment and ongoing training, we made key transitions to better support our team at OPTIONS NORTHWEST. This included moving to a new benefits provider in the fall and launching a partnership with a new Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider to support employee well-being. We were also proud to help introduce the Wake the Giant Indigenous Culture and Inclusivity Training, furthering our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion across the agency.

As we reflect on a successful year, we are excited by what we've achieved and looking forward to another successful year.

Morgan Clark, Manager of Human Resources







**OPTIONS NORTHWEST Personal Support Services**  
**Schedule of Receipts and Expenditures**  
*For the year ended March 31, 2025*

	<b>2025</b> <i>(unaudited)</i>	<b>2024</b> <i>(unaudited)</i>
<b>Receipts</b>		
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services	20,380,793	19,402,703
Individual rent and recoveries	1,056,876	1,033,310
Interest earned	136,104	120,268
Other recoveries	828,212	826,226
	<b>22,401,985</b>	<b>21,382,507</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Salaries and benefits	18,152,315	17,586,598
Salaries and benefits - wage enhancement	100,509	128,572
Staff training	57,026	55,569
Building occupancy	758,564	1,119,586
Travel and communication	299,816	274,631
Supplies and equipment	1,060,190	680,200
Other program service expenditures	1,690,698	1,383,160
	<b>22,119,118</b>	<b>21,228,316</b>
	<b>282,867</b>	<b>154,191</b>

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To view the complete set of financial statements, including the Independent Auditor's Report, or for any other comments or questions regarding this report, contact the Organization's offices at:  
95 Cumberland Street North, Thunder Bay ON P7A 4M1 phone (807) 344-4994 fax (807) 346-5811

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