



FEATHER CARRIERS REPORT

FIRST GATHERING APRIL 7&8 2025

MI'KMAW NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

Prepared By

**MI'KMAW FEATHER CARRIER
WORKING GROUP**

Date

AUGUST 2025



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Project Working Group

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Mapping Minds Counselling



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Program Overview

About Feather Carriers

The Feather Carrier program offers a transformative approach to life promotion and suicide prevention, grounded in Indigenous knowledge and teachings. With traditional wisdom, Feather Carriers addresses the root causes of premature, unnatural death by fostering a deep sense of identity, spiritual connection, and community among participants. This year-long training program invites participants to learn and embody life promotion principles through seasonal, immersive teaching circles, cultivating leaders who can guide and support their communities in preventing suicide and nurturing life.



Executive Summary

The Feather Carrier program is a year-long, Indigenous-led initiative promoting life and preventing suicide through Indigenous knowledge, ceremony, and leadership. Supported by Roots of Hope, Injury Free Nova Scotia, Tajikeimik, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, the program ensures cultural integrity, accessibility, and participation from Indigenous communities across Nova Scotia.

Participants include Indigenous professionals, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders in health, education, and wellness. The program strengthens identity, spiritual connection, and community ties while addressing gaps in mental health and addictions care, particularly in rural and remote areas, aligning with Recommendation C.13 of the Mass Casualty Commission.

Initial outcomes showed participants feeling validated in their cultural knowledge, empowered by ceremony, and motivated to share teachings in their communities. Key achievements include securing funding partners, engaging multiple Indigenous communities, advancing integration of Mi'kmaq culture and teachings, and fostering connection, hope, and empowerment.

This Feather Carrier project is cultivating a network of culturally grounded leaders contributing to long-term mental wellness and community resilience across Mi'kma'ki.

Project Supporters

Tajikeimik (Mi'kmaw Health and Wellness)



Tajikeimik plays a key role in promoting the program and supporting the recruitment of participants from across Mi'kma'ki. Their efforts help ensure broad community representation and engagement, aligning with the program's vision to grow capacity for life promotion within Mi'kmaq communities.

Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre



The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre plays a central role in coordinating the Feather Carrier program, managing communication, logistics, and reporting to funders. They provide critical support to Elders and Knowledge Keepers, ensuring their contributions are honored and their teachings shared in culturally appropriate ways. The Centre also guides adaptations to align the program with Mi'kmaw culture, ceremony, and community priorities.

Roots of Hope (Nova Scotia Health)



Roots of Hope provides essential logistical and coordination support throughout the program. This includes managing communication with participants and funding to cover accommodations and meals for in-person gatherings. Their support helps create a welcoming and well-resourced environment for learning and connection.

Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia



The Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia contributed funding to support participant registration, removing financial barriers and helping to ensure strong Indigenous representation from communities throughout the province. Their support was vital in making the program accessible to those with lived experience and a commitment to life promotion.

Injury Free Nova Scotia



Injury Free NS contributed direct funding to cover critical program expenses, including facilitator honoraria, travel, and other facilitation-related costs. Their investment supported the delivery of culturally grounded, community-led teachings and ensured Elders and Knowledge Holders could be present and supported.

Public Health Agency of Canada



Community, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, with support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, contributed to this project by funding and championing culturally rooted, community-led approaches to mental health and addictions care. Their support helped strengthen local capacity, expand access to culturally safe supports, and address service gaps—directly aligning with Recommendation C.13's goal to improve services for adults with moderate to severe mental health and addiction needs in Nova Scotia.

PJILA'SI! LEADERSHIP IN LIFE PROMOTION!

Becoming a Feather Carrier

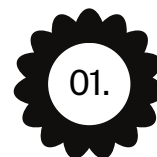
Life promoters (enaadmaget wii Bimaadziyiing) can use their teachings with individuals in their day to day lives, help develop community resources that promote life, and use the teachings when individuals experience a loss of hope and purpose that leads to suicidal ideation. The teachers (Gashkichige jig) and those learning to be teachers (Ozhiitaa jig) are invited to lead training cohorts as they come up. They are not obligated to teach and do so only when they feel ready. Your Getsijig (Elder) is Dr. Connors, Gashkichige Jig (teacher) is Erin. and Ozhiitaa Jig (teacher in training) is Connor



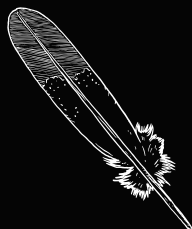
Dr. Ed Connors



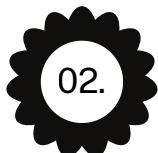
Dr. Connors is one of the founders of the Feather Carriers program. "If you don't know where you come from, and you don't know who you are, then certainly you don't know why you're here and where you're going."



Erin Dixon

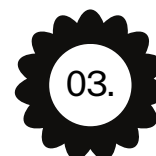
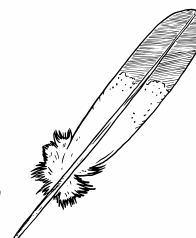


Erin, Ashati Sakahikan, belongs to the crystalline waters of Skeleton Lake in the traditional territories of the Anishinabek Peoples in Williams Treaty territory. A member of the Métis Nation of Ontario, Erin relates to being Otipemisiwak and works collectively with many Nations of peoples from across Akiikwe, Mother Earth.



Connor Lafortune

Connor Lafortune is from Dokis First Nation on Robinson Huron Treaty territory of 1850 in Northeastern Ontario. He is Anishinaabek, queer and Francophone and uses his understanding of the world to shape his creations as a writer, spoken word poet, and musician.



Participants

Indigenous Professionals, Knowledge Keepers, and Community Leaders

The Feather Carrier program includes 22 Indigenous professionals, leaders, and helpers working at the intersections of mental health, education, wellness, and community support. Participants are primarily Indigenous or work closely with Indigenous communities and hold roles that allow them to influence, guide, and support life promotion within their work and relationships.

The program engages a diverse group of individuals committed to culturally grounded approaches to wellness and suicide prevention, including:

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

counsellors, clinical therapists, crisis managers

NURSES AND NURSE EDUCATORS

including those focused on Indigenous and L'nu health

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS LEADERS

health directors, outreach workers, educators

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION LEADERS AND ADVISORS

PROGRAM MANAGERS, CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT WORKERS

These participants are well-positioned to integrate the teachings of the Feather Carrier program into their personal, professional, and community-based roles, contributing to long-term, systemic change in life promotion and suicide prevention within Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous communities.



Participants



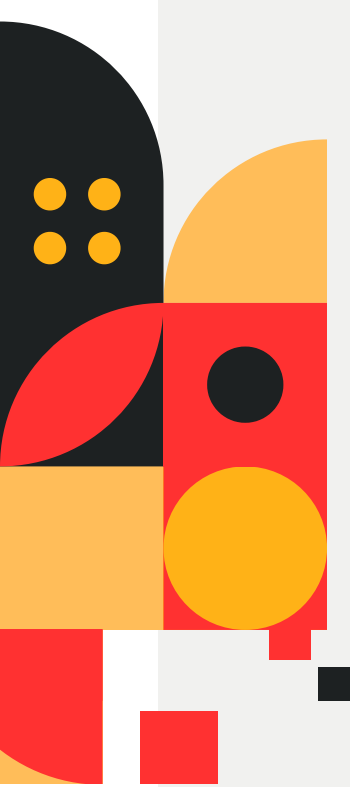
Communities Represented

- ☒ Bear River First Nation
- ☒ Eskasoni First Nation
- ☒ Membertou First Nation
- ☒ Millbrook First Nation
- ☒ Potlotek First Nation
- ☒ Sipekne'katik First Nation
- ☒ We'koqma'q First Nation
- ☒ Indigenous people residing within the Kjiptuk area
(Halifax Regional Municipality)



Strengthening Mental Health

How Feather Carriers Addresses Mental Health Needs in Indigenous Communities



Expand network of Indigenous mental health leaders: Trains and empowers professionals and community leaders to deliver culturally relevant, trauma-informed support.

Reduce service delivery gaps: Brings mental wellness practices into rural and remote Indigenous communities, beyond clinical settings.

Promote continuity of care and trust: Builds healing relationships, cultural safety, and spiritual connection to improve engagement and retention in care.

Drive systemic change: Cultivates culturally grounded leaders who influence mental health systems to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and healing.



Respect

The program honours Mi'kmaw teachings, Elders, and cultural protocols, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge is upheld as a source of strength and healing. Every participant's experience and perspective is valued as part of the collective learning journey.



Connection

Feather Carriers fosters deep bonds between participants, communities, and culture, creating a supportive network rooted in shared values, ceremony, and life promotion principles. These connections extend beyond the program into ongoing relationships of care.



Empowerment

By building skills, cultural confidence, and leadership capacity, the program enables participants to carry forward life-promoting practices, advocate for change, and positively impact their communities.

Initial Outcomes

Participants experienced...

01. Strengths-based approach

Felt affirmed in their Indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, and community strengths, rejecting deficit-focused models.

02. Healing through ceremony

Gained empowerment and pride by engaging in cultural practices and spiritual teachings as powerful tools for healing from trauma and suicide loss.

03. Personal healing and openness

Shared their experiences of suicide in a safe space, engaging in collective grief work and cultural grounding.

04. Commitment to action

Committed to applying Feather Carrier principles in their communities, workplaces, and professional practice.



05. Leadership influence

Applied learnings in leadership roles to advocate for and implement culturally safe mental health approaches.



Affirmation



Healing



Action

Key Achievements

01



Integrating Mi'kmaw culture and ceremony

Advanced discussions toward a shared agreement on how to respectfully include Mi'kmaw teachings, ceremony, and cultural protocols within the Feather Carrier program.

02



Participation from across Nova Scotia

Engaged multiple Indigenous communities and Knowledge Keepers, ensuring diverse representation and the sharing of regional perspectives.

03



Fostering connection and hope

Created a supportive space where participants build meaningful relationships, share experiences, and leave with renewed optimism for community wellness.

04



Funding partners investing in life promotion

Secured support from multiple funders who recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge and the importance of culturally grounded approaches to suicide prevention.



Thank You!

The Feather Carrier program is a year-long, Indigenous-led initiative that promotes life and prevents suicide through Indigenous knowledge, ceremony, and community leadership. With the support of multiple funding partners and the participation of Indigenous communities and Knowledge Keepers across Nova Scotia, the program is building cultural pride, healing capacity, and leadership to strengthen mental health and addictions care in culturally meaningful ways.

Thank you to our supporters and for your interest in this important work. For further information, please contact us!

Our Contact Information :



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