



# WE MATTER

ONTARIO SUPPORT NETWORK  
2018 - 2019

MULTIMEDIA STORYBOOK

## What is We Matter?

We Matter is a national Indigenous and youth-led organization committed to Indigenous youth empowerment, hope and life promotion. Our key project is the We Matter Campaign – a national multi-media campaign in which Indigenous role models and allies submit short video, written and artistic messages sharing their own experiences of overcoming hardships and communicating with Indigenous youth that no matter how hopeless life can feel, there is always a way forward.

## What is the Ontario Support Network?

The Ontario Support Network (OSN) is an exciting new project that works to build deeper partnerships between We Matter and a select number of Northern Ontario communities and deeper relationships between youth and their supports across communities. Using We Matter's new multi-media Toolkits created this year, the Ontario Support Network mentors Youth Ambassadors and Community Guides to bring conversations of hardship, hope and healing to schools and communities and lead Indigenous-youth led mental health and life promotion initiatives focused on culture, community engagement and peer-to-peer support.

**"We're just trying to learn from one another which is amazing. I want to bring culture to my people. I want to learn and show more culture to my community for sure."**

*- Jared Nodin, Whitesand First Nation Youth Ambassador*

**"I've been learning about hope and how to have hope. We're planning a project to create hope in our communities because there's been a loss of hope, and courage and there have been suicides in our communities."**

*- Tara Wabano, Eabametoong First Nation Youth Ambassador*

## Goals of the Ontario Support Network include:

- Inform, educate, and engage with Indigenous youth and community members about the We Matter Toolkits. These Toolkits will be used by youth, educators, and support workers to introduce We Matter into their homes, communities, and schools in order to foster life promotion, positive mental health, wellness, coping, and cultural pride.
- Build a team of Youth Ambassadors and Community Guides across Northern Ontario, and support them in the creation of youth-led projects around hope, culture, and strength.
- Host a regional #HopeForum gathering for Youth Ambassadors and Community Guides that will provide cultural teachings, training, and capacity-building while connecting youth from various communities together.
- Share the strengths and successes of young leaders and their communities on a national platform in order to inspire others.



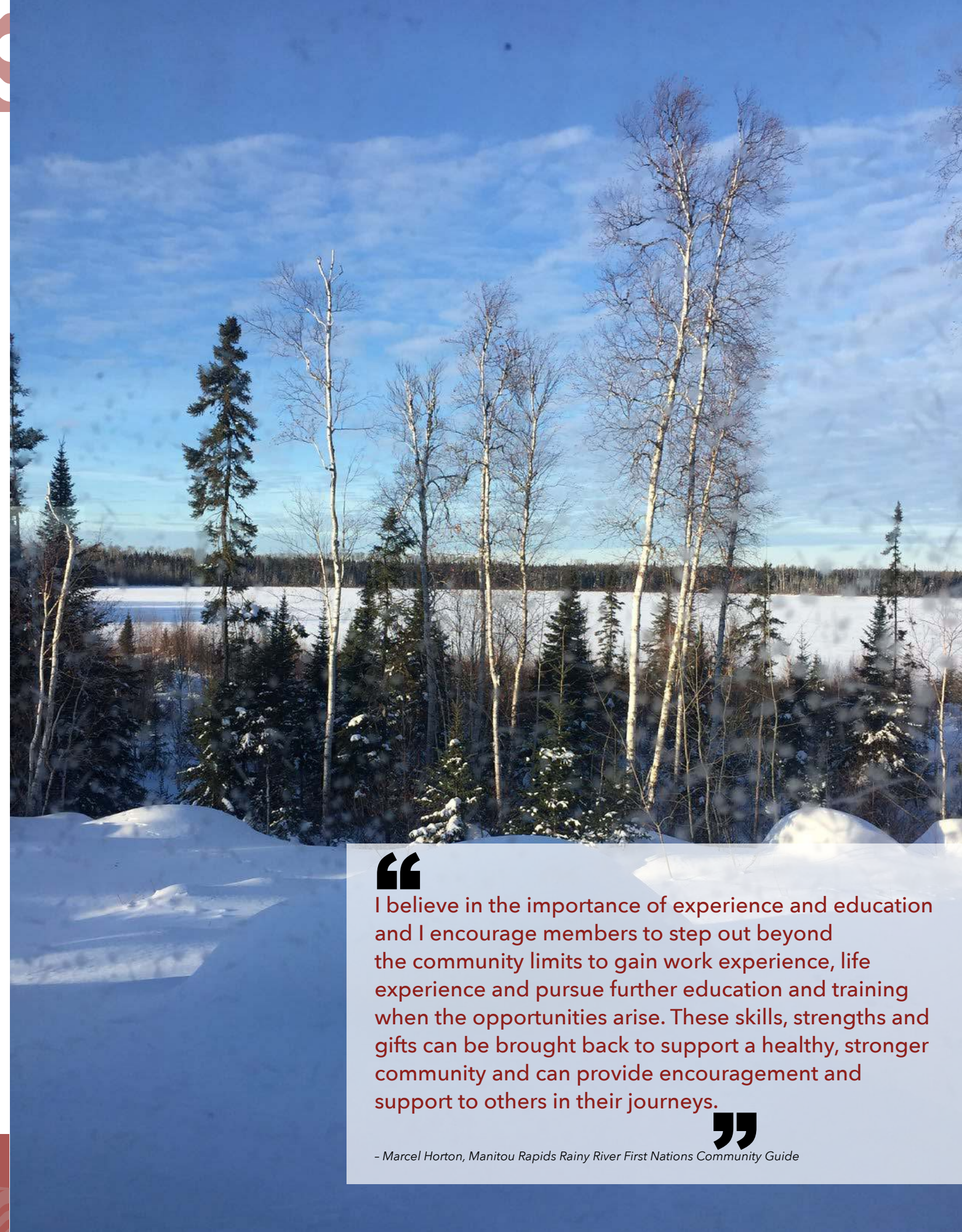


### ***Details:***

- The Ontario Support Network is made up of 5 Community Teams across northern Ontario who are interested in bringing discussions of mental health and life promotion, and hope, culture and strength into their schools and communities.
- Each Community Team includes two Youth Ambassadors (young leaders 13-20 years of age) and a Community Guide (adult mentor) to work directly with We Matter.
- The Ontario Support Network is a multi-year project at no cost to communities.
- Each year the selected Community Teams will participate in a fully funded Regional #HopeForum, and receive \$2500 to implement their very own youth-led life promotion project.

### ***Through the Ontario Support Network, We Matter hopes to work with communities to:***

- Help build new connections between youth ambassadors and adult mentors
- Inspire a strengthened sense of positive identity, confidence and self-determination among youth ambassadors
- Increase knowledge of peer engagement, community supports, and mental health literacy among youth ambassadors and community guides
- Strengthen youth capacity and engagement within schools and communities through the implementation of youth-led initiatives
- Normalize youth and community dialogue around culture, identity, mental health and life promotion
- Support positive relationship building and networking between youth ambassadors and community guides within and between communities



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I believe in the importance of experience and education and I encourage members to step out beyond the community limits to gain work experience, life experience and pursue further education and training when the opportunities arise. These skills, strengths and gifts can be brought back to support a healthy, stronger community and can provide encouragement and support to others in their journeys.

”

- Marcel Horton, Manitou Rapids Rainy River First Nations Community Guide



# TIMELINE

## APRIL THROUGH JUNE

### HIRE COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR

April and June were designated to hiring a Community and Youth Engagement Coordinator, whose sole role is leading the Ontario Support Network.

“When we tried to bring the pride flag to the powwow committee I could tell that when my friend was talking to them that only a few were listening. I thought that I should speak up because if we have more youth voices then maybe more people will listen.”

- Natu Broadbent, Manitou Rapids Rainy River First Nations Youth Ambassador

## JULY THROUGH SEPTEMBER

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLES

Between the months of July and September the newly hired Community and Youth Engagement Coordinator conducted a Needs Assessment to become better accommodated with the issues in Northern Ontario communities. In addition to textual research and one-on-one interviews, two Virtual Sharing Circles were held through video conference on August 29th and September 4th, 2018 for teachers, educators, counsellors, youth workers, community leaders and members, Elders, and youth across Northern Ontario to answer questions about support in their regions. The finite goal of the Needs Assessment was to evaluate the strengths and gaps of existing programs alongside community strengths and challenges in order to provide a concrete list of recommendations for the Ontario Support Network to utilize moving forward.

Click to view  
Needs Assessment

## AUGUST

### OUTREACH

Outreach for participants to join the OSN was conducted in the month of August. We initially reached out to previous contacts of We Matter, building on existing relationships. Following this initial outreach, we compiled a list of contacts for schools, band offices, health services in all of the communities in Northern Ontario. We reached out to some tribal councils and friends within the region as well. In addition to email outreach, and being a multimedia organization, we utilized our social media platforms for outreach as well, with multiple posts targeted to the region of Northern Ontario. Over the month we reached out to over 250 contacts, engaged in communications with many more, and following multiple inquiries, had 8 complete applications submitted.

## SEPTEMBER

### APPLICATIONS

The application period was open throughout the month of September. The closing date was originally October 3rd and was extended for those who expressed interest for an additional week. Applications were submitted as a team, and the applicants answered questions explaining the context of their community, their relationship to the concepts of hope culture and strength, and the challenges and strengths that they see within their community. Once applications were submitted, we arranged a call with each community team to discuss their ideas for their project, their understanding of the OSN program, and their availability and level of commitment.

## OCTOBER

### SELECTION

Following the introductory calls with each prospective Community Team, 6 Communities were selected to join the OSN based on level of commitment, initiative, and promise of youth-led projects expressed in both their applications and the call. In the weeks following one community dropped out due to their inability to attend the upcoming #HopeForum event. The finalized Community Teams of the year are Eabametoong First Nation, Kashechewan First Nation, Manitou Rapids Rainy River First Nations, Red Lake, and Whitesand First Nation. To learn more about the participants go [HERE](#)

## NOVEMBER

### ONTARIO SUPPORT NETWORK WE MATTER AND FACEBOOK REGIONAL #HOPEFORUM

We Matter and Facebook partnered to launch the Ontario Support Network with a regional #HopeForum gathering bringing together all of the participants of the OSN for skill development, cultural learning, relationship building, and project planning. Over November 20th through 25th, the #HopeForum allowed the communities to initiate their project planning so that they could return to their communities and deliver their projects of hope, culture, and strength.





## NOVEMBER THROUGH MAY

### COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Community projects occurred throughout the months of November through May, once the Community Teams returned to their communities after the #HopeForum. Some communities chose to do a collection of different activities for their project, while others chose to do weekly or monthly activities that continued throughout the months of the program. The flexibility of the community project reflects the difference between each community's needs and strengths, which was something that we built on in the creation phase of the community projects. See pages 11-13 to learn more about the specific projects and activities that happened in each community!

### YOUTH AMBASSADOR AND COMMUNITY GUIDE VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLES

Community Teams participated in at least one Virtual Sharing Circle call with the Community and Youth Engagement Coordinator to update on their progress. We found that personalizing methods of communication was helpful and ended up using Facebook, text, one-on-one calls, and email to communicate and receive updates about the projects throughout the year. Both the Youth Ambassadors and Community Guides participated in monthly Virtual Sharing Circles that focused on reflection-based skill development. Each month was designated a theme based on topics that YAs and CGs expressed interest in learning, and incorporated reminders for program deadlines and the opportunity to discuss challenges that arose in the implementation of their community projects. This allowed for technical and emotional support from their fellow Network members. Each meeting was opened and closed with a prayer and 'virtual smudge' by the OSN Elder, to ensure the circle is opened in a safe and meaningful way.

## JANUARY THROUGH MARCH

### COMMUNITY VISITS

In order to continue strengthening the relationships with the Community Teams and their communities, the Community and Youth Engagement Coordinator visited the communities for 2-3 days over the months of January through March. Each Community Visit was structured to fit each Community's unique needs, but did consistently include meeting as a Community Team, participating in one of their community project activities, and problem solving any challenges arising for the Community Team in their project planning. To see more about the Community Visits check out pages 16-19.

## #HOPEFORUM

What do the youth have to say about the #HopeForum?



Learn more about the  
#HopeForum



View our Project Plan  
Workbook





## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

"We hope to bring youth together so that they can have a space where they feel like they belong. We are planning a movie night, fun activities, and a Cree Culture day."

- Kashechewan FN Community Team

“

Living here and being a youth means I get to see first hand on what my peers are going through. They are wonderful people filled with laughter and happiness, but they still have immense amount of trauma and mental health issues, the worst part is that no one listens to these youth, they often turn to unhealthy resources like drugs, alcohol and self harm. I noticed this and knew that all they wanted was to be somewhere where they are not judged and they are not looked down upon, they just want to be loved and accepted. I was determined to do what I can to help them.

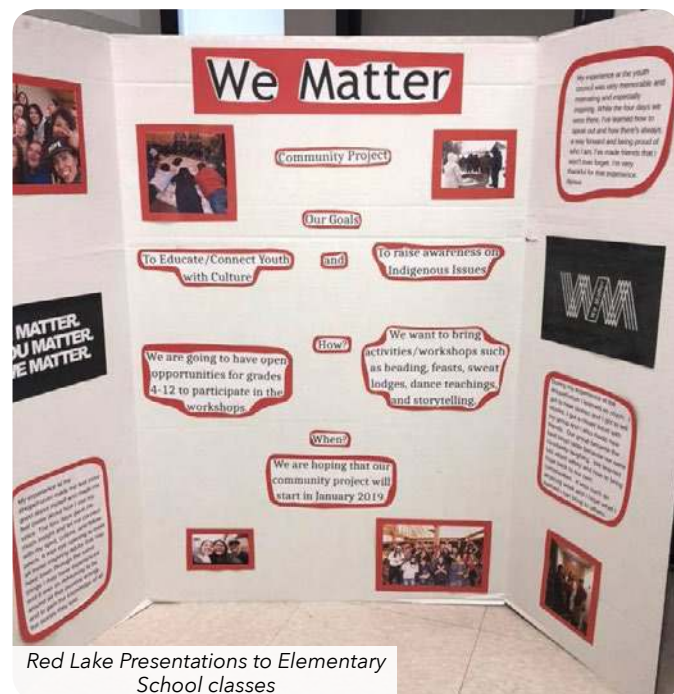
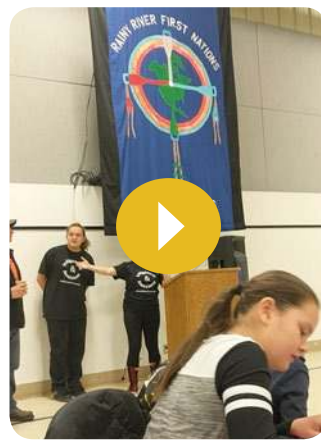
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- Tashie Broadbent, Manitou Rapids Rainy River First Nations Youth Ambassador

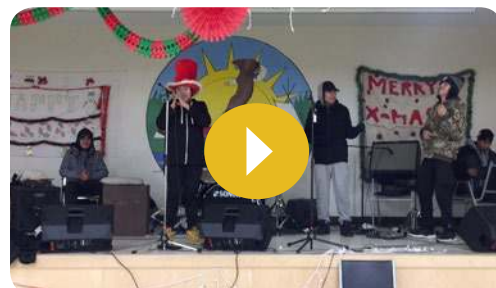




## DECEMBER



## JANUARY



Eabametoong FN Youth Night, and Shelter Building On-the-Land

Red Lake We Matter Presentations to Elementary School classes

Manitou Rapids Rainy River FN Youth Council, Peer Support Group, Homework Help

## FEBRUARY



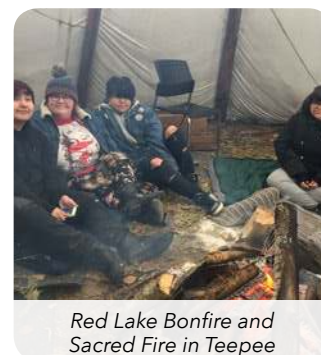
Manitou Rapids Rainy River FN Spaghetti Dinner

Whitesand FN Floor Hockey Tournament

Red Lake We Matter High School Presentation

Eabametoong FN Movie Night

## MARCH



Manitou Rapids River FN Hoop Dance Workshop

Whitesand FN We Matter Presentation

Red Lake Bonfire and Sacred Fire in Teepee

## APRIL



Whitesand FN Easter Dinner and Egg Hunt

Manitou Rapids Rainy River FN Youth Support Circle, Youth Council Meetings, and Tutoring Nights

## MAY



Manitou Rapids Rainy River FN Youth Council runs a Smoothie Bar at Powwows

Red Lake Closing Bonfire Event

Whitesand FN We Matter Presentation at the Elementary School

Eabametoong FN Sports Nights Floor Hockey, Volleyball, and Basketball

By the end of the year the Ontario Support Network Youth Ambassadors and Community Guides have contributed 220 hours of their time dedicated to life promotion using hope, culture, and strength. They reached 540 youth from the ages of 8 through 20 years of age. We are forever grateful for their participation in this exciting project!





It is a privilege and an honour to work with the youth in my community and to foster culture, identity and support.



– Lorrie Rolland, Red Lake Community Guide

NOVEMBER

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

November 8th, 2018  
Topics/ Theme: Clarifying roles, project ideation, opportunities to learn/ capacity building

COMMUNITY GUIDE VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

October 30th, 2018  
Topics/ Theme: Origin story, considerations re: engaging youth (system level, social level), opportunities to learn/capacity building (self-identified)

DECEMBER

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

December 13th, 2018  
Topics/ Theme: Moving into the planning process, shift of calls to feelings, further developed projects

COMMUNITY GUIDE VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

December 17th, 2018  
Topics/ Theme: Supporting the planning process for youth projects, observations of more youth engagement since the #HopeForum

JANUARY

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

January 17th, 2019  
Topics/ Theme: Active listening, working with Elders, Storytelling, cultural connection at the forum

COMMUNITY GUIDE VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

January 21st, 2019  
Topics/ Theme: Managing challenges and unexpected change to plans, proactive reflection about anticipated challenges with youth and their projects

FEBRUARY

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

February 21st, 2019  
Topics/ Themes: Public speaking, finding our voice and supporting youth to find theirs, encouragement, inviting disengaged youth, making space for diverse views

COMMUNITY GUIDE VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

February 25th, 2019  
Topics/ Themes: Supporting ourselves, self-care, managing compassion fatigue, needing patience to motivate youth

MARCH

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

March 28th, 2019  
Topics/ Themes: Communication, team skills, organizational skills, focusing on achievements and strengths

APRIL

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

April 18th, 2019  
Topics/ Themes: Using voice for motivation, reflection on how to overcome barriers: practicing, right to opinions, building relationships and building a good reputation

COMMUNITY GUIDE VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

April 29th, 2019  
Topics/ Themes: Empowering youth: reflection, tools, appreciation love and support, culturally appropriate ways to support youth challenges

JUNE

YOUTH AMBASSADOR VIRTUAL SHARING CIRCLE

June 24th, 2019  
Topics/ Themes: Final knowledge reflections, peer mentorship, leadership and capacity building, on the land cultural engagement activities, access to services

For more information on the content and evaluation of the Virtual Sharing Circles go

HERE



# COMMUNITY VISITS

January 9-13

**Eabametoong First Nation**

"Our goal is to build a community project around identity, culture, and hope. We planned a youth night, shelter building on the land, a movie night, and traditional activities."

- Eabametoong FN Community Team

We Matter Presentation at the school



Shelter building led by Community Guide, Robert



Chelsea, Community and Youth Engagement Coordinator, and Danielle, Community Guide, do a Radio Show to promote We Matter and the upcoming OSN Activities



Youth Night Air Band Competition



Day On-the-Land with Youth Ambassadors Tara and Riley



February 27-March 2

**Red Lake**

"Our goals for our community project are to educate and connect youth with culture, and to raise awareness on Indigenous issues. Some of the activities we are planning are; beading/mini-moccasin making teaching/activity, day out on the land, sweat lodge and a feast. We also launched our project through a sacred fire where we shared cedar tee, We Matter and our community project information."

- Red Lake Community Team

The Resident Snow Monster



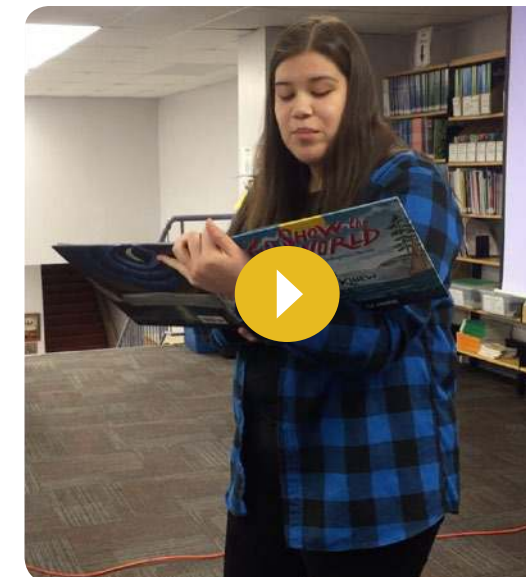
Taking the #HopePact in the Teepee!



Adventures on the Ice Road as a Community Team



Youth Ambassador Drea raps "Go Show the World" for the We Matter Presentation





March 10-13

Whitesand First Nation

"For our community project we want youth to come together and be active and have positive things to do in the community. We hosted a floor hockey tournament, planned an Easter dinner, and a trip out to Old Whitesand to learn culture and history."

- Whitesand Community FN Team

Youth  
Obstacle  
Course, led  
by Guest  
Facilitator  
Chelsea



Youth  
Ambassador  
Tenika  
presents We  
Matter and  
the Ontario  
Support  
Network to the  
community



The Magic of  
Whitesand at  
night



March 15-18

Manitou Rapids Rainy River First Nation

"The programs we have are working really well. The weeks are filled with programs. We have a support circle every Monday, we have homework help every Wednesday, and every other Tuesday we have our youth council meetings. The programs have brought so many youth together and honestly the most I've seen them smile."

- Manitou Rapids Rainy River FN Community Team

The Youth  
Council  
prepare their  
Canteen for  
the Powwow



Honouring  
the Hoops



The  
community  
team attends  
the Local  
Sobriety  
Powwow  
together



The Youth  
show their  
teachings  
from the  
Hoop  
Dancing  
Workshop



Unfortunately, due to scheduling challenges we were unable to include the Kashechewan Community Visit into year one of the Ontario Support Network. With many snow days affecting school attendance and preparation time, as well as the evacuation of the community (a reality for this community every year due to flooding), it was just not a reality for us to schedule the visit. This is the reality of working with community; sometimes things don't go as planned, but we roll with it and try to address those challenges in creative ways to stay connected and make things work! We utilized Facebook as a central hub for communication throughout this time, which was very helpful in maintaining relationships.



## FINAL REFLECTION

We Matter, through the Ontario Support Network, aimed to increase the dialogue of hardships and healing within Northern Ontario communities, and build supportive connections and relationships between peers, between youth and supportive adults, between support services, between communities, and between communities and We Matter. The Ontario Support Network was not without its challenges, unique to each community. The realities of working with community and the need to be flexible and meet communities where they are at was highlighted for We Matter, and will be taken into consideration for the planning of year 2 of the Ontario Support Network. Despite any situational challenges that arose throughout the year, the Ontario Support Network was a success, and we acknowledge that one small step at a time, we will make a difference for Indigenous Youth who are struggling.

We Matter and the Ontario Support Network brought conversations of hope, hardship and healing into communities; more specifically, Red Lake, Rainy River, Whitesand, Eabametoong and Kashechewan in Ontario. Over the last 10 months, the Youth Ambassadors and Community Guides worked together to create and implement youth-led mental health and life-promotion initiatives in their communities. Youth Ambassadors had the opportunity to lead and facilitate activities with the support of adult-ally's (Community Guides, We Matter Staff, Elders), which allowed them build on their own capacity skills as well as set a good example for young people in their communities to look up to. At the end of the projects, more on-the-land based activities were requested by most communities and opportunities to overcome barriers to access mental health services.

**"We went to the lodge out on the land, I really liked that. I'm excited to work with the youth when we go back to the community, and take them out on the land."**

*- Riley Whitehead, Eabametoong First Nations Youth Leader*

**"I've been learning a lot from the youth. Being inspired by them coming together, seeing them overcoming their shyness, and supporting them has meant a lot to me."**

*- Brad Bouchard, Whitesand First Nation Community Guide*



## MOVING FORWARD

**Adapting to community context:** After implementing year one of our Ontario Support Network, the We Matter team has been reflecting on and discussing the various challenges which arose. We have taken many learnings, and have come to understand that many of the First Nation communities in northern Ontario which we hope to work with, are not at a place where they have the capacity to engage in and lead longer-term, sustainable programming. This is as a result of the nature of crisis-state communities exist in, where constant and ongoing challenges and traumas within a community-context make it difficult to have the time and energy to put towards preventative and ongoing programs. Many youth and community members also have personal and collective challenges, making it difficult to engage in year-long community and youth work. In order to lead successful relationship and capacity building within an Indigenous community and youth context, we have come to the conclusion that the OSN needs to meet communities where they are at, and support them within their present capacity.

**Proposed Year 2 & 3 Activities:** In order to create realistic and beneficial opportunities to build youth capacity, foster engagement, peer-to-peer support, and relationship-building within northern Ontario communities, we would like to shift the OSN from being a year-long program commitment for six community teams to being a project-based mentorship and support opportunity for individual community teams.

The outcomes and elements of the OSN will remain the same, however, the structure and process for the program will change and adapt. Instead of recruiting a select number of community teams in August to work with throughout the whole program period, we will have an open an ongoing application period running from August to March, where community teams with a minimum of two youth can apply to implement a specific individual mental health and life promotion project within their community with the support and mentorship of We Matter. We Matter will have four project options that community teams can apply for, which can be catered and implemented in that community. Projects will still be required to be youth-led, with the identified support of a community guide (adult mentor). With a successful application, We Matter will support and mentor the individual community teams to lead the project from start through finish, providing an initial set of relationship building calls, check-in calls, video meetups, and materials/ resources to do so. Each team will have access to youth discretionary funds which will range from \$500-\$2000 depending on the project they wish to lead. Community team projects will have requirements such as: a minimum of two Indigenous youth ages 14-26 leading the project, an identified community guide to support the process, one community partner identified to support the project, projects be completed within a designated timeframe, and community teams stay connected with We Matter for the duration of the project through calls, debriefs, and by submitting updates and social media highlights. Community teams will also be added to the Facebook network hub, where they can network, learn about other teams, stay connected, and share successes.

## SPONSORS/PARTNERSHIPS

The Ontario Support Network would not be possible without our amazing friends and partners, We Matter would like to thank:



**I Matter. You Matter. We Matter.**

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# WE MATTER

LEARN MORE ABOUT US AT [www.wemattercampaign.org](http://www.wemattercampaign.org) FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA    @WeMatterOrg

