

History of Indigenous Friendship Centres in Ontario

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The Beginnings. . .

- ▶ In Ontario, the first centres opened in the late **1950s** and early **60s**, when Indigenous community members began to see a need to gather together and provide social supports for their neighbours who'd migrated to cities and towns.
- ▶ The first six centres to open in Ontario are warmly referred to as “**the Original Six**”. They are: **Kenora, Thunder Bay, Toronto, London, Parry Sound and Red Lake.**
- ▶ In **1971**, members of the Friendship Centre movement saw a need to advocate for centres collectively and founded the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres
- ▶ **Today**, the OFIFC supports **31 Friendship Centres** across the province with each Friendship Centre holding Non-Profit/Charitable status.

(OFIFC.org/history)

Urban Indigenous Services

- ▶ providing vital social services, which we refer to as “cradle to grave services” including: family care planning, employment counselling, housing, health programs, justice, men and women specific counselling, elder care and much more.
- ▶ All of our Centres are considered “status blind” in which anyone that walks through our doors will be helped regardless of where they come from and if we can’t support their specific needs then we have the ability to point them in the right direction in order to provide support when needed.
- ▶ Unique programs have been developed that specifically deal with issues that cannot be found in any other organization
- ▶ Partnered with the Government of Ontario, ONWA and the metis nation of Ontario to develop an “Urban Aboriginal Action Plan”

Outreach and Engagement

- ▶ Each centre is governed by a duly elected Board which comprises interested community members who have shown an interest in supporting and carrying the Friendship Centre Movement in its best form.
- ▶ Its only been in the last 10-15 years has municipal governments recognized the value of partnering with their local Friendship Centre.
- ▶ Some municipalities have also taken the steps to fund programs and support Friendship centres through MOU's co-signed by Mayors and Board presidents which mirror the MOU signed by AMO and the OFIFC in late 2020 which has begun to build the working relationship between our 2 organizations.
- ▶ Municipal leaders have begun to attend and participate in local events and some attend ceremonial events as well.
- ▶ There is more that can be done. . .RECONCILIATION (TRC, MMIWG, UNDRIP)

Delicate Balance

- ▶ With any effort to be inclusive and diverse there are always positives and negatives that arise and need to be recognized.
- ▶ Mainstream community voices are always louder and get more attention
- ▶ Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding are making their way into municipal engagements through partnerships and the creation of Indigenous specific roles within the municipal structure
- ▶ There are spaces within the municipal body that are still very structured and colonial in nature and may not be open to any type of progressive change without a deep dive into the historical imbalance that was created by others.
- ▶ Cultural conflict, systemic racism and unconscious bias are still very evident in most areas of this structure and continue to be a barrier to employment to BIPOC community members regardless of education and experience.

Partnerships and Resources

- ▶ The Friendship Centre movement has gained strength by partnering and collaborating with other organizations both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous and include but not limited to: ONWA, Metis Nation of Ontario, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Service, Government of Ontario, Ministry of the Attorney General, Ministry of Health, Public Health Agency of Canada
- ▶ Local collaborators and MOU partners include Childrens Aid Society of London and Middlesex, The City of London, Thames Valley School Board and the London Police Service, At^lohsa Family Healing Services, Southern Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre, University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ www.namerind.on.ca
- ▶ www.ofifc.org
- ▶ www.onwa.ca
- ▶ www.ontarioaboriginalhousing.ca
- ▶ www.metisnation.org