

# Report of the 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session

Department of Social and Cultural Development  
Cree Nation Government

June 1, 2018



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This report is dedicated to the youth and elders of Eeyou Istchee: the elders because they hold the language in their minds and hearts, and the youth because they will be the ones to teach their children and carry the language forward.

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# Executive Summary

The 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session was convened because action is urgently needed to begin building a regional language maintenance plan to sustain and promote the Cree language. On the surface, the situation in Eeyou Istchee may not seem to be as bad as it is for many indigenous nations - many of whom have already lost their language or have only a handful of speakers. Delegates were unanimous, however, in expressing concern about the retention and use of the language among the youngest generations, and it is clear that aggressive action is needed to help ensure that today's children learn to speak their mother tongue well so that they can teach it as tomorrow's parents.

It is also clear that for a language maintenance plan to be effective it has to engage all of the stakeholders in Eeyou Istchee. That starts with individuals and families, who must be encouraged and inspired to speak their language in all the facets of their lives. It then extends to regional entities and businesses, who must develop, implement, and support initiatives to encourage the use of Cree in public spaces and workplaces. And it ends with community and regional governments who must develop and implement law and policy, and who must be willing to fund efforts to support and promote the language.

The following document includes a brief overview of language work to date, a description of the language engagement session itself, a brief assessment of the state of the Cree language today, calls for action, and suggested language activities. Further, it includes a number of appendices offering supplementary information about the 2018 Engagement Session, and information about past language conferences and work.

*Of these, the calls for action are the most important as they suggest measures that can provide the foundation for a renewed effort.* If you read nothing else, we suggest that you read these carefully, making sure to think through fully the implications of each. The calls for action were developed on the basis of input from the Language Engagement Session delegates,

and on the basis of a thorough examination of past efforts and recommendations.

Some of the calls to action may generate debate. There is nothing wrong with that. It is important, however, that debate does not lead to inaction. Past efforts have too often stalled, and it is critical that this not happen now. Delegates were clear in their insistence that action is needed.

The calls for action also include the suggestion that three working groups be convened by the Cree Nation Government - one to examine funding for language, one to examine the difficult question of how best to increase the use of Cree in the workplace, and one to examine how to build a coordinated strategy to encourage Cree language publishing. Working groups were suggested because these are very difficult questions that require serious examination. We hope that these working groups can work efficiently and report back soon as there is little time to waste.

Delegates were also clear in their view that leadership and commitment is needed from the Cree Nation Government. Over the past 40 years, Crees have won recognition of their sovereignty and rights and have built an impressive capacity to act on behalf of their language. The time to act is now.

# Acknowledgements

The 2018 Language Engagement Session could not have happened without the support and hard work of a great many individuals.

First and foremost, the organizers would like to thank the elders who attended the session. We hope that we have done justice to the wisdom and guidance they offered during the session.

We would also like to thank the delegates, presenters, and discussion facilitators for all of their hard work and support. The session was a success primarily because of their knowledge, experience, and passion.

Thanks are also owed to Grand Chief Abel Bosum, Deputy Grand Chief Mandy Gull, Chief Louisa Wynne, Chief Allan Jolly, and Deputy Chiefs Arden Visitor and Lance Cooper who attended, addressed, and participated in the session. We would also like to thank Willie Iserhoff for his address and unwavering support. We hope that such visible support from local and regional political leadership will help win support for future language maintenance initiatives.

We are also indebted to Cree Nation Government staff Sarah Coon-Come and Marlena Otter without whom the session would have been impossible.

Thanks to Sarah Pashagumskum for offering Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute as the host venue. At Aanischaaukamikw Rob Imrie, Harold Bosum, Nicodemus Bosum, Jennifer Thivierge, Trifona Simard, Anaïs Biernat, Queenie Napash, and Karen Etapp deserve recognition for their hard work. Many thanks to Lindsey Akerman for designing the posters for the Engagement Session, and to Emmie Tsumura for her design of the session's logo.

In Ouje-Bougoumou, Sarah Coonishish-Mianscum, Sarah Cooper, Jennifer Thivierge, Blanche Awashish, Kecia Matabie, and the Ouje-Bougoumou Novice Wolves deserve a thank you for meals and snacks as does Gloria Shecapio-Blacksmith for the Awards Gala decorations. Thanks also to the Capissisit Lodge in Ouje-Bouguoumou for their patience and flexibility. In Chibougamau, we are grateful to the Motel Nordic, Hotel Chibougamau, and Autobus Mercier.

Many thanks to Willy Bosum for his beautiful photographs of the session.

Finally, Dany Bouchard and Helen Capissisit did a wonderful job providing sound at both the session and awards gala. Nick Diamond, Scott Forward, and Mike Reid deserve great thanks for the live radio and web broadcasts as well as assistance with audio-visual display during the session.

Thanks to the James Bay Cree Communication Society, CBC North, and Maamuitaa for broadcasting and covering the event. We hope they continue to pay close attention to language-related issues in Eeyou Istchee.

For the Awards Gala, we are grateful to Daniel Mark-Stewart for stepping in at the last moment and expertly MC'ing the event. Many thanks also to Deputy Chief Mandy Gull for her opening address, and to Richard Bosum, Kenny Mianscum, and the Big Rock Dancers from Mistissini for the entertainment.

Lastly, thank you to laureates Florrie Mark-Stewart, Luci Bobbish-Salt, Kenny Mianscum, and Luke MacLeod, and to the Pashagumskum, Ratt, Loon, and Sam-Atkinson families for inspiring us to keep up the hard work.



Delegates to the 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session congratulating the Cree Nation Youth Council delegates for their courageous and inspiring words during their panel discussion.



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The 2018 Language Engagement Session was organized because there is a need for decisive action before it is too late. If it was evident to all that it was time to act in 1997, it should be doubly so today. The Session brought together delegates from each of the eleven communities in Eeyou Istchee, as well as delegates from the principal stakeholders currently undertaking language work. The goal was to lay the groundwork for the development of a clear and realistic language maintenance plan that engages all of the major stakeholders from individuals, parents, and families to regional entities, businesses and governments.

*The plan must support a broad range of initiatives in the communities and must establish support for the Cree language as a political, social, and economic priority.*

The calls to action that follow should be seen as the first step in this process.

As you read this report, we would like you to consider the following major themes that are fundamental to the calls to action:

*There is still time to act from a position of strength.* Unfortunately, many of the world's indigenous communities would love to be in the position we are in today. Eeyou Istchee has a sizeable population of fluent speakers, including elders who are expert speakers of the language. It is of critical importance that action is taken while this is still the case. To wait another twenty years is simply not an option.

*Everybody needs to play a role.* There is no one organization that has the means to reverse the trends currently threatening the language. All of Eeyou Istchee must be engaged, from individuals and families to governments, entities, and businesses. For far too long, the Cree School Board has shouldered the responsibility for the bulk of the language work in Eeyou Istchee. While we applaud the work they have done, it is time for others to assume a greater responsibility.

*There is a need for an institutional infrastructure capable of supporting and sustaining the language.* A regional language maintenance plan will only

succeed if it successfully supports community-level programming and encourages individuals and families to speak, teach, and learn Cree in all the facets of their lives. What is needed is an infrastructure that can support effective action by individuals, families, and communities. That means ensuring that resources and funding are available when and where they are needed. It also means inspiring people to take action.

UNESCO estimates that half of the world's 6,000 languages are in imminent danger of disappearing (UNESCO 2011). Unfortunately, this figure includes many of the world's indigenous languages. This is no accident. Colonial states have devoted great energy to eliminating these languages, which almost always lack the state and institutional support necessary to fight back. We as Crees have made many great strides in winning recognition of our sovereignty and rights, and in doing so, we are building a nation that now has the resources to fight back.





# Efforts to Date: A Brief Overview

The Crees have long been working to support their language, and to develop the institutions, tools, and resources necessary to see it thrive in the post-JBNQA era. The timeline in Appendix E clearly demonstrates that the need for effective language resources, funding, and programming has been recognized since at least the early 1970s. It also clearly shows that there is a long-standing recognition that greater support is needed.

## Consistent Demands for Recognition

The Crees have consistently demanded recognition of their inherent right to speak and use the Cree language. The JBNQA included provisions recognizing this right in the context of local government, education, the administration of justice, and economic and social development (see Appendix F). Notably, the JBNQA states that

*every person may address the public corporation in Cree and the public corporation shall ensure that such person can obtain available services from and can communicate with it in Cree (10.0.12).*

The affirmation of language rights in the JBNQA makes it clear that the negotiators saw a future for their people in which the Cree language remained the principal language in Eeyou Istchee. Subsequent agreements have continued to affirm this inherent right. The 2002 *Agreement Concerning a New Relationship Between Le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec* states that

*the Cree Nation must continue to benefit from its rich cultural heritage, its language and its traditional way of life in a context of growing modernization.*

The 2012 *Agreement on Governance in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory Between the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and the Gouvernement du Québec* states that

*Cree and French shall be the principal languages of the Regional Government.*

The adoption of the Cree Constitution in 2017 raises the possibility of further enshrining these affirmations into language-related law(s) to be adopted by the Cree Nation Government and/or individual Cree First Nations. Further, as the Cree Constitution is more fully developed, the opportunity will exist to further enshrine the inherent Cree-language related rights of the Cree people.

## **Cree Way and the Cree School Board**

The Cree Way Project, established in 1973, represented the beginning of a new era in the history of the Cree language. The Crees recognized that their schools needed Cree-language materials and took the initiative to create them themselves. This commitment to the importance of Cree as a language of instruction in the schools launched decades of language work in the territory.

There is much to be proud of in the time since. Cree negotiators ensured the JBNQA recognized the right of students to receive an education in the Cree language, and tasked the Cree School Board with the responsibility of training Cree teachers and developing courses, textbooks, and classroom materials so as to instruct students in their own language.

The Cree School Board was established in 1978, and assumed the responsibilities it had been given under the JBNQA. In terms of language, these were as follows:

*to arrange for the hiring of Native persons as teachers*

*to develop courses, textbooks and materials designed to preserve and transmit the language and culture of the Native people*

*to establish courses and training programs to qualify Native persons as teachers*

1987 saw the publication of their first dictionary, Annie Whiskeychan's *Cree Lexicon*. Subsequent dictionaries were published in 2004, 2012, and 2013. Further, in 2000 the Cree School Board partnered with Carleton University to launch *eastcree.org*, a website housing a variety of language resources including stories, lessons, resources on grammar, and an online dictionary. Cree Programs staff have also worked over the years to develop a catalogue of pedagogical materials and curriculum.

The Cree School Board also took important steps in terms of affirming the value of mother-tongue education. In 1989, they introduced the Cree Language of Instruction Program (CLIP). The program represented a bold commitment to using the Cree language as the sole language of instruction through grades 1-3. The program suffered, however, from a number of challenges, including a need for increased and more focused teacher training, a more detailed teaching curriculum, and classroom resources suitable to the needs of the program. Low levels of exposure to the written language at home also presented an obstacle to the program. Despite an abundance of research from other jurisdictions that supports the value of mother-tongue education the program was ultimately discarded by the Cree School Board as many pinned the blame for poor English and French literacy on the program. The impact of CLIP, however, continues to be seen as positive by many and support for reinstating the program remains high in a number of communities and constituencies. Further, the evidence as to CLIP's influence on English and French literacy is at best highly ambiguous. Again, evidence from other jurisdictions suggests that such a program should be both possible and beneficial given an appropriate level of support.

The Cree language continues to be taught as a discrete subject in the Cree School Board, although it continues to face many of the same difficulties that challenged the CLIP program. Notably, many of these problems require solutions that extend beyond the walls of the school. Community-based programming aimed at increasing commitment to using the language as parents, to raising literacy levels among adults, and to fostering the publication of a wider variety of dialect-appropriate publications for home and school would all help language teachers in the classroom.

## **Repeated Calls for Greater Institutional Support**

Aside from the Cree School Board, there are a number of other institutions that have taken the initiative to develop language programming and undertake language research. Notably, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay has taken language-

related issues related to the delivery of health care very seriously. They have developed medical glossaries, worked on training and resource development to support access to health services in Cree, and have begun to take seriously the place of the language in efforts to improve social and cultural well-being in Eeyou Istchee. Similarly, the Cree Nation Government's Justice Department is to be commended for their recognition of the important role language-related issues can play in the criminal justice system. Their commitment to improving access to services in Cree and to highlighting the problems that can result from a lack of adequate translation within the justice system is to be applauded.

While not taking away from the excellent work that has been done by the organizations mentioned above, there is clearly a need for greater support for the Cree language. This is frequently suggested by those engaged in language work who highlight the need for surveys to monitor the health of the language, support for translation, interpretation, and transcription, community programming and adult education, and increased advocacy. Indeed, the past forty years have witnessed repeated calls for the establishment of an institution devoted solely to the preservation and promotion of the Cree language.

The first came in 1979, followed by calls in 1989, 1997, 2003, 2005, and 2017:

- 1979      *Adoption of Grand Council of the Crees Board of Directors Resolution GCCQ #284 calling for the establishment of a Cree Language Commission (Proposed: Chief George Wapachee, Seconded: Chief Walter Hughboy).*
- 1989      *Adoption of Cree School Board Council of Commissioners resolution mandating the Chairperson and the Grand Chief to direct the development of a proposal for a Cree Language and Culture Commission.*
- 1997      *Cree Language and Culture Conference, which called for the establishment of a Cree Language Commission "with representatives from each community."*
- 2003      *Adoption of GCCEI/CRA Council/Board Resolution 2003-39 supporting the establishment of a Cree Language Commission (Proposed: Chief Abraham Rupert, Seconded: Thomas Jolly).*
- 2005      *Adoption of GCCEI Annual General Assembly Omnibus Resolution 2005-07 supporting the establishment of a Cree Language and Cul-*

*ture Commission (Proposed: Chief David Mast, Seconded: Elizabeth Iserhoff).*

- 2017 *Adoption of GCCEI Annual General Assembly Members' Resolution 2017-19 calling for the establishment of a framework to maintain and enhance cultural heritage and language, including support for cultural facilities that encourage lifelong learning (Proposed: Chief Kenneth Cheezo, Seconded: Susan Esau).*

There have also been repeated attempts to begin building such an institution, beginning in 1982 with the establishment of the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre and extending through Cree Regional Authority efforts from 2011-2015:

- 1982 *Establishment of the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre.*
- 1988 *Proposal for a Cree Language and Culture Commission, submitted to Mr. Billy Diamond by Theresa Pelletier.*
- 1989 *Cree Language Commission Study undertaken by the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre.*
- 1990 *Release of the Cree Language Commission Study survey results.*
- 1991 *Release of the document Cree Language Commission: A Discussion Paper by Sheila McCulley for the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre.*
- 2003 *Kuuhkumich Language Project: Strengthening and Protecting Our Iyiyuu/Inuu Language.*
- 2012 *Release of the internal discussion paper A Cree Language Commission, by Cree Language Coordinator Kevin Brousseau for the Cree Regional Authority Department of Cree Culture and Language.*
- 2013 *Manon Tremblay engaged as Advisor - Cree Language Commission, Dianne Ottereyes Reid as Consultant, and John E. Bishop as Toponymist. All positions are attached to the Cree Language Commission project, under the direction of the Cree Regional Authority's Department of Culture and Language.*

*Consultations with regards to establishing a Language Commission begin with GCCEI/Council Board and other stakeholders and carry on through 2014.*

*Letter written by Grand Chief Dr. Matthew Coon-Come to Cree School Board Chairperson Kathleen J. Wootton suggesting a Cree Language Commission be established under the responsibility of the Culture Department of the Cree Regional Authority, to be funded by matching contributions from the Cree Regional Authority and the Cree School Board, subject to agreement on the terms of reference for the Commission.*

2014 *The Cree Language Commission team completes the Cree Language Commission - Strategic Action Plan 2014-2017 in July, 2014. Consultations with entities are ongoing.*

2015 *Departure of Manon Tremblay and Kevin Brousseau. The final Cree Language Commission - Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018 is submitted by Manon Tremblay in April, 2015. Consultations with stakeholders are complete, save the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association and the Cree Language of Instruction Program team at the Cree School Board.*

The efforts spearheaded by Kevin Brousseau, Dianne Ottereyes Reid and Willie Iserhoff which culminated in the 2015 Cree Language Commission Three-Year Strategic Action Plan represented the closest the project has come to actually being established. That effort included extensive consultations with political leadership and Cree entities, and envisioned a stand-alone institution with a mandate to:

*Promote the use of the Cree language in all aspects of Cree life.*

*Empower Eeyouch/Eenouch to maintain and strengthen our ancestral language.*

*Develop and enrich the Cree language in order to realize its potential in the expression of contemporary Cree culture.*

*Preserve vocabularies and place names associated with Cree traditional lifestyle and ancestral knowledge.*

*Foster and promote the use of Cree in the workplace environment.*

*Monitor the evolution of the Cree language in Eeyou/Eenou Istchee and report to Cree leadership as required.*

*Assist and inform administration, businesses, individuals and interested groups in the standardization of Cree syllabics and roman orthography for the enrichment of the Cree language.*

*Promote the benefits of Cree fluency and literacy.*

*Protect and promote the use of Cree syllabics as the primary writing system.*

*Liaise and collaborate with Cree communities and Cree entities to achieve the above mandate.*

Unfortunately the restructuring of the Cree Nation Government, difficulties negotiating agreements relating to funding, and the departure of key staff led to the project stalling. Despite this, the 2015 Cree Language Commission Three-Year Strategic Action Plan remains a relevant and important roadmap that can inform the creation of a Cree Language Commission. Its creation was informed by widespread consultation with stakeholders, and extensive discussion with political leadership at the regional and local levels. Further, it is based upon a comparative survey of similar institutions in other minority language environments around the world.

The Crees have been calling for the creation of an institution whose sole purpose is to work on behalf of their language for close to forty years, and there can be little doubt that the creation of such an institution would be of use in informing future language maintenance efforts and supporting effective language work in the communities. The 2015 Strategic Plan envisioned a fairly autonomous language commission which would provide significant programs and services. Should the costs associated with establishing such an institution become an obstacle, however, there are certainly other examples that could inform more gradual approaches. What is important is that some sort of action is taken while there is still sufficient fluency so as to develop effective programming in all of the communities.



# The 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session

No matter how we define our future, and no matter how the future unfolds for us, we need to ensure that our work to protect and promote our Cree language continues. There is no guarantee in advance, and there is no definitive certainty, that our Cree language will survive unless we take aggressive measures to ensure its survival. With the changes that have taken place over the last four decades, there have been increasing pressures all around us that pose clear risks for the Cree language.

*Grand Chief Dr. Abel Bosum (Ouje-Bougoumou)*

The 2018 Language Engagement Session brought together close to one hundred individuals from each of Eeyou Istchee's eleven communities, and from each of the major stakeholders currently involved in language work in the territory (see the appendices for the list of delegates and program). Over three days, delegates met at Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute where they presented the work of their organizations and participated in formal and informal discussions about how best to move forward with language policy and programming.

## **Tuesday, March 13th**

*Opening Address - Grand Chief Dr. Abel Bosum*

Grand Chief Dr. Abel Bosum opened the Engagement Session with a speech high-

lighting the importance of taking decisive action on behalf of the Cree language. Placing the situation here in Eeyou Istchee in a global context, he noted the need for both urgency and care:

We have learned by looking around the world, that languages can be very vulnerable in view of the many pressures that threaten to eliminate them. In our collective effort to address this threat, we must be extremely focused and extremely careful. One small error of programming that misses the mark, or one small error of policy can have consequences for an entire generation. It only takes one generation of people who do not speak the language well, or who do not speak the language at all, to see the Cree language on its way to extinction.

He then addressed the importance of successfully engaging and supporting youth so that they continue to speak the language. While recognizing the severity of the challenge, he nonetheless insisted upon the fact that the Crees benefit from years of language work - work that has given them resources and tools with which to build the needed language maintenance efforts. He then proceeded to highlight and praise the important work that has been done - by the Cree School Board, the Cree Health Board, the Cree Nation Government, at Aanischaaukamikw, and in the communities. Concluding, he noted the importance of coming together as a people and nation to work together:

Throughout our history, we Crees have often come together, as a united and single people to struggle against challenges to our way of life and challenges to our Indigenous and our Cree rights. We are in one of those moments in history right now, and we must come together as never before to ensure the health of our Cree language for the future.

*Welcoming Address - Sarah Pashagumskum, Aanischaaukamikw*

Following the Grand Chief's opening remarks, Sarah Pashagumskum welcomed the delegates to Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute. She provided an overview of Aanischaaukamikw's history and programming, and then discussed the importance of language research in informing future decision making. Noting potential roles the Institute could play in supporting a regional language maintenance effort, she highlighted on-going work to digitize and preserve video, audio,

and textual materials in Cree. She also emphasized the importance of providing public access to such materials so that the Crees can continue to benefit from the work that has been done documenting their heritage and history. Finally, she noted Aanischaaukamikw is well-placed to support regional literacy campaigns by expanding its publishing in the Cree language.

*The Cree Language Commission Survey and Report (1989) - Janie Pachano*

The Engagement Session's first presentation concerned the *1989 Cree Language Commission Study and Report*, undertaken by the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre (JBCEC). Janie Pachano, former director of the JBCEC, detailed the history and findings of the survey - the first attempt by the Crees to assess the state of their own language.

1,149 people in each of the nine communities participated in the survey. Participants were asked if they could speak, read and write Cree, and where they learned. They were also asked about the languages they used at home, work, and school. Janie Pachano highlighted the following findings concerning the state of the language in 1989:

- 99% of the Crees were still able to speak their mother tongue.
- Literacy declined significantly in younger generations. While 83% of those 45 years and older were literate, the figure dropped to 42% of those between 26 and 44, and declined further to 25% of those under the age of 25.
- 83% saw the use of Cree as a benefit, and there was clearly a strong interest in the state of the language. Most felt that keeping the language alive was a personal responsibility. Respondents generally saw the state and future of the language in a positive light.
- 86% of respondents used Cree at home when speaking to their children. Further, they indicated that children learned to speak the language from parents, family, and friends. Despite this, many questioned the quality of the Cree language spoken by children and noted a decline in children's ability to understand elders.

Janie Pachano also described a number of challenges that were identified by the survey:

- Questions were raised as to who was responsible for language preservation. Further, there was concern that entities were working in isolation - a problem that could result in duplication of effort and a waste of human and financial resources.
- The question of how best to work at a regional level while respecting local dialects was also identified as a key challenge. Participants were clear that they did not want their dialect replaced. The need to produce materials in three dialects, however, elevated costs and could be difficult.
- Finally, challenges were identified with respect to the writing system used. It was noted that there was no standardized writing system, and that the existence of different syllabic and roman orthographies could make it difficult to produce resources and teach literacy.

The presentation concluded with a discussion of current projects being undertaken by the Nishiyuu Council of Elders. They are working on publishing booklets with pictures to aid in the identification and naming of berries, trees, and geographical features.

*The Board of Compensation's Language Initiatives - Rusty Cheezo*

Rusty Cheezo began his presentation by emphasizing the importance of the Cree language to the continued existence of the Crees as a distinct nation and people. He also signalled the willingness of the Board of Compensation to support future language maintenance initiatives. In terms of future language planning, he suggested the Session pay attention to the four "W's": Who will do the work? What will be done? When can it be done? Where will it be done? Why will it be done?

He then discussed a decision taken in December, 2017, by the Board of Compensation to develop and implement a Cree Language Policy. The goal of such a policy would be to examine what the Board could do to promote the use of the language.

The presentation concluded with his suggestion that the Cree Nation and communities pass language laws to promote and protect the Cree language. "Québec has done this," he noted, "so why can't we?"

*Cree Board of Health Language Initiatives - Bella Moses Petawabano*

Bella Moses Petawabano's presentation offered an overview of the language work

being undertaken by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services, committed the Board to playing an active role in promoting and preserving the language, and affirmed that the Crees have the right to use their own language to access healthcare services.

In terms of current initiatives, she highlighted:

- Efforts to honor and respect Cree-language patient care by teaching Cree to both Cree and non-Cree employees.
- Having two translators on staff to assist in translating documents, booklets, and medical terminology. She noted specific efforts to work on medical terminology relating to mental health, and in the context of communicating about public health, illness and well-being.
- Providing medical terminology training to interpreters so that they are able to provide accurate and precise information to patients.
- Publishing Cree-language materials, including a medical glossary with illustrations of the digestive system, respiratory system, and lymphatic system. They have developed an app that can be used to access this material.
- A program to engage elders as counsellors for those suffering from mental-health issues.
- The launch, in Chisasibi and Waskaganish, of *Waapimaausuwin* - a pilot project on traditional midwifery. The project was ten years in the making and involved interviews with over 100 elders. The interviews themselves still need transcribing.

In addition, she spoke of the need to aspire to a future whereby Cree will be the language of the workplace, and further, for youth to have a place where they can learn to speak the language well. Moving forward, she noted the Health Board needs to develop an organizational strategy to deal with language-related matters, to develop and implement a language policy, and to work on increasing support across departments for language-related work. To achieve this, she suggested it would be helpful to have clear standards and guidelines from a higher authority on the written language, a literacy survey of Eeyou Istchee, and continued partnerships with other entities to move forward collectively on work to preserve the language.

Abraham Jolly spoke to the Session about the history of the Cree School Board's Cree Language Programs. He began by noting that prior to the JBNQA, the Department of Indian Affairs held exclusive responsibility for education, and that Cree language and culture was not a factor. Further, parents had no control over the school calendar, and as a result, children were frequently unable to join parents in traditional activities. This changed with the negotiation of the JBNQA, which mandated the establishment of a Cree School Board which would, among other duties, work for the preservation of culture and language.

Jolly then proceeded to a more detailed survey of the history of Cree language instruction, beginning with the Cree Language of Instruction Program (CLIP). CLIP was established following a December 1988 Council of Commissioners and CRA resolution mandating Cree as the language of instruction for grades 1 to 3. Cree Programs was tasked with developing materials and curriculum, using the provincial curriculum as a guide. In 1991, the program was launched as a pilot in Waskaganish and Chisasibi.

Jolly noted that CLIP faced considerable challenges, which affected the ability of the program to succeed. In particular, a lack of qualified teachers, a lack of curriculum and teaching materials, poor planning and budgeting, and poor transition from CLIP to English and French language of instruction classrooms caused problems. Because of these challenges, he suggested it became clear that CLIP was not working well in all of the schools. Further, a 2004 Cree Programs survey suggested that only 50% of parents were satisfied with the program while even fewer believed in the benefits of the program. Despite this, he noted that the program did in fact work well in those schools that had good teachers.

The 2007-08 Cree School Board Educational Review, otherwise known as the CAFSI Report, analysed the success of Cree students and concluded they were not succeeding for the following reasons:

- The School Board was failing to teach students how to read.
- Literacy in two languages needed support from parents and communities.
- Kindergarten to Grade 3 are critical years for learning a language - the fact that children were reaching Grade 4 without a strong foundation in reading was harming their schooling in subsequent years.
- The structure of Cree is very different from English or French and Cree language instruction in early years did not provide for student development in

these languages.

There was a need, Jolly suggested, to find programs and policies that offered the greatest support for students seeking to master Cree and English or French. In order to achieve this, the School Board would need to better develop its understanding of bilingual education, curriculum development, and language acquisition.

Jolly concluded his presentation with a discussion of the *Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC)*, implemented in 2011. The GVC was developed by the School Board with standardized, learning targets drawn from Quebec's provincial curriculum. Importantly, the GVC is aligned with Cree language and culture and clearly indicates student expectations. In terms of the Cree-language curriculum, elementary grade curriculum was rolled out from 2011 to 2014. The secondary curriculum roll-out began in 2016. Work is currently on-going on Secondary 3 and 5 curriculum.

#### *The 1997 Cree Language and Culture Conference - Daisy Bearskin-Herodier*

Daisy Bearskin-Herodier was the next to present, speaking about the *1997 Cree Language and Culture Conference*. The 1997 conference produced a number of important recommendations, including a recommendation that a Cree Language Commission be established, that a Language and Culture Law be adopted, and that measures be taken to increase the use of Cree in the workplace and schools.

However, Daisy spoke primarily about her own long history of language work, and of the traditional education used by families for generations on the land. She told delegates that before contact with Europeans, the Crees were very capable, had a great deal of knowledge, and that they used this to advance themselves as a people. Although their life must have been difficult, they were able to "read" the land. Our ancestors, she reminded delegates, were very good at teaching their children. They showed them the skills and knowledge needed to live on the land. All of this knowledge, she emphasized, is contained in our language - there is much in our language that we do not know.

She then spoke about the word *ayaanischa*, and noted that the word can be used to speak both about the past and future. It has occurred to her while thinking about this word how good our ancestors were in developing our language.

She told everyone she was pleased to hear what was being said about learning the language, and pleased that people were planning to work together to preserve it. Elders must be used as resources when teaching children and youth, she said.

She concluded with some stories about life on the land that had been told to her over the years by elders. She remembered one man, raised on the land, who told her that he had learned all that could be taught to him by the time he was 16. She had hear another elder, from Whapmagoostui, speaking on the radio saying that by the time he was 12 he could set a net and check it by himself. Yet another elder had spoken to her of being able to shoot rapids on his own by the age of 14. This, she reminded everyone, is how successful Cree people were in teaching their children.

She also asked her audience not to forget that the “Cree mindset” about the land was very different than the “non-Cree mindset” about the same. The elders and those who grew up on the land remember what they were taught and learned. They have a lot of knowledge and they understand very well the influence this knowledge has on their lives. The Crees respected life. One of her grandfathers had once told her “when I am on the land, I am closest to the One that holds my life.”

*Cree Language Programming in Eeyou Istchee’s Daycares - Sherry-Ann Simard, Christine Duff & Shirley Diamond*

The final presentation of the day concerned Eeyou Istchee’s childcare centres. Sherry-Ann Simard, the Director of Ouje-Bougoumou’s Waspshooyan Childcare Centre, described their vision: to work with parents to provide educational programs that promote the holistic growth of all children, from newborns to those 5-years of age. Their belief, she stated, is that children are the future bearers of Cree culture and language. The challenge, in terms of mother tongue education, is that many of the children in Ouje-Bougoumou speak only English. Staff try to speak to them in Cree, but they need parental support to improve their success in teaching the children. Their goal this year is to reach out to parents in order to work on increasing parental support and involvement.

Shirley Diamond and Christine Duff also presented, offering a regional perspective on the work Child and Family Services. Their mission at the regional level is to monitor and enhance the quality and effectiveness of the services offered in each of the Centres, and to further develop their autonomy. They also over-

see, manage, and administer funding, and manage agreements including the Head Start Program, the Maternal Child Health Program, and the First Nations and Inuit Childcare Initiative. In addition, they oversee the training programs that are provided for all staff, and provide professional and technical support. They work to place Cree thought, culture, and language into all of the Centres' educational programs and work to ensure that wherever possible all services are offered to children in Cree. They have noted, however, a significant decline in the use of the language by children in the childcare centres:

(In the last several years, we have noticed a decline in the use of the mother tongue, the Cree Language, by the children in care. Many children are also interacting among each other in English. We are also seeing children communicating with their parents in the English language more today than 10 years ago.)

#### *Concluding Open Mic Discussion*

The first day ended with an open-mic discussion. **Paul Dixon** of Waswanipi spoke at length about the contrast between Cree and non-Cree education. He began with a call to parents to support their children and their schools - he was thankful for the education his children received from the Cree School Board, and saddened by the lack of support he sees for the schools. He also expressed concern about the degree to which Cree leaders place a great emphasis on formal education, too often forgetting about the importance of a Cree education based upon close observation and listening. His father taught him that formal education comes second - the most important education is the one that ensures students' feet are solidly grounded as Crees.

Paul then proceeded to discuss the benefits of a Cree education in terms of mental-health and well-being. He worries that youth caught between formal and traditional education are more likely to commit suicide, as are those whose parents are placed at a lower level in a society that values formal education. Youth who were not successful in either form of education too often end up taking their lives. Perhaps, he said, if we had put our traditional ways of learning first we might not be losing youth in this way. As individuals and families, he noted, we have the power to rise up and support our children. He then thanked the Creator for where we came from, and thanked our parents for teaching us in a good way.

**Luke Tent** of Nemaska spoke next. He noted that he has often been invited to the school to help Cree Culture teachers who were unsure of what to teach. He then told a story about being invited to help a teacher with a class of sixteen who was having difficulty getting his students to pay attention or work. Luke felt that many of the students who were acting in this way came from homes where parents were separated or who struggled with drugs and alcohol. If the problems in the community continued, Luke told the teacher, behaviour like this would always be an issue. He noted it is important to support those who are having a difficult time.

He also spoke of being invited to the Daycare, where his wife and some other elders have been asked to work. He noted that he spoke to his wife about the role of the Childcare Centres. "You are raising some parents' children for them," he told her, as many parents do not see their children from the time they drop them off until they finish working. He later noted that the state of homes in the community also has an effect on children - when children grow up in a messy environment, their minds become "messy." Finally, he spoke of the importance of nutrition - Luke noted that people are eating too much store-bought food and fried foods which leads to illness. Our ancestors, he stated, were very healthy and knew how to be healthy.

## **Wednesday, March 14th**

### *Opening Address - Deputy Grand Chief Mandy Gull*

The second day of the Engagement Session opened with an address by the Deputy Grand Chief, Mandy Gull. She spoke of the importance of maintaining the Cree language, and noted the changes that were taking place that needed to be countered. The *1989 Cree Language Commission Survey and Report*, she observed, suggested that children were learning the language from their parents, grandparents, and other family members. The same report also suggested that those communities that had no access roads spoke the language better. This, however, was no longer the case. The *1997 Cree Language and Culture Conference Report* indicated that participants wanted a Cree Language Commission to be established, and that they wanted to see more Cree used in the workplace and in meetings.

It is alarming, she noted, to know that a language can be lost within two genera-

tions. She then told a story - of taking a group of young people to a conference involving other indigenous nations. The Cree youth were the only ones there who could still speak their languages. Concluding, she encouraged everyone to always speak to their children in their own language. Specifically addressing youth, she strongly urged them to not give up - to continue to speak.

*Current CSB Education Services Initiatives - Lucy Shem, Mary Bear, Pearl Weistche & Greta Cheechoo*

The first presentation on the second day was from the Cree School Board's Education Services staff, and focused on the current work being undertaken to support Cree language teaching in the schools. The first to speak was **Lucy Shem**, the Coordinator of Cree Programs. Cree Programs was mandated by the School Board to develop the curriculum for the Cree Language of Instruction Program, and since the program ended, have been tasked with creating curriculum and resources for Cree Culture and Language Programs in the schools.

The presentation began with an overview of the materials the Cree Programs staff has developed for use in the classroom: books in Cree aimed at a variety of reading levels, dictionaries in both northern and southern dialects, illustrated thematic dictionaries, and stories by elders. She then spoke about their partnership with Carleton University which supports the website [eastcree.org](http://eastcree.org). The website is aimed at both teachers and learners and contains a wide variety of resources including elders' stories, online and downloadable dictionaries, syllabic fonts and keyboards for computers and phones, lessons, a syllabic convertor, and grammatical resources. Cree Programs staff have also developed a grammar and a spelling manual.

She then described the process Cree Programs staff use when publishing a book. Books go through a series of drafts and revisions, and elders are consulted to ensure that the content is aligned with Cree culture. She concluded by observing that there is a great deal of work that still needs to be done, and that there is a need for more human and financial resources to complete the work.

Lucy Shem was followed by **Mary Bear**, Coordinator of Professional Development for the Cree School Board. She described the language-related work her department has undertaken, including the 30-credit Cree Literacy Certificate Program, which consisted of 10 courses and was developed to support CLIP and Cree language teachers, and is open to parents seeking to help their children. The pro-

gram was developed in partnership with McGill University. To date, it has been offered 5 times and has at least 300 graduates. The current course, however, will be the last as it has been cut due a lack of financial resources. One challenge for the department relates to the size of the department, as she is one of only two educational consultants working in the department which has only recently hired her as a Coordinator.

Mary Bear also noted that there was a 30-credit program for Cree Culture and Language Teachers offered through the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi. A B.Ed. program has also been offered, again in association with McGill University, whereby a student who completes 60 credits receives a teaching permit, and 120 credits a license to teach. Again, the current cohort is the final one, but she hopes it will be offered again. In the future, she is hoping that they will be able to offer a B.Ed. Program in Cree Language and Culture.

She concluded by expressing her hope that the future will see more Crees becoming teachers. Her experience has suggested that students are more respectful when they have Cree teachers.

The Cree Programs presentation concluded with a presentation by Education Consultants **Pearl Weistche** and **Greta Cheechoo** of the Instructional Services Department who work on the development of the Cree language Guaranteed Viable Curriculum (GVC). They both spoke about recent work on the development of a curriculum for Cree Language as a subject. The content includes material relating to the Cree way of life, and is oriented according to seasonal activities.

Work began on the elementary curriculum, and the presenters suggested the initial work was rushed and overwhelming. Part of the challenge in developing the content involved navigating the relationship with non-Cree consultants who wanted their input to be included. Ultimately, Weistche and Cheechoo said they and their colleagues were able to successfully fight against this and the curriculum was fully developed by the Crees. The first version of the curriculum, released in 2012, was deemed to have too much content per school year for Grades 3-6. They decreased the content and released a second version. As the allotted time for Cree classes has decreased, they have had to again adjust the curriculum.

*Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association - Tina Mark-Ottereyes, Irene Bearskin-House & Marlene Kitchen*

**Tina Mark-Ottereyes** began the presentation by offering an overview of the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA), describing their mission statement, vision statement, and guiding values. The CWEIA aims to empower Cree women in all of the communities through support for chapters in the communities, support for women entrepreneurs, training and leadership development. Their work is based on traditional knowledge and healing, and works to encourage traditional social structures, closeness with Mother Earth and transparent and positive communication. As Mark-Ottereyes noted, the CWEIA does face challenges securing a permanent operating budget and therefore lacks funding for much of the work it hopes to pursue - including language-related work translating documents. She concluded the presentation by reminding delegates that mothers and grandmothers hold a lot of knowledge and need to be included as valued participants in future language efforts.

Mark-Ottereyes was followed by Whapmagoostui elder **Irene Bearskin-House**, who sits on the CWEIA's *Kuuhkumich Council*. She spoke of the honor and respect she holds for her language and culture and spoke of the need to turn to language and culture for healing. Our language, she noted, comes from the land - from Mother Earth - and hence can heal. Bearskin-House works with the National Women's Mental Health program, and has published a booklet on women's roles and teachings. She shared an overview of the publication which details the importance of ceremonies and rites of passage, including the naming ceremony and vision quests and fasting, and also includes discussions of worldview, language, and the traditional roles and responsibilities of men and women. Concluding, she reminded delegates that residential school taught many a foreign mindset. People need to return and think once again with a Cree mindset.

The final speaker was **Marlene Kitchen**, of Waswanipi, who also works with the *Kuuhkumich Council*. She spoke of the difficulty she experienced trying to understand elders speaking "old Cree," and then described the regular, seasonal meetings the *Kuuhkumich Council* was holding to gather teachings for Cree culture and language.

*Maintaining Our Language (Wemindji's Community Language Program) - Mary Visitor-Georgekish & Theresa Kakabat*

The afternoon saw an eagerly anticipated presentation by Mary Visitor-Georgekish and Theresa Kakabat-Georgekish from Wemindji, who are both working on the recently established *Maintaining Our Language* program - an effort by the Cul-

tural and Wellness Department in Wemindji to counter the damage done by Residential Schooling to knowledge of, and attitudes towards the Cree language. The idea for the program originated in a notice from the National Indian Brotherhood that funding was available for community education programs for residential school survivors. The Cultural and Wellness Department decided to apply for funding to support a language education program because they felt that the community would have fun trying to speak only Cree, and that this would not only serve to strengthen the language but would also contribute to the community's well-being. Further, they observed that language was often not a priority. Securing a grant of \$50,000 for three years, which was subsequently matched by the community, they are now seeking to make the language a priority in efforts to move beyond the intergenerational damage inflicted by residential schooling.

The program was developed in consultation with Cree teachers, the local Advisory Committee on Culture, and elders. The objectives of the program were to:

- replace the language and knowledge lost during years of residential schooling.
- make learning the language a positive experience, in opposition to the residential school experience.
- reach as many of the community members as possible, and ultimately, to hear the language spoken everywhere in the community.

Traditional activities are used as much as possible in teaching and learning, and the program is open to all. Activities that are being developed include a literacy program aimed at beginning and advanced readers, a "Gookum & Friends" program, a youth and family program, and Cree hymn sing-alongs. They are also working to integrate the literacy program into other activities organized by the department, hoping that it will become essential to events including craft nights, the youth café, the community kitchen, couples' lunches, and community workshops. A monthly *Maintaining Our Language* evening is also being held.

Visitor-Georgekish and Kakabat-Georgekish noted the program does have its challenges, however. It is not always easy competing with other events, including Bingo nights, and adequate space can be difficult to secure. Inconsistent attendance, challenges associated with implementing so many programs, and difficulties associated with reaching young children and parents were also noted to be

problems. Long-term, permanent funding will be needed for the program to continue.

Decreasing attendance led program organizers to opt for a greater use of social media. Facebook has been successfully used as a forum for teaching vocabulary, follow-along reading lessons with Cree hymns, and forums for discussing language issues. The Facebook page now has more than 3,000 members from across Canada and the U.S.A.

Future plans for the program include a local language symposium, a Cree Language and Culture Awareness Week, radio programming, an after-school Cree science camp, and negotiations with the band and entities so that they can release employees periodically to attend literacy classes.

#### *Language Initiatives at the James Bay Communications Society - Luke MacLeod*

The final presentation of the day was given by Luke MacLeod, Executive Director of the James Bay Cree Communication Society (JBCCS). Luke spoke about the work they are doing to ensure the language they use in their broadcasts is as high a quality as possible. Their goal, he noted, is to speak Cree properly, and to actively take measures to ensure they are using correct terminology (for example for weather and other topics where traditional vocabulary is well-developed). For this reason, they have worked closely with elders so that younger radio hosts can improve the quality of their speech. He noted that Elders are happy that they can listen to radio broadcasts in their own language.

Luke also spoke of the important work JBCCS is doing recording and preserving elders' stories - something he noted was a priority because it documents older and more complex forms of the language. Language changes depending whether one is on the land or in the community, and the recordings are important because they document much older, land-based vocabulary. Many of the JBCCS recordings are on cassettes that are too old and frail to be played, and for this reason have been digitized so they can be safely kept and used. Where it is warranted, stories can be re-told and re-recorded based upon the older recordings. He encouraged anyone with recordings at home to ensure that they are digitized.

His experience extends beyond JBCCS. He noted he was the Chair of the Cree School Board when they were negotiating to establish the CLIP program. He was encouraged by elders at the time to "fight" for the the program.

He further suggested that summer student employment programs should include language and literacy training, and spoke in favour of encouraging people to use Cree when using modern technology - for example, on social media, cell phones, and iPads. Ultimately, he concluded, the only way to prevent the language from being lost was to use it daily in the home.

### *Concluding Open Mic Discussion*

Again the day concluded with an open mic discussion. **John Petagumskum**, a Whapmagoostui elder, spoke of the importance of older ways of knowing. Long ago, he observed, our ancestors had an all encompassing way of knowledge. Their teaching came from the land. He then shared a story about John Kawapit, who used to teach Cree Culture. John would insist on taking the class outside - “that which is Cree is not in here, it is out there.”

In terms of language, John stated that there was still a lot of work to be done on the language. He concluded his discussion by speaking about naming. In the past, everyone was given a name in Cree - usually by a grandparent. The names given came from the land, or from hunting. Today, not many people do that anymore. It does not cost anything, however, to bring back this practice. His name is *Paahpaashaapinwaashkum*, given to him by his grandfather. The name refers to clouds that look like they are in a line as dawn approaches.

**Sanders Weistche** then spoke. He noted he has worked a great deal with youth, having taught them Cree Culture on the land. He finds that youth do not understand “university-level” Cree - the very old language - when he uses it in his classes. As an example, he suggested no one understands him when he says “*taan-ite etishiyihkepaat niichishkweshuu? Where is my wife?*” His wish is to hear well-spoken Cree. He allowed the Cree School Board to build a bush camp on his land, but it was not used this year. It stayed closed and the snow was not removed. Seeing this, he said, was like seeing the end of something important.

He further suggested that many he had taught when they were younger are now in their 40s and do not appear to have learned more since that time. Too many old, old words are being lost. We must try to not let this happen, he said. “There are other first nations who weep because they have lost their language.”

Whapmagoostui elder **Samson Petagumskum** addressed the session, speaking about the situation in his community. There are many parents, he said, who are

choosing to teach their children English instead of Cree. Two of his own grandchildren find it easier to speak in English. It is as if some of his own children do not want to use the old Cree words. He then spoke of how difficult it can be to see more and more young people turning to English:

When I hear our younger people turning more and more to the English language, it is as if I am becoming weak, that I am losing my strength. When they do not do what their parents have told them to do, it is as if we do not have the strength to carry them when do not want to live the real Cree culture and speak the real language. We cannot but still love them, help them and feel compassion for them. It seems like they (the youth) still want to come to us to learn, but we (the elders) are not as strong as we were in the past in raising our young people. Yet I am happy to know that we are trying to maintain our language.

The mic was then passed to Mistissini elder **Isaac Loon** who related a short story about his own experience learning to read and write. He was raised by the late Isaac Shecapio. Isaac Shecapio would write down what happened each day in Cree on a calendar. Sometimes, Isaac Loon said, I would read what he wrote. At first he could not understand what was written, but there came a day when he could read and understand it. He suggested that perhaps this could be an activity that one could use to learn to read and write.

**Thomas Coon**, of Mistissini, followed Isaac. He noted he was thankful for the gathering on Cree language and culture, observing that it felt like he was being awoken to look at the state of our language. He then spoke of the way the language is being lost with each new generation - our grandparents, he observed, spoke only Cree. His generation was sent to residential school and were taught English or French - they knew less of the old language. His children's generation speaks even less Cree, making it even harder for them to keep the language for their own children. Addressing youth, he encouraged them to try their hardest to use the language: "Do not reject being Cree or speaking your language."

Echoing previous speakers, he emphasized the fact that few people are still named in Cree, and urged people to bring back Cree names. Concluding, he noted that hope rests with us to maintain and keep our language. Let us do what Wemindji is doing, he said: "we are the only hope."

Following Thomas, a couple of current and former teachers addressed the session. The first was **Alvin Cheezo**, a former CLIP and Cree Culture teacher in his home community of Eastmain. He began by thanking his former Cree-language teacher Florrie Mark-Stewart, as well as Josephine Gilpin, and the late Martha Dixon. He noted that he is proud to have taken the Cree Literacy Program and graduated with his certificate, as well as the Teacher Training program. He taught the Pre-K/K class and is pleased to say that all of his students graduated from Secondary 5. The population is growing, and he believes there is a need to increase the size of the Pre-K/K classroom. He concluded by noting the importance of having more Crees training as teachers. More Cree teachers are needed within the Cree School Board.

The second teacher to speak was **Flora Otter**, a Cree Culture teacher from Waswanipi. She emphasized that language goes with culture, and expressed her appreciation for the assistance she gets from the Cree Trappers' Association. The resources she gets from them helps her in her teaching. She then spoke of a conversation she once had with her father. He told her to listen to the birds and trees. It saddens her, she said, that the students do not have the chance to be on the land. She would like to see the *kusaapahchikan* and drum brought back. Her students, however, told her that these were considered evil. This leads her to feel like some of our education is being blocked. She concluded by noting that she will follow what her father told her.

**David Erless** from Waskaganish then spoke. He suggested that a Cree Language Resource Centre is needed. He also spoke of his own family and the fact that they have a rule in his house - to only speak in Cree. It is the parents' responsibility, he noted, for how their children behave in school. Concluding, he argued that it is ultimately up to us - if we do not speak our language, we will lose it, and we will lose our culture. We do not want that to happen, he said.

Following David, another teacher spoke. **Charles Cheezo**, from Nemaska but a long time teacher in Waskaganish, observed that he was learning a lot from what people are saying. He was pleased to hear the words people used, and the wisdom they were offering. He then spoke about goose break - at first, three weeks were taken. Now it is only two. The practice of Cree culture has decreased because of this decision. He then said he would like to know who decided this, as it seems like the Cree School Board is too like a non-Cree institution, in spite of its name. He believes there is a need for more Cree principals who will understand what it is like to teach Cree culture. As things are now, there are many things that

cannot be taught - such as making bear grease. He concluded by noting that it would be useful to have separate buildings with stoves, to be used for teaching Cree Culture and Language classes.

The day's proceedings ended with **Luke Tent** of Nemaska. He expressed his gratitude for having been invited, and noted he would like to hear more about the challenges faced by the Cree Culture teachers. He then noted that he had gone around the building (Aanischaaukamikw) and enjoyed the displays of birds and the beaver. This is what the schools should be like, he said. He finished by noting there is much to be learned from animals like these:

I understand what the birds and the beaver say. They predict the weather by their behaviour. If there is to be a mild snowfall, they give us messages.

## **Thursday, March 15th**

### *Opening Address - Willie Iserhoff*

The final day of the session began with a speech from Willie Iserhoff - the Director of the Cree Nation Government Department of Social and Cultural Development. He expressed his gratitude to all of the delegates who attended the session, and affirmed his belief that our language will not be lost. We can keep it if we work hard. He also spoke of his pride at seeing Roméo Saganash address the Canadian Parliament in Cree - a very visible reminder that our language has not yet been lost.

He spoke of his experience over the years attending meetings and conferences dealing with culture and language, and emphasized that while he was happy to see the conference come to life, the conference was only the first step:

Conferences like the one this week are very important and I thank everyone who has come here and participated and shared their visions, their ideas and their thoughts. But conferences will not be enough for us to prevent the loss of our language. We will now need to act - carefully, yes, but we need to act decisively and with determination.

Echoing the Grand Chief, Willie re-emphasized that the Cree Nation Government, the Community Governments, and the entities have significant resources to bring to the cause of language maintenance. Further, he noted that his department had filled the Cree Language Coordinator position, and that Dorothy Stewart would be working to coordinate the needed cooperation between the different entities, governments, and departments as they move forward. He was confident that she would be supported by political leadership, as well as by grassroots volunteers. He hoped the calls to action that would emerge from the session would guide our vision for the future.

Concluding, he urged delegates to carry back the ideas that have emerged from this session, and from previous conferences, and begin the hard work of developing the programs and creative measures needed to sustain Cree:

It is my prayer that our next Cree Language Conference will be different. Instead of our talking about what we should be doing to protect and promote our Cree language, it is my fervent hope that our next conference will be about measuring our success with the programs and services we will have created between now and then. Let our next Cree Language Conference be about evaluating what we have done from this day forward. And let our next Cree Language Conference be about celebrating together our collective achievements in preserving our language, and let us celebrate that we have done what needs to be done...

*Youth Perspectives on securing Iyiyuu Ayimuwin's future - Youth Grand Chief Kaitlyn Hester-Moses, Deputy Youth Grand Chief Robin Gull-Saganash, Jordan Masty, Samantha Awashish, Stacy Anderson, & Alex Moses*

The first presentation of the day was a panel discussion involving the delegates representing the Cree Nation Youth Council. They began by outlining the work of the Youth Council, noting that it works with the youth of Eeyou Istchee to facilitate the development of their capabilities, leadership, and joy for life. Its ultimate goal is to ensure that youth can grow as responsible members and contributors to their communities and to the nation as a whole. Their work includes mandates to promote, preserve, and protect Cree identity and Cree culture and heritage. They are also tasked with implementing programs designed to help youth further their development and growth, and hence to fulfil their potential as Cree Nation

members and as future leaders.

Programs offered by the Youth Council include youth and elder gatherings, the regional canoe brigade, the winter journey through the heart, Cree Nation Summer Games, an Annual General Assembly, and an Inspire Hope Conference. They hope in future to expand their ability to lead, direct, teach, and provide youth with greater opportunities to learn and practice their language and culture.

Delegates then spoke directly from their own experience. They all spoke of trying to speak Cree at work, but noted that they sometimes resorted to a mixture of Cree and English (Creenglish). They find themselves resorting to Creenglish because they do not know a word for what they want to say.

Jordan Masty noted that youth from Whapmagoostui are often considered to be fluent speakers, but even so, he felt that their use and knowledge of the language was still in decline. He then spoke of the efforts he makes to improve his own knowledge - that when he hears a word he doesn't understand he frequently goes to ask what the word means. He also emphasized that there are some youth who graduated from school, and who speak Cree very well and are very knowledgeable about their culture. It is important to ensure these youth are given opportunities.

Delegates also spoke of the challenges that came with their efforts to speak the language. Their efforts to speak in their mother tongue is frequently met with an English response - many youth understand, but are not comfortable speaking. They all noted they were making the language a priority and trying to speak to their children in the language.

Importantly, they requested that they not be mocked or laughed at in their attempts to speak:

We must not look down on those youth who do not speak Cree properly. We must look at them equally as learners of the language and of the culture. This will encourage them and instill strength in them as they will be future leaders and the ones to transmit knowledge of the language and culture in the future.

Samantha Awashish, from Mistissini, spoke of the situation in her community. Youth in Mistissini also feel they are still losing their language. Further, she noted the ways the language is changing between generations makes it difficult to com-

municate with elders. Elders frequently do not understand because of the way youth speak, and likewise, youth have difficulty understanding elders because they speak “real” Cree.

All of the delegates felt that they need help from elders in their efforts to learn to speak the language better. They also suggested that efforts be made to use modern technology to reach youth and to help them learn. It would be useful, they said, to develop apps, virtual reality, and to translate children’s programs into the language. Further, online Cree language and literacy courses would be helpful.

Youth delegates also suggested that a Cree Language Resource Centre that is accessible to all would help those who wish to work to increase their fluency. For those who travel south for post-secondary, there was a need for greater support - perhaps an on-site Cree tutor, or Cree language courses. Concluding, they called for action to be taken now. If it is just talked about for 10 years, they argued it will be as if we are “covering” the language. There is an urgent need to raise the profile of the language again - not only for youth, but for the young children and those yet to come.

Concluding, they spoke of taking inspiration from previous generations who fought to retain the language:

We must not ever again let anyone prevent them from speaking Cree as happened in the residential schools. We recognize that many past and present leaders who attended residential schools fought hard to keep the language alive no matter what they experienced while there.... Let us show the youth that we can do what we say we will do.

*Open Mic Discussion of the Cree Nation Youth Council Presentation*

The Youth Council panel discussion ended with a spontaneous show of support from the delegates in attendance, who lined up to hug and congratulate the youth for their words. This was followed by an open-mic discussion.

**Lucy Shem** noted that Cree Programs had been approached to teach shared Cree courses at a number of schools and post-secondary institutions in the south that have significant numbers of Cree students. Unfortunately, she said, they were unable to do so at this time.

**Charles Cheezo** spoke of the importance of ensuring youth were fully involved in community activities. He offered the example of having them help in traditional cooking for feasts - this would enable them to learn from those who are older than them.

**Evelyn Stevens** observed that many of those who study down south seem to be forgetting their language because they are spending so much time in a non-Cree environment, and do not hear the language being spoken enough. **Barbara Blackned** agreed, suggesting she too has seen a decrease in the fluency of elementary students who attend school down south while their parents attend post-secondary programs.

**David Erless** responded to some comments Jordan Masty had made, agreeing that it was true that it would be impossible to return to the way of life of long ago. Even if there is a lot of change, he suggested, if the Crees consistently do what they want to do, they will be able to succeed. He also spoke of the need for urgency, as fluent speakers are being lost every year. Those are the people who have that which we want to maintain, he said.

**Elijah Sandy** spoke of the importance of traditional family structures to future efforts. The Cree way of life can be likened to a Cree lodge. Every member of an extended family lived in the lodge and had their place within it. Children were very carefully looked after. This family circle was broken, however, when so many were taken to residential schools. People lost their sense of family. People no longer knew where they belonged. To save our language and culture, he suggested, we need to reclaim our Cree lodge. We need to reclaim our language, identity, and mindset.

**John Petagumskum** addressed the youth, and reassured them that there were many fluent speakers and elders who could help them, and who would help them.

**Daniel Mark-Stewart** addressed parents, asking them to acknowledge those children who decide to postpone higher education in order to pursue Cree knowledge through living on the land.

*Cree Nation Government Language Initiatives - Dorothy Stewart*

In the final presentation of the Session, Cree Language Coordinator Dorothy Stewart presented the current and on-going language-related work of the Depart-

ment of Social and Cultural Development. She began by offering a timeline of the language initiatives to date (see the Appendices) and noted that the first call for a Cree Language Commission was in 1979 - almost 40 years ago. Over the years, the call was repeated regularly, and in 2015 a Strategic Plan for a Cree Language Commission was produced. Implementation efforts were delayed, however, due to the restructuring of the Cree Nation Government and the departure of key employees in the Department of Social and Cultural Development.

Dorothy then told delegates that since 2017 there has been a renewal of efforts. She was hired as Cree Language Coordinator in 2017, and this has allowed for language-related initiatives to once again proceed. In particular, she highlighted the following initiatives:

- A Regional Cree Language Engagement Session. The last language conference was held in 1997, so this session was long overdue. Such Engagement Sessions need to be held more regularly, possibly every two years.
- A Regional Language Survey. The goal of the survey will be to support the development of language policy and programs, to monitor the health of the language, and to monitor attitudes towards the language. A pilot survey will be launched in Chisasibi, followed by a full survey in all of the communities.
- The establishment of a Cree Language Commission. There is still a need for a Commission, but some challenges remain to be worked out. It will be necessary to discuss the structure and administration of a commission with political leadership. The 2015 Strategic Plan could be still be used, but the recent establishment of the Eeyou Planning Commission does offer another possible, and more gradual model.
- Place Names Project. The department's place names project was formally mandated by Council/Board in 2017 and is proceeding with its work. It has corroborated 40 years of research and currently contains approximately 18,000 gathered names, 14,000 of which can be accurately mapped. Ongoing surveys involve consultation with elders, tallymen, and other land-users.

Dorothy also noted the existence of some challenges that will need to be addressed moving forward. In particular, there is a need to clarify the relationship between the Cree Nation Government and the Cree School Board as it pertains to language work. This should not delay work, however, as there is a great deal of work to be

done. Current projects can proceed without risk of duplicating Cree School Board efforts. The other significant challenge relates to staffing - currently the Department only has two staff members working on language-related issues. There is a need for further staff, including language technicians, translators, a traditional knowledge researcher, and a webmaster.

### *Closing Open Mic Discussion*

The final afternoon of the Session ended with a period of informal discussion among delegates, and a final open mic session.

**Paul Dixon** spoke about the need to consider what is really at stake when speaking about saving the language. To save the language, he noted, will require the Crees to save their ancestral land:

We cannot fool ourselves into thinking we can save only our language. Without our culture we will be spiritually adrift. Our elders have told us that the land is our home, our church, and our classroom. It would be very easy to lose our culture. To save our language we must save our land.

This is why, he said, a Cree Language Commission must not be a band-aid solution - it must be properly set up, and it must be effective. Concluding, he mentioned he was saddened that many of the political leaders were unable to stay for the full session to hear what was said. He thanked Bella Moses Petawabano, Kathleen Wootton, and Louisa Wynne for staying for the full three days.

**Eddie Pashagumskum**, from Chisasibi, spoke next and addressed the youth present. In my mind, he said, I go back to the time of our ancestors - our great-grandparents and grandparents. They were not worried about their language. If we look back, he said, when they sat talking to one another, listening to each other with respect, they did not say to anyone that he was not saying words right or telling them tht it was not the correct way to say it. He then continued, noting the respect needed for one another's speech:

As I drove here today, I was listening to the livestream. I heard someone speak about where our language came from. Our ancestors knew

where the language came from and they respected everyone. They respected each other's way of speaking and way of writing. Today, it is as if there is much confusion. There are many books now. Long ago, when someone read anything that another person wrote, one could be identified as to what community he was from, from the way he wrote. Our ancestors did not say that it was not the way to write.

Long ago, he observed, the path that our ancestors followed was not wide. Today, where we are, that path has widened. There are many directions to go in. He then urged delegates to use what our ancestors have showed us. He asked those present, are we going to follow their path?

He continued, speaking of his work with youth on the land. To the youth, he said, do not stop learning what you want to learn. Do not be stopped by thinking that you will lose the language. The late Billy Diamond had western education and also knowledge of where he came from. Look at what he did. If you draw on our faith and beliefs, he concluded, then the obstacles and challenges you face will only make you stronger.

**Billy Katapatuk Sr.** was the next to speak. He remembered that he learned to speak Cree as a child, but that he lost much of it when he was in residential school. There they were not allowed to speak it. For him, it was difficult to re-learn the language. He then reminded those present that it was their right to speak their own language, and to use, retain, and develop that language.

Mistissini's **Mary-Jane Petawabano** then addressed the session. She has worked as a translator and can read and write in Cree. She told everyone that she would not say that she believed that we are losing our language. We need to strengthen it, she argued. We must pass on our knowledge to the youth, that which the Creator has given us.

She then spoke of an experience they had in Mistissini when setting up the language department. She remembered an elder, who has since gone home, who would come and sit with us. He once told us, "do you know the work you are doing is the most important, working with the Cree language?" Finishing her speech, she offered some thoughts on how best to strengthen the language: to use it at home, to have signs in Cree, and for the Cree School Board and the Band Office to help each other. It is not only for the Cree School Board to do this work, she said.

**Margaret Fireman** followed, speaking of her experience establishing the Chisasibi Heritage and Cultural Centre. She told delegates that one priority of the Heritage Centre is the Cree language. She noted they sought the help and support of elders when the Centre was in its planning stages. We listened to them, she said, and did not leave the room while they were speaking. It is said that the “heart of a language is in its speakers.”

The elders advised them not to keep talking about what they were planning to do, not to simply meet about it over and over again. Rather, she said, they advised them: “Do it! Do what it is that you want to do.” She then passed the same advice along to the delegates: if you want to maintain your language, don’t ask someone else - just do it! So, she concluded, let us do this now.

Margaret Fireman was followed by the current Executive Director of the Chisasibi Heritage and Cultural Centre, **Beverly Cox**. She spoke of her love of being Cree and of being able to speak her own language. She then encouraged the youth, saying that she felt deeply when hearing what the youth had to say about not being fluent in the language. I was there too, she said. She concluded by relating to the delegates the strength she draws from her language, telling everyone that her language strengthens her as a Cree and she wants to pass it on to her grandchildren so they will be strong and keep it going into the future.

**George Blacksmith** of Mistissini then spoke of the strength he received from renewing his connection to the land. He told delegates that he lost his parents when he was very young, and that he was raised by another family. He went to residential school and then pursued a higher education, but after a while, he grew very tired of it and wanted to go on the land. This is what he did. He told the man who raised him of his plan to go on the land, and the man agreed. George told the delegates he went first, on his own, to prepare the camp. They lived there on the land for 5 years. He said that when he got to where they would be staying, that is when he knew where George Blacksmith was and how he came to know where he came from. He wept, he said, but he found peace. His heart was in a good place. He felt that living on the land allowed him to let go of some of what he had experienced in residential school. That is where he found peace and healing.

He then related another story - of his daughter’s walking-out ceremony. When she was born, he said, an elder told him that his daughter would have her walking-out ceremony on his land. So she had her walking-out ceremony on the man’s land, but George never asked him why he had said that. Years later, however, he

did ask him why he had made the request. The elder told George that to know both ways of education - formal and traditional - would make his daughter strong, and that his children would have the strength to be able to maintain their language.

The final speaker of the open mic session was **Florrie Mark-Stewart** of Eastmain. She told delegates that she started teaching Cree in the school at the request of the chief at the time, the late Matthew Shanush. When she started, they had no pencils or paper or anything at all that they could use in the class - she had to make everything. She also spoke of the history of Crees using the written language, whether putting symbols on clothing, or writing notes to one another while on the land. Long ago, she said, when travelling on the land, people who knew how to read and write in Cree left notes written on birchbark using coals from the fire to let others who may come by know how they were doing.

She was grateful, she said, for all of the work that has been done for the teaching of the language. She then told everyone that it was her hope that all the youth who are trying to keep their language alive would succeed in their efforts. This language, she reminded delegates, was given to us by the Creator:

It is my hope that we will always keep our language and make it strong.  
It is also my hope that we will teach our children and youth, including  
how to read and write it.

**Willie Iserhoff** then stood and thanked delegates for their support and attendance.







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(I often wonder what, in 10 years' time, what kind of Cree we will have. It seems that sometimes we are making up our own Cree language. This is not just in Whapmagoostui; it happens everywhere. We youth are changing our Cree language; we mix English and Cree together: Creenglish.)

As mentioned earlier, the Crees still have the ability to act. It is imperative that action be taken decisively.

### **Stages of Language Loss**

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(Back home, there are youth who speak both English and Cree. We put our own language as a priority. We are still losing our Cree language. When we speak to Elders, they cannot understand us because of the way we speak Cree and when they speak to us, we cannot understand them as they speak the old, old Cree.)

*Jordan Masty (Whapmagoostui)*

It is important that people understand the ways in which languages are lost. To those who hear the Cree language spoken on a regular basis the language may not appear to be in any danger. The fact is, however, that language loss can occur very quickly. The process is not necessarily gradual, and it can happen inside of a couple of generations if high enough

numbers of children lose their language. Such children will grow to become parents unable to speak or pass on the language to their own children, and the phenomenon will snowball.

The *Cree Language Commission Three-Year Strategic Action Plan, 2015-2018* described a number of the ways linguists describe languages in terms of their health and stability (Department of Culture and Language, 2015: 7-8). The following terms describe very well the different possibilities:

**Developing language** A healthy language that has an increasing number of speakers. A developing language is spoken fluently and actively by all segments of the population. It has a high number of monolingual speakers.

**Stable language** A language that retains an important number of speakers. Stable languages are usually spoken by most community members, including the very young. A stable language can still experience a decrease in speakers without its status being affected.

**Shifting language** A language that is in the process of changing its health status. A shift can occur for the better or for the worse. It can also occur slowly or rapidly depending on the factors that are contributing to the shift.

**Threatened language** A language that retains a significant amount of speakers. It is used in day-to-day communications but is losing ground to a more dominant language. A threatened language is typically experiencing a loss of speakers, especially among the very young.

**Endangered language** A language that has a steadily decreasing number of speakers. The number of speakers represents a small percentage of the cultural community. Endangered speakers typically have no monolingual speakers left and the average speaker is an older adult.

**Moribund language** A language that only has a handful of elderly speakers left. It is typically no longer used as a means of communication between speakers. A moribund language is usually on the brink of extinction.

**Extinct language** A language that has no fluent speakers left. There may remain a handful of semi-speakers.

The authors of the *Cree Language Commission Three-Year Strategic Action Plan* suggest that “although the Cree language is perceived by many to be safe from immediate danger of extinction, it has been undergoing a **shift from stable to threatened in the past 30 years**” (Department of Culture and Language, 2015: 13). Many of the delegates to the 2018 Language Engagement Session painted a picture of the current situation very much in line with this analysis - while the language is still widely spoken, children in the communities are increasingly speaking English in place of Cree. **If this situation is allowed to continue, the risk is that Cree will become endangered and English will come to assume a dominant place in Cree society.**

Linguists have further described a series of stages that can be used to describe and understand how language loss occurs. The following stages progress from 1 (whereby the language is strongest) to 8 (the weakest, in which a language is in serious danger of being lost) (Reyhner, Cantoni & St. Clair, 1999):

**Stage 1** A language is very widely spoken, and is used in higher levels of government and education, including colleges and/or universities.

**Stage 2** A language is widely spoken, and is used in lower government services and mass media. In communities where literacy is not very high, the language is used in government but records are generally kept in the colonial or majority language.

**Stage 3** A language is widely spoken, and is used in places of business and among employees, but is frequently not used by supervisors.

**Stage 4** A language is widely spoken, and is required to be instructed in schools. *Here it is important that the language not be taught only as a distinct subject, but rather that it is used to teach academic subject matter. In this way, it is clearly communicated to students that the language is a one with which to engage knowledge about the world they live in.*

**Stage 5** A language is widely spoken in the community, but is only taught on a voluntary basis in schools.

**Stage 6** Widespread use of the language is breaking down, but there is still some intergenerational use of the language in homes. It is critical at this stage that parents be encouraged to use the language with their children, and that there be spaces where children are encouraged to regularly speak the language.

**Stage 7** A language may have many fluent speakers, but most, if not all, are beyond their child-bearing years. This means it is very difficult for children to be raised in environments where the language is spoken well and as the principal language. For these languages it is important that parents and children be targeted together, and that both learn the language alongside one another.

**Stage 8** Only a few elders speak the language, and the language is on the verge of being lost.

At first glance, the stages may appear to be a somewhat awkward fit for the current situation in Eeyou Istchee, as they tend to place a great deal of emphasis on the kinds of institutions that regularly use a language. Institutions have power, however, and can have a big influence on how, when, and where people speak a language.

*For example, a student who aspires to higher education may not place great importance in a language they cannot use for their studies, a parent who speaks one language all day at their workplace may have difficulty switching to another at home with their children, and a child who attends a school all day in one language may have difficulty understanding why they should switch to another when playing with their friends. Parents may worry about which language will allow their children to succeed in the workplace or at school.*

This is why so many of the Calls to Action made later in this document have to do with the ways in which Cree entities and governments in Eeyou Istchee use and teach the language.

*If the Cree language is to be valued and widely spoken, then it is important that it be used in as many facets of life as possible.*

The situation today in Eeyou Istchee does not match exactly any of the stages described above, as the Cree language does have some institutional support. The language is used in schools, at many workplaces, and in government. In each of these places, however, one could suggest that Cree is currently losing ground to English. In the schools, it is only taught as a discrete subject for most grades *and is not used as a language of instruction*. In



*census exercise in some communities. Furthermore, census forms are not designed to gauge an individual's level of fluency. As a result, the reported number of speakers may include individuals who are semi-speakers or who overestimate their language skills out of a sense of pride and identity. This is particularly true in situations of language endangerment (Department of Culture and Language, 2015: 9).*

That is why the Cree Nation Government will begin developing and implementing Cree language surveys in the coming years. That said, there is sufficient information available to clearly establish the fact that current trends are not good and need to be aggressively countered.

The mere fact that the Crees have been calling for support for the language for the last forty to fifty years demonstrates that there is a longstanding awareness that the Cree language faces challenges that need to be confronted (see Section 3). Further, the experience of other First Nations in Canada, North America, and globally, shows that people are right to be concerned.

The James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre's 1989 *Cree Language Commission Study* was clear in its assessment of the situation as it existed thirty years ago:

*In order to strengthen the Cree language and keep it flourishing, the time has come to be aware of the dangers it faces. When Native people were living in remote places, the mother tongue was always used and was not threatened. Now with exposure to radio, television, videos, magazines, newspapers, and books in many other languages, the Native voice is becoming silent. This silence can become total if Cree are not aware of their responsibility (Bobbish-Salt, et al., 1990: 5).*

A more recent study undertaken by the Cree School Board painted a truly troubling picture of the degree to which young children entering school were able to speak Cree. The 2010 Department of Education Services study assessed the Cree language skills of 99 five-year olds across the Cree School Board's nine schools and concluded that:

*If Cree is not fostered and promoted in a highly protected environment in CSB schools, the five year olds we assessed will have completely lost communicative*

*competence in their mother tongue before the end of their teens, an absolutely tragic prospect. Furthermore, if Cree demographics are factored into the mix and consideration given to the high percentage of the population under the age of 25, it becomes apparent that the Cree language as a whole is currently dangerously close to the point of no return. If no concerted action is taken to preserve and promote the Cree language in school and elsewhere in the community, Cree could well be moribund or completely dead within a generation (Department of Education Services, 2010: 10).*

The 2015 *Cree Language Commission Three-Year Strategic Action Plan* adopted a somewhat more measured tone, but still assessed the situation as critical. Again, they highlighted the fact that urgent action is needed to reverse trends with the youngest generations:

*A significant proportion of Eeyou Istchee's youngest members are not fluent speakers. Because 63% of Eeyou Istchee's population is under the age of 25, the Cree language will reach endangered status in less than a generation. Endangered status is conferred on languages where few children speak the language and a significant proportion of young adults are not fluent (Department of Culture and Language, 2015: 13).*

Recalling the earlier discussion of the stages of language loss, it is worth remembering here that the critical turning point is not when there are no speakers, but rather when there are no longer fluent speakers who are having children.

The 2015 *Strategic Plan* also highlighted the important link between language and culture:

*The process of cultural and language loss has already begun in Eeyou Istchee. Youth have lost much of the vocabulary related to life in the bush. Older, experienced hunters and gatherers increasingly find themselves having to explain traditional ways of knowing that were implicit only a generation ago (Department of Culture and Language, 2015: 14).*

This observation was regularly and widely repeated by delegates to the 2018 Engagement Session who spoke of the need to teach culture and language together. It is for this reason that the development of land-based education programs, both in and out of schools, is being recommended below.

While we agree with the above assessments, and share their concern about the state of the language among Eeyou Istchee's youngest generations, **we would like to conclude this discussion by emphasizing strongly that there is still time to act.** The 2018 Engagement Session took place almost entirely in Cree and illustrated nicely that the language is still very much alive. There is a large population of speakers that are fluent and are capable of teaching the language. We must take advantage of this now.

*What is needed is a broad and firm commitment of resources and effort at regional and local levels that engages ALL of the principal stakeholders in Eeyou Istchee.*





their lives. It is because they don't have that sense of family; that he does not know where he belongs. As Crees, we have the strength to reclaim our Cree Lodge, Iyiyuu Aschii. Here, I hear questions about what can we do and how can we can save our language and culture. It all starts in our homes, in our families. This is where our work is - to help our children know who and what a Cree is, that we are Cree in our Cree Lodge. This is how we will become well. Bring back our elders in to our Lodges so they can look after us and teach us so that we will not lose our Cree way of life.)

*Elijah Sandy (Whapmagoostui)*

Any effort to sustain and support the Cree language in Eeyou Istchee must be founded in a respect for the traditional ways the Crees have educated their children for generations. Delegates were unanimous in their emphasis that the primary responsibility for teaching the language lies with families. In light of this, we would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the following:

*Parents have the future of the language in their hands. Those who speak Cree fluently can make a deliberate and sustained effort to speak their mother-tongue to their children, and in doing so they will raise future parents who will have the ability to teach their own children.*

*Parents who do not speak Cree fluently can make a deliberate and sustained effort to improve their own knowledge of the language, and in doing so they will communicate clearly to their children that their mother-tongue is worthy of effort.*

*Elders are the experts whose guidance should inform every aspect of language teaching and learning. Every effort should be made to ensure that they are given the support needed so that they can regularly teach their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In doing so we will instill a respect for elders, a willingness to listen and learn, and a commitment to the value of the culture and language they carry.*

*Those who are learning must be encouraged to speak publically and often, as only in speaking will they continue to learn. Their efforts should be celebrated.*

*There can be no place for shame or embarrassment, as these will only further diminish the place of the Cree language in Eeyou Istchee's homes and communities. To learn something, you must commit yourself to practice.*

## **Families Need Support**

(When I hear our younger people turning more and more to the English language, it is as if I am becoming weak, that I am losing my strength. When they do not do what their parents have told them to do, it is as if we do not have the strength to carry them when they do not want to live the real culture and speak the real language. We cannot help but still love them, help them and feel compassion for them.)

*Samson Petagumskum (Whapmagoostui)*

While the primary responsibility for teaching children to speak Cree lies with families, it is also true that families need support - from regional entities and governments. There are powerful institutions that support English and French and signal their importance, and it is no accident that they are increasingly prominent in Eeyou Istchee. Support for the Cree language is necessary for a variety of reasons:

*To inspire families and parents to make the choice to speak, teach, and learn Cree.*

*To give families and parents the confidence that teaching their children to speak Cree is the right thing to do and will benefit their children in many ways.*

*To give families and parents the resources they require to speak, teach, and learn Cree.*

*To give families and parents the freedom to choose to have their children educated in their mother-tongue, and to ensure that when they do so their children will receive a high quality education that is firmly founded in their own communities and culture.*

*To give families and parents the confidence that a strong knowledge of Cree will lead to further opportunities in terms of employment and education.*

*To ensure that the Cree language is visible everywhere as the primary language in Eeyou Istchee.*

To accomplish these goals, we offer the following calls to action:

### **Calls to Action for All Stakeholders**

1. That all Cree Entities, Governments, and Businesses in Eeyou Istchee be asked to develop a Cree-Language Policy so as to establish the rights and responsibilities of their organizations and employees with respect to the Cree language, and so as to communicate the role their organizations can play in teaching the language and supporting a regional language maintenance initiative.
2. That all stakeholders establish mentorship programs that pair youth with elders and facilitate the teaching and learning of Cree culture and language.
3. That the Cree Nation Government, community governments, and regional entities commit to Cree as the primary and official language of communication in Eeyou Istchee, and that public relations and publications fully reflect this commitment.
4. That the Cree Nation Government, community governments, and regional entities develop and implement land-based education programs aimed at immersing adults and youth in Cree culture and language on the land, and that such education programs be available in all seasons, and engage elders as instructors. The development of such programs should examine and learn from existing models elsewhere, including the Tshikapisk Foundation program at Kamestastin, Labrador, and the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning in Weledeh Dene Territory, and should consider whether to engage in partnerships with non-Cree educational institutions. (For info, see [tshikapisk.org](http://tshikapisk.org) & [dechinta.ca](http://dechinta.ca)).
5. That the Cree Nation Government, community governments, and regional entities publish, and produce some materials and programming in the Cree language that are unilingual and not bilingual so that there are materials that are accessible only in Cree. It is too easy for people to avoid learning and improving their Cree-language skills if bilingual materials allow for ready access in English or French.

## **Calls to Action for the Cree Nation Government**

6. That the Cree Nation Government and Cree Community Governments pass an Iyiyuu Ayimuwin Protection Law, and that the Cree Constitution be amended to enshrine Cree-language rights for beneficiaries.
7. That the Cree Nation Government renew efforts to establish a Cree Language Commission that can coordinate language maintenance efforts at the regional level, and that the Commission be structured in such a way that communities have representation.
8. That the Cree Nation Government initiate Cree Language Surveys to monitor the health and use of the Cree language, and to raise the profile of the Cree-language related issues in Eeyou Istchee.
9. That the Cree Nation Government and the other principal stakeholders establish a working group to examine and report on funding for Cree-language programming and activities in Eeyou Istchee, and that the mandate include a survey of existing funding, a survey of potential sources for additional funding, a review of existing needs, and suggestions to improve cooperation around funding for language programming.
10. That the Cree Nation Government and the other principal stakeholders establish a working group tasked with recommending measures to increase the use of the Cree language in the workplace in Eeyou Istchee.
11. That the Cree Nation Government and the other principal stakeholders establish a working group to examine and report on support for Cree-language publishing in Eeyou Istchee, with the aim of establishing a regional, co-ordinated approach to encouraging and increasing Cree-language publishing.
12. That the Cree Nation Government, the Eeyou Istchee Baie James Regional Government, Community Governments, and Entities, take measures to ensure that the Cree language is prominent on all signage and public displays in Eeyou Istchee, and that existing agreements regarding Cree as an official language are fully enforced in this regard.
13. That the Cree Nation Government and Community Governments engage the Commission de Toponymie du Québec to request official recognition for Cree-language place names in Eeyou Istchee.

14. That the Cree Nation Government, the Cree School Board, and other principal stakeholders cooperate to establish language education programs for adults, youth, and parents and children, and that these programs include a broadly-targeted Cree literacy campaign as well as programs aimed at meeting certification needs applicable to Cree-language use in the workplace.
15. That 2020 be declared as a “Year of Iyiyuu Ayimuwin” and that the Cree Nation Government, Community Governments, and all principal stakeholders be encouraged to launch programming and activities celebrating the Cree language as a way to build momentum around the need for greater effort with respect to the Cree language at all levels of society in Eeyou Istchee.
16. That the Cree Nation Government, following consultation with Community Governments, the Cree School Board, and other stakeholders, declare a yearly “Iyiyuu Ayimuwin Awareness Month” that can be used to highlight the importance of the language, and can be a focal point for the introduction and delivery of Cree language programming and instruction in both the schools and communities.
17. That the Cree Language Commission (if established) coordinate with the Cree School Board and other regional stakeholders so as to establish a language resource centre that can support language professionals, teachers, and community members in their efforts to access and develop resources and language programming. Such a resource centre should facilitate the sharing and distribution of language resources, including publications and audio and video materials, by maintaining a Cree-language library in each community.
18. That the Cree Nation Government convene another Language Engagement Session in 2020, and that subsequently such sessions be held regularly so efforts can be maintained and progress monitored. Further, local language engagement sessions should be held in each of the communities so as to prepare for the next regional session and so as to further engage the general public.
19. That the Cree Language Commission (if established), or the Cree Nation Government in collaboration with other stakeholders including the Cree Nation Youth Council, develop and implement public information campaigns highlighting the importance of the Cree language in Eeyou Istchee, explaining the threats, and publicizing measures that can be taken to sustain the language. Included must be campaigns aimed specifically at children and youth that promote pride in the Cree culture and language, and encourage youth and children to speak Cree among themselves.

20. That the Cree Nation Government and principal stakeholders, including Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute, the Cree School Board, the James Bay Cree Communication Society, and CBC North, coordinate on the establishment and maintenance of repositories for Cree-language video and audio recordings, and that such recordings be made useful and accessible for the purposes of Cree-language research, programming, and teaching.
21. That the Cree Nation Government repatriate digital copies of any Cree-language audio and video materials that exist in the holdings of non-Cree institutions, and that these be incorporated into the repositories mentioned in the recommendation above.

### **Calls to Action for Community Governments**

22. That Community Governments develop and implement regular and sustained programs and activities aimed specifically at promoting the use of the Cree language.
23. That Community Governments hire Language Coordinators so as to have a staff member specifically tasked with language programming at the community level, and that Community Language Coordinators regularly meet and work together at the regional level with the Cree Nation Government, the Cree Language Commission (if established) and other principal stakeholders.
24. That Community Governments establish a local language committee tasked with supporting language programming at the community level, and that the language committee work closely with local and regional Language Coordinators, local elders, local and regional governments, the Cree Language Commission (if established) and other principal stakeholders.

### **Calls to Action for the Cree School Board**

(On the discussion of Cree Culture being taught in the school, I want to share a story. Many years ago, an elder, John Kawapit, used to teach Cree Culture. He would come to our class and tell us that he was taking us outside. He would say, “That which is Cree is not in here; it is out there.” Then we would

go out. Sometimes, he would only bring an axe and chop down a tree. All the while he was chopping or making what he wanted to make from the tree, he was continually telling us stories. One time, he only had a stick and as we sat on the hilly rocks, he gave us many teachings about the gun and gun safety.)

*John Petagumskum (Whapmagoostui)*

25. That the Cree School Board re-commit to Cree as a Language of Instruction for a broad range of subjects and grade-levels, including but not limited to, gym, art, and social studies, so as to increase the use of Cree in the classroom and to expand students' exposure to the Cree language across as wide a range of knowledges and activities as possible. This effort should be informed by a thorough review of past efforts, including analysis of past students' successes and interviews with parents, teachers, and graduates so as to avoid past difficulties and win support for future initiatives. Wherever possible, the incorporation into the curriculum of Cree history, geography, ecological knowledge, art, sport, and any traditional skills should aim for full instruction in the Cree language.
26. That the Cree School Board increase its support for the development of Cree-language curriculum and teaching by drawing upon established methods used in language teaching, by ensuring the Cree Programs department is adequately staffed and funded, by ensuring local elders are involved in the classroom, and that it commit to the provision of on-going and regular training and workshops to provide Cree language teachers with opportunities for professional development. As part of this effort, the Cree School Board should establish forums for the regular sharing of teacher-generated lesson plans, materials, and ideas, similar to those used regularly by non-Cree teachers.
27. That the Cree School Board undertake a thorough survey of best practices for schools involved in minority- and indigenous-language maintenance from jurisdictions around the world, and that the resulting report be made public.
28. That the Cree School Board undertake a detailed longitudinal analysis of student success that includes students who participated in the CLIP program, as well as those since the program was eliminated, to establish whether concerns about CLIP's impact on English and French literacy were warranted.

29. That the Cree School Board commit to ensuring that the resources it develops for Cree-language teachers are equitable and sufficient in terms of the following broad dialect regions: northern coastal, southern coastal, and southern inland. The School Board should immediately take measures to survey and address the inequities and needs that currently exist.
30. That the Cree School Board commit to ensuring it is equitable in its language programming, offering equivalent Cree-language versions of those remedial and support programs it offers in English. For example, that the Cree School Board offer Cree-literacy summer camps to accompany those currently offered in English.
31. That the Cree School Board move to a Cree-language immersion model, based upon established immersion teaching methods from other jurisdictions, when and where children's Cree fluency requires it, and if not, that the Cree School Board begin preparing for such an eventuality in communities where current trends suggest it will be needed.
32. That the Cree School Board commit to increasing land-based instruction of Cree culture as settings on the land will allow for better instruction of ancestral vocabularies and skills, will encourage greater involvement by elders, and will encourage the development of positive self image and identity among youth.
33. That the Cree School Board, the Cree Nation Government, and other principal stakeholders, cooperate to develop a history and culture curriculum to be taught in Cree in the schools, and that any publications associated with this curriculum be made available to the general public for use in community language programming.

### **Calls to Action for Cree Childcare Centres and the Cree Board of Health and Social Services**

34. That Cree Childcare Centres, the Cree Head Start Program, and Maternal and Child Health Programs incorporate and develop programming to encourage the use of the Cree-language in these settings, and between parents and young children, and that the childhood learning of Cree be framed as an important contributor to health and well-being.
35. That the Childcare Centres move to a Cree-language immersion model, based upon established immersion teaching methods from other jurisdictions, when and where

children's Cree fluency requires it, and if not, that Child and Family Services begin preparing for such an eventuality in communities where current trends suggest it will be needed.

### **Calls to Action for Cree Media**

36. That Cree-language Media further develop programming aimed at explicitly teaching Cree vocabulary, grammar, and literacy to the general public, and that such programming be developed with the assistance of Cree-language experts and elders. Examples could include programming discussing and explaining vocabulary, read-aloud programming whereby people at home could follow along reading a text, or Cree-word radio bingo.
37. That Cree-language Media continue to work with elders to improve the fluency of announcers and to ensure the Cree being spoken is of as high a quality as possible.





# Suggested Language Activities

We recognize that many of the Calls to Action are aimed at governments, entities, and businesses, and may take some time to implement. We also recognize that there is little time to waste, and that there is an urgent need to act. For that reason, we would also like to highlight that there are activities that can be organized by motivated individuals in the communities. The following are some suggestions:

1. Start a routine whereby you find time on a weekly basis to tell family stories to your children in Cree.
2. Arrange for a child to regularly spend time with an elder, and have them do activities together. Have your children visit their grandparents often.
3. Start weekly language classes in your community in the evenings - a time more convenient for students and those who work during the day. Seek out fluent speakers willing to try their hand at teaching and keep it fun.
4. Encourage the local radio station to start a program aimed at teaching Cree - telling simple stories, or teaching vocabulary and grammar.
5. Use facebook to broadcast your own programs or lessons aimed at teaching Cree.
6. Use cellphones or tablets to record elders and other family members telling stories in Cree and share these among family members. Take the time to ask some questions about those words or phrases you have trouble understanding.
7. Ask an elder or a fluent speaker to describe what they are doing in Cree so you can learn vocabulary associated with specific tasks.
8. Have a “cooking or baking in Cree” evening or weekend get-together, and spend time explaining to one another in Cree how to prepare the dishes.

9. Go for a “Iyiyuu Ayimitaau” walk with friends or family.
10. Listen regularly to Cree-language radio - especially when they broadcast stories being told by elders. Try to remember some words you don't understand so you can ask a fluent speaker to explain them.
11. Go out to a restaurant with friends or family and order everything in Cree.
12. Make dioramas or pictures of a story (a legend or family story) and have fun re-telling the story in the Cree language to the class or group. Make sure to help one another, but in Cree.
13. Play describing games - describe what you did/ate/saw etc...
14. Play describing games - put different objects in a bag. Each player takes an item out and describes what it is - what it looks like or smells like, what it is used for, its color, shape, size, etc...
15. Play pictictionary in Cree - one person draws something and the others have to guess what it is, but only using Cree. If you do not remember a name, then describe the object until someone else gets it.
16. Name your child in Cree, or if it is too late, start using nicknames for your children in Cree.
17. Listen to songs in Cree. Sing songs in Cree.
18. Learn to read and sing hymns in Cree. Get together with friends to sing hymns.
19. If you are Christian, begin reading the bible and hymns in Cree. Form a Cree bible study group with elders who read well and follow along as they read.
20. Learn to tell a family story or aatiyuuhkaan in Cree. Seek out elders in your family or community to teach you.
21. Get some children's books in Cree to practice reading. Read them to your children or grandchildren.
22. Research the meaning of your family name, or the family names in your community.
23. Begin keeping a diary in Cree - if you find it difficult to write, keep a short one recording briefly what you did on a calendar.

24. Text as much as you can in Cree. Start by trying to send one complete text in Cree a day, and build it up from there.
25. Speak to one another in Cree during meals.
26. Talk about the weather in Cree with an elder. Pay attention to how different weather events are described.
27. Go on a nature walk and describe what you see in Cree. Better yet, go with an elder and listen as they describe what they are seeing.
28. Pick a day of the week and only speak Cree at home on that day. Expand it to two, three, four...







# Appendices



# Appendix A

## Suggested Guidelines for Developing a Language Policy

The Engagement Session's first call to action requests that all stakeholders develop and implement a Cree Language Policy:

1. That all Cree Entities, Governments, and Businesses in Eeyou Istchee be asked to develop a Cree-Language Policy so as to establish the rights and responsibilities of their organizations and employees with respect to the Cree language, and so as to communicate the role their organizations can play in teaching the language and supporting a regional language maintenance initiative.

The Cree Nation Government can decide whether it wants to pass a law that would require all entities, governments, and businesses working in Eeyou Istchee to have such a policy. This is what Nunavut has done in its language protection law. Were this to happen, then the Cree Nation Government would need to provide guidelines for the creation of such a policy. Again, this is what Nunavut has done for Inuktitut.

In the meantime, however, there is no need for stakeholders to wait and nothing is stopping them from developing their own language policies. Indeed, the Board of Compensation has already begun moving in this direction, and we hope others will follow.

We are offering the following suggestions as an initial guide to those thinking about developing a policy.

## **Within Your Organization**

The policy should address the role the Cree language will play within your organization:

- What place does the Cree language have in your workplace? Do your employees have the right to speak Cree at work? Do they have an obligation to speak Cree at work? What kinds of accommodations will you make for employees who do or do not speak Cree?
- Will support be given to your employees so that they may improve their knowledge of Cree? Support could include providing classes or training, or allowing for employees to leave work to attend classes or training.
- Will efforts be made to increase the place of Cree-language reading and writing within your organization? Would your organization offer support to employees wanting to improve their Cree-language literacy?
- Will your organization create a position, or appoint an already-existing staff member, so as to have someone on staff responsible for managing language-related issues in the workplace? They could be tasked with reporting on the place of language in the workplace currently, with suggesting ways of increasing the use of Cree within your organization, and with liaising with outside organizations undertaking language work.
- Will your organization create a process that will allow for employees to offer feedback, including complaints, about language-related issues in the workplace?
- Will your organization organize mentorship programs with elders so as to improve the Cree language ability of staff?

## **Communicating with the Public**

The policy should also address the role the Cree language will play in terms of the interaction between your organization and the public:

- What rights do members of the general public have in terms of services offered in the Cree language? Do you need to provide support and/or training to be able to offer services in the Cree language to the general public?

- Does your organization have signage in the Cree language? Is the signage more prominent in Cree than in English or French? Does your organization have the capacity to write in Cree sufficient to meet any needs it has in terms of signage?
- Does your organization publish materials in the Cree language? If so, does it publish unilingual materials in Cree, or are materials always published bi- or trilingually? Does your organization have a protocol to ensure that published materials are of an acceptable quality? Does your organization have the capacity to produce its own Cree-language materials?
- Will your organization create a position, or appoint an already-existing staff member, so as to have someone on staff responsible for managing language-related issues as they relate to services offered by your organization? They could be tasked with reporting on and monitoring Cree-language programs and services, and with suggesting ways of increasing and improving Cree-language related programs and services.
- Will your organization create a process that will allow for members of the public accessing services to offer feedback, including complaints, about language-related issues?
- Does your organization have the ability to support Cree-language activities and programming in the communities? Can your organization support or organize mentorship programs between youth and elders?
- If your organization works with young children and/or young parents, do you have the ability to develop and implement programming to encourage the use of the Cree language when services are offered? Will you offer staff working with these groups additional language training, or allow them to leave work to attend such training?

## **Budgeting for Language Work**

If possible, the policy should address the financial obligations emerging from your organization's commitments relating to the Cree language:

- Does your organization have or need a budget for its language-related obligations?

- Does your organization fund language-related activities or programming? Can your organization contribute funding to regional language maintenance activities and programming?
- Can your organization commit to using a fixed percentage of its budget for language-related activities or programming?

### **Timeline for Implementing a Language Policy**

Finally, any language policy should include timelines for the implementation of any measures introduced in the policy. Such timelines should be clearly communicated to those concerned, be they staff or members of the general public.

## Appendix B

# 2018 Language Engagement Session Participants

### Whapmagoostui

Louisa Wynne  
Mary Shem (CHB)  
Elijah Sandy (CTA)

Sam Petagumskum  
Maria Kawapit (CWEIA)  
Pakesso Mukash (CBC)

John Petagumskum  
Jordan Masty (CNYC)

### Chisasibi

Lucy Shem (CSB)  
Elsie House (CSB)  
Beverly Cox  
Janie Pachano (NCOE)  
Christine Duff (CFS)  
Eddie Pashagumskum

Nellie Cox (CSB)  
Elma Moses (CSB)  
Darlene Bearskin  
Robbie Matthew (NCOE)  
Allan House (CTA)  
Janie Pashagumskum

Angela Tapiatic (CSB)  
Davey Bobbish  
Irene Bearskin-House (CWEIA)  
Roderick Pachano (NCOE)  
Margaret Fireman  
Sarah Pashagumskum (ACCI)

## **Wemindji**

Barbara Georgekish (CSB)  
Arden Visitor  
Abraham Matches (CTA)

Frances Visitor (CSB)  
Theresa Georgekish  
Dorothy Stewart (CNG)

Jeremiah Mistacheesik (CSB)  
Mary Visitor-Georgekish

## **Eastmain**

Alvin Cheezo  
Florrie Mark-Stewart  
Eva Louttit (CNG)

Daniel Mark-Stewart  
Rusty Cheezo (BoC)  
Josephine Gilpin

Sarah Mark-Stewart (CSB)  
Wendy Mark-Stewart

## **Waskaganish**

Greta Cheechoo (CSB)  
Barbara Blackned (CSB)  
Shirley Diamond (CFS)  
Florrie Weistche

Pearl Weistche (CSB)  
David Erless  
Sanders Weistche

Mary Bear (CSB)  
Kaitlyn Hester-Moses (CNYC)  
Pearl Weistche

## **Nemaska**

Sarah Rabbitskin (CSB)  
Abraham Jolly (CSB)

Charles Cheezo (CSB)  
Joshua Iserhoff (CTA)

Edna Jolly  
Luke Tent

## **Waswanipi**

Louise Cheechoo (CSB)  
Marlene L. Kitchen  
Paul Dixon (CTA)  
Alexander Moses (CNYC)

Flora Ottereyes (CSB)  
Clara Cooper  
Eleanor Gull (CHB)  
Mandy Gull (GCCEI)

Marcel Happyjack  
Allan Cooper  
Tina Mark-Ottereyes (CWELA)  
Robin Gull-Saganash (CNYC)

## **Ouje-Bougoumou**

Jane L. St.-Gelais (CSB)  
Charlie Bosum

Annie Dixon (CSB)  
Abel Bosum (GCCEI)

Lance Cooper  
Glen Wapachee

## **Mistissini**

Mary Brien (CSB)  
Louise Blacksmith (CHB)  
Stacy Anderson (CNYC)  
Dinah Loon  
Juliette Neeposh  
Betsy Longchap (CBC)

Kathleen Wootton (CSB)  
Luke MacLeod (JBCCS)  
Willie Iserhoff (CNG)  
Charlie Mianscum  
Kenny Blacksmith  
George Blacksmith

Bella Moses-Petawabano (CHB)  
Samantha Awashish (CNYC)  
Isaac Loon  
Mary-Jane Petawabano  
Mathias Jolly (CBC)

## **Washaw Sibi**

Suzie Mowatt  
Margaret Mowatt-Trapper

Billy Katapatuk  
Beatrice Trapper

Fred Mowatt

## **MoCreebec**

Allan Jolly

Lorraine Jolly

Grace Delaney



# Appendix C

## Program of the 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session

**Monday, March 12, 2018**

Arrival of delegates in Ouje-Bougoumou.

**Tuesday, March 13, 2018**

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 7:30 | <i>breakfast</i>   |
| 9:00 | OPENING PRAYER<br>WELCOMING ADDRESS / Deputy Chief Lance Cooper, Ouje-Bougoumou  |
| 9:15 | OPENING ADDRESS / Grand Chief Dr. Abel Bosum   |
| 9:30 | WELCOMING ADDRESS / Sarah Pashagumskum, Executive Director,<br>Aanischaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute   |
| 9:45 | PRESENTATION / <i>The Cree Language Commission Survey and Report (1989)</i> , Janie Pachano, Former Director, James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre |

*Appendix: 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session Program*

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- 10:30 PRESENTATION / *The Board of Compensation's Language Initiatives*, Rusty Cheezo, Chair, Board of Compensation
- 11:15 PRESENTATION / *Cree Health Board Language Initiatives*, Bella Moses Petawabano, Chair, Cree Board of Health and Social Services
- 12:00 *lunch*
- 1:15 PRESENTATION / *A History of Cree Language Programs at the Cree School Board*, Abraham Jolly, Director-General, Cree School Board
- 2:00 BREAKOUT DISCUSSION SESSION / *A History of Cree Language Programs*
- 2:45 *health break*
- 3:00 PRESENTATION / *The 1997 Cree Language and Culture Conference*, Daisy Bearskin-Herodier,
- 3:45 PRESENTATION / *Cree Language Programming in Eeyou Istchee's Daycares*, Sherry-Ann Simard, Christine Duff, Shirley Diamond, Child and Family Services, Cree Nation Government
- 5:30 *supper*

**Wednesday, March 14, 2018**

- 7:30 *breakfast*
- 9:00 OPENING PRAYER
- ORDER OF THE DAY
- 9:15 OPENING ADDRESS / Deputy Grand Chief Mandy Gull
- 9:45 PRESENTATION / *Current Cree School Board Cree Programs Initiatives*, Lucy Shem, Coordinator, Cree Programs, Cree School Board
- 10:30 BREAKOUT DISCUSSION SESSION / *Cree Language Instruction in the Schools and Beyond*

- 11:15 PRESENTATION / *Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA)*, Tina Mark-Ottereyes, Program Coordinator, Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association
- 12:00 *lunch*
- 1:15 PRESENTATION / *Maintaining Our Language (Wemindji's Community Language Program)*, Mary Visitor-Georgekish & Theresa Kakabat, Wemindji Community Services Department
- 2:00 BREAKOUT DISCUSSION SESSION / *What Can You Do in Your Community?*
- 2:45 *health break*
- 3:00 PRESENTATION / *Language Initiatives at the James Bay Cree Communications Society*, Luke MacLeod, Executive Director, James Bay Cree Communications Society
- 3:45 CONCLUDING OPEN-MIC DISCUSSION
- 5:30 *feast*
- 7:00 *The 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Achievement Awards Gala*

## **Thursday, March 15, 2018**

- 7:30 *breakfast*
- 9:00 OPENING PRAYER
- ORDER OF THE DAY
- 9:15 OPENING ADDRESS / Willie Iserhoff, Director, Department of Social and Cultural Development
- 9:45 PANEL DISCUSSION / *Youth Perspectives on Securing Iyiyuu Ayimuwin's future*, Youth Grand Chief Kaitlyn Hester-Moses, Deputy Youth Grand Chief Robin Gull-Saganash, Jordan Masty, Samantha Awashish, Stacy Anderson, & Alex Moses, Cree Nation Youth Council

*Appendix: 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session Program*

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- 10:30 OPEN-MIC DISCUSSION / *Discussion of the Cree Nation Youth Council Presentation*
- 11:15 PRESENTATION / *Cree Nation Government Language Initiatives*, Dorothy Stewart, Cree Language Coordinator, Cree Nation Government
- 12:00 *lunch*
- 1:15 *Informal Discussion*
- 2:45 *health break*
- 3:00 CONCLUDING OPEN-MIC DISCUSSION
- 5:30 *supper*

**Friday, March 16, 2018**

Departure of delegates from Ouje-Bougoumou.



Florrie Mark-Stewart, of Eastmain, addresses the Engagement Session. Florrie was recognized for her commitment and long history of language work by being the first recipient of the The Marianne Pashagumskum Award for Lifetime Achievement in Cree Language Instruction.



The cover of the Awards Gala Program.

# Appendix D

## The 2018 Eeyou Istchee Language Achievement Awards

The 2018 Language Engagement Session in Oujé-Bougoumou provided the opportunity to inaugurate a set of language awards to recognize and celebrate those Crees who have been working tirelessly on behalf of the language. The following awards were awarded at a gala, held at the Petaapin Youth Centre on March 14th:

The Marianne Pashagumskum Award for Lifetime Achievement  
in Cree Language Instruction  
was presented to Florrie Mark-Stewart

The Matthew Ratt Award for Lifetime Achievement  
in Cree Language Development  
was presented to Luci Bobbish-Salt

The Morley Loon Award for Achievement  
in the Use of Cree Language in the Arts  
was presented to Kenny Mianscum

The Josie Sam-Atkinson Award for Achievement  
in the Use of Cree Language in the Media  
was presented to Luke MacLeod

The Awards Gala included a feast, catered by Oujé-Bougoumou's Sarah Coonishish-Mianscum, followed by an evening of entertainment:

Program

Master of Ceremonies: Daniel Mark-Stewart

Opening Remarks: Deputy Grand Chief Mandy Gull

Presentation of the Eeyou Istchee Language Achievement Awards

Dancing: The Big Rock Dancers (Mistissini)

Singing: Richard Bosum (joined for the final song by laureate Kenny Mianscum)

Awards were presented to the laureates by members of the Pashagumskum, Ratt, Loon, and Sam-Atkinson families.





Bella Moses Petawabano presents the language work being undertaken by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay.

# Appendix E

## A Timeline of Language-Related Work in Eeyou Istchee

The 2015 *Cree Language Commission Strategic Plan* includes a timeline of historical markers, re-presented and updated here (additions to the 2015 Strategic Plan timeline are in *italics*):

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1973 | Establishment of the Cree Way Project.   |
| 1975 | Signing of the <i>James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement</i> which states that “every person may address the public corporation in Cree and the public corporation shall ensure that such person can obtain available services from and can communicate with it in Cree.” |
| 1978 | Creation of the Cree School Board  |
| 1979 | <i>Adoption of Grand Council of the Crees Board of Directors Resolution GCCQ #284 calling for the establishment of a Cree Language Commission (Proposed: Chief George Wapachee, Seconded: Chief Walter Hughboy).</i>   |
| 1982 | Establishment of the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre.<br><br>Establishment of the Regional Council of Cree Elders.  |

- 1987      Publication of *Cree Lexicon: Eastern James Bay Dialects* by Annie Whiskeychan and associates for the Cree School Board.
- Adoption of resolution CC 87-127 which states that the Cree School Board's role is to preserve, promote, protect and enhance the cultural heritage and language of the James Bay Cree of Northern Quebec.
- Robert Kanatewat submits a proposal to the Cree School Board for the establishment of a Cree Language Commission.*
- 1988      Proposal for a Cree Language and Culture Commission, submitted to Mr. Billy Diamond by Theresa Pelletier.
- Adoption of guiding principles regarding the Cree language and curriculum at Strategic Planning Session of Chiefs, Grand Chief and Cree School Board Council of Commissioners.
- 1989      Adoption of Cree School Board Council of Commissioners resolution mandating the Chairperson and the Grand Chief to direct the development of a proposal for a Cree Language and Culture Commission.
- Resolutions leading to the implementation of Cree as the language of instruction from pre-kindergarten to grade four.
- Establishment of the the Cree Language of Instruction Program [CLIP].
- Cree Language Commission Study* undertaken by the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre.
- 1990      Release of the *Cree Language Commission Study* survey results.
- 1991      Release of the document *Cree Language Commission: A Discussion Paper* by Sheila McCulley for the James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre.
- Adoption of GCCEI Annual General Assembly Members' Resolution 1991-22 calling for the drafting of a Cree Official Language Act (Proposed: Violet Pachanos, Seconded: Robbie Matthew).*

- 1992      *Adoption GCCEI Annual General Assembly Members' Resolution 1992-16 calling for the creation of a Traditional Cree Education Program (Proposed: David Masty, Seconded: Matthew Petagumskum).*
- Adoption GCCEI Annual General Assembly Members' Resolution 1992-23 calling for a Conference on Cree Culture and Language (Proposed: John Shecapio-Blacksmith, Seconded: Hattie Mayappo).*
- Adoption GCCEI Annual General Assembly Members' Resolution 1992-26 calling for measures to be taken to further the preservation of Cree Culture, including measures to promote the use of Cree language in the workplace (Proposed: Chief Henry Mianscum, Seconded: Lawrence Katapatuk).*
- 1997      Cree Language and Culture Conference.
- 2000      Launch of the *eastcree.org* website, a collaboration between the Cree School Board and Carleton University.
- 2002      Signing of the *Agreement Concerning a New Relationship Between Le Gouvernement du Québec and The Crees of Québec* which states that “the Cree Nation must continue to benefit from its rich cultural heritage, its language and its traditional way of life in a context of growing modernization.”
- 2003      Kuuhkumich Language Project: *Strengthening and Protecting Our Iyiyuu/Inuu Language.*
- Adoption of GCCEI/CRA Council/Board Resolution 2003-39 supporting the establishment of a Cree Language Commission (Proposed: Chief Abraham Rupert, Seconded: Thomas Jolly).*
- 2004      Publication of the *Eastern James Bay Cree Dictionary: Southern Dialect, Cree-English* edited by E. Neeposh et al. for the Cree School Board.
- Publication of the *Eastern James Bay Cree Dictionary: Northern Dialect, Cree-English* edited by Lucy Bobbish-Salt et al. for the Cree School Board.

*Appendix: Timeline of Language-Related Work*

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- 2005      *Adoption of GCCEI Annual General Assembly Omnibus Resolution 2005-07 supporting the establishment of a Cree Language and Culture Commission (Proposed: Chief David Masty, Seconded: Elizabeth Iserhoff).*
- 2010      *Release of the Report Cree School Board Language of Instruction Evaluation by The Cree School Board's Department of Education Services.*
- The Agreement Between the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada Concerning the Eeyou Marine Region is signed. Chapter 27 contains provisions for the recognition of Cree-language place names for the "various locations, geographic features and landmarks" in the Eeyou Marine Region.*
- 2011      *Kevin Brousseau engaged as Cree Language Coordinator for the Cree Regional Authority's Department of Culture and Language.*
- 2012      *Signing of the Agreement on Governance in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory Between the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and the Gouvernement du Québec which states that "Cree and French shall be the principal languages of the Regional Government."*
- Release of the internal discussion paper A Cree Language Commission, by Kevin Brousseau for the Cree Regional Authority Department of Cree Culture and Language.*
- Publication of the Eastern James Bay Cree Dictionary: Southern Dialect (Cree-English) edited by Ruth Salt et al. for the Cree School Board.*
- Publication of the Eastern James Bay Cree Dictionary: Northern Dialect (Cree-English) edited by Lucy Bobbish-Salt et al. for the Cree School Board.*
- Letter written by Grand Chief Dr. Matthew Coon-Come to Cree School Board Chairperson Kathleen J. Wootton suggesting a Cree Language Commission be established under the responsibility of the Culture Department of the Cree Regional Authority, to be funded by matching contributions of \$500,000 from the Cree Regional Authority and*

the Cree School Board *subject to agreement on the terms of reference for the Commission.*

2013 *Publication of the East Cree (Southern) Thematic Dictionary edited by Linda Visitor et al. for the Cree School Board.*

*Publication of the East Cree (Northern) Thematic Dictionary edited by Linda Visitor et al. for the Cree School Board.*

*Manon Tremblay engaged as Advisor - Cree Language Commission, Dianne Ottereyes Reid as Consultant, and John E. Bishop engaged as Toponymist. All positions are attached to the Cree Language Commission project, under the direction of the Cree Regional Authority's Department of Culture and Language.*

*Consultations with regards to establishing a Language Commission begin with GCCEI/Council Board and other stakeholders and carry on through 2014.*

2014 *The Cree Language Commission team completes the Cree Language Commission - Strategic Action Plan 2014-2017 in July, 2014. Consultations with entities are ongoing.*

2015 *Departure of Manon Tremblay and Kevin Brousseau. The final Cree Language Commission - Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018 is submitted by Manon Tremblay in April, 2015. Consultations with stakeholders are complete, save the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association and the Cree Language of Instruction Program team at the Cree School Board.*

2016 *Wiyâshâkimî, the Cree-language place-name for Clearwater Lake, is recognized as the official name by Quebec's Commission de Toponymie.*

2017 *Council/Board approves a mandate for the Cree Nation Government's Toponymy Program.*

*Dorothy Stewart is engaged as the Cree Nation Government's Cree Language Coordinator.*

*The Cree Constitution is formally approved and adopted by each of the Cree First Nations and the Cree Nation Government. The constitution introduces the possibility that Cree-language related law can be adopted by the Cree Nation Government and/or individual Cree First Nations. Further, as the Cree Constitution is more fully developed, the opportunity will exist to enshrine the inherent Cree-language-related rights of the Cree of Eeyou Istchee.*

*Adoption of GCCEI Annual General Assembly Members' Resolution 2017-19 calling for the establishment of a framework to maintain and enhance cultural heritage and language, including support for cultural facilities that encourage lifelong learning (Proposed: Chief Kenneth Cheezo, Seconded: Susan Esau).*

2018 *Michiminihtaaou Chitayimuwininuu Eeyou Istchee Language Engagement Session is held in Ouje-Bougoumou.*

*Inauguration of the Eeyou Istchee Language Achievement Awards, coinciding with the Language Engagement Session.*





Washaw Sibi's Margaret Trapper-Mowatt speaks during one of the Breakout Discussion Sessions during the event.

# Appendix F

## Language Provisions in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1976)

The following are the provisions that explicitly have to do with the Cree language, found in the JBNQA:

### **Section 10: Cree Local Government (Category 1B):**

- 10.0.12** The language of communication of the public corporation shall be in accordance with the laws of general application in Quebec. In addition, every person may address the public corporation in Cree and the public corporation shall ensure that such person can obtain available services from and can communicate with it in Cree.

### **Section 16: Cree Education:**

- 16.0.9** The Cree School Board shall also have the following special powers, subject only to annual budgetary approval:

f) to arrange, with the Quebec Department of Education, for the hiring of Native persons as teachers notwithstanding that such persons might not qualify as teachers in accordance with the standard qualifications prevailing in the other areas of the province;

g) to select courses, textbooks and teaching materials appropriate for the Native people and to arrange for their experimental use, evaluation and eventual approval;

h) to develop courses, textbooks and materials designed to preserve and transmit the language and culture of the Native people;

k) to establish courses and training programs to qualify Native persons as teachers;

**16.0.10** The teaching languages shall be Cree and with respect to the other languages in accordance with the present practice in the Cree communities in the Territory. The Cree School Board will pursue as an objective the use of French as a language of instruction so that pupils graduating from its schools will, in the future, be capable of continuing their studies in a French school, college or university elsewhere in Quebec, if they so desire. After consultation with the parents' committee, and having regard to the requirements of subsequent education, the commissioners shall determine the rate of introduction of French and English as teaching languages.

**16.0.10** The budget of the Cree School Board shall take into account the unique characteristics of the Cree School Board's geographical location and of its student population. It shall provide for items such as the following:

d) the development of a special curriculum provided for in paragraph 16.0.9;

## **Section 18: Administration of Justice:**

**18.0.28** When a Cree is arrested or detained, he must be informed in the Cree language, if he does not comprehend either French or English,

of his basic rights and has a right to communicate with his family and to obtain the service of a lawyer of his own choice.

- 18.0.36** Programs must be provided for non-Native persons engaged in the various aspects of the judicial and legal system of the said district so that such persons be familiar with the language, customs, needs and aspirations of the Crees.

### **Section 19: Police (Crees):**

- 19.1.9** The training programs for such accepted candidates at the school of the Quebec Police Institute shall be conducted in both French and English, and in the Cree language where appropriate. Books and materials for the said training program shall be both in French and in English and, when possible, in the Cree language.

### **Section 28: Economic and Social Development - Crees:**

- 28.9.3** Quebec and Canada shall assure that unilingual Cree candidates who successfully complete training course shall have the right to be examined either in the Cree language or with the assistance of a translator. Applicants for jobs in the public service will, however, be required to possess sufficient knowledge of one of the two official languages, as may be specified.



# Appendix G

## Past Language-Related Recommendations

There have been many recommendations made over the past few decades with respect to the Cree language:

### **1988: Proposal for a Cree Language and Culture Commission:**

That a Cree Language and Culture Commission be established...

to ensure that Cree Language and Culture programs be treated equitably in relation to other programs in education.

to formulate a policy for language and culture retention and use within the Cree schools.

to inform the public on the language issue using workshops, information sessions, and the media.

to develop terminology for new words.

to encourage the use of the Cree language on calendars, posters, public notices, agendas for meetings, minutes of meetings.

to promote literacy courses for adults.

to examine the policy of Cree as a language of Instruction in the first few years of school.

to interview people from all ages, different occupations on their views about language and culture in the schools for their ideas and suggestions.

to examine the possibility of having more outdoor activities as a way to enhance Cree Culture classes.

to preserve the diversity of all Cree communities but on the other hand to facilitate written communication by having some standardization for the written language.

to encourage the other entities to promote the use of the Cree language, spoken and written, local and regional.

to make recommendations to the Council of Commissioners and ensure implementation of policies on Cree language and culture.

to set up incentive programs for students with a particular interest in Cree language and culture.

to promote the traditional way of life as a viable and important career choice.

to encourage interested persons in taking courses, in Cree education in order for them to teach in later years.

to support professional development and training for teachers teaching Cree language and culture classes.

to investigate the possibility of having Cree literacy compulsory for new recruits in the Teacher Training program.

*(Proposal prepared by Luci Salt, Annie Whiskeychan, and Linda Visitor)*

## **The 1989 James Bay Cree Cultural Education Centre Cree Language Commission Study:**

The survey results and the review of Native languages in Canada and worldwide support the recommendation that a language commission for the preservation of James Bay Cree be formed. One way to go about this would be for each community to form its own network link. Each link could then share and exchange projects and plans with the others. The following tasks serve as a guide to planning and exchange for each community:

Assess needs for overall goal setting.

Look at what programs might be started immediately.

Consider some smaller pilot projects.

Begin training people for long-range expectations such as vocabulary building and writers' workshops.

Involve elders at all levels of planning.

Encourage full participation by all ages in the planning and long-range goals.

Establish the objectives and be sure people know about them.

Ask for community input and feedback for planning.

Use many different techniques to involve all ages and interests.

Implement plans.

Organize regular reports on programs and projects.

Set up cross-community exchange.

Ask for and respond to feedback for evaluation.

Recognize and reward participation.

Re-evaluate and set new goals.

## **The 1997 Cree Language and Culture Conference:**

The Assembly Recommended As Follows:

1. That a language and culture law be adopted by the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee (Grand Council/Cree Regional Authority) and by each of the Cree community governments along with the required policies, programs and initiatives in order to ensure the protection, promotion, and enhancement of the Cree Language and Culture. That the Cree language be recognized by the nine Cree communities and by the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee (Grand Council/Cree Regional Authority) as the official language of the Cree workplace and that this be established through laws, policies, programs and other initiatives.
2. That the Cree National Entities and the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee (Grand Council/Cree Regional Authority) adopt a consistent spelling system for the Cree Language for the production of all written materials.
3. That all Cree entities work together to promote and enhance the Cree Language and Culture by ensuring its use in the workplace and in meetings. Reports and internal and external correspondence should be in the Cree language to the extent possible. A Cree Language Commission should be created with representatives from each community and Cree language consulting firms should also be relied on for coordination and advice on how to implement this recommendation. Moreover the entities should develop plans for the improvement and increased use of Cree language and culture by their employees. In addition the entities should report annually to the General Assembly on what efforts they undertook in the previous year in the areas of Cree language and culture.
4. That the Cree School Board Department of Adult Education (in collaboration with the Department of Cree Programs) [and the Cree Language Commission] identify a strategy to increase, enhance and promote the use of the Cree Language in the workplaces of the Cree people and to outline the means necessary to accomplish this objective. This is to be presented, for consideration and adoption, to the Council Commissioners at a date to be set by them. This strategy is to include the development of Cree written materials and programs necessary to teach written Cree to adults who would like to learn it.
5. That the financial resources and pedagogical days be set aside by the leadership of the Cree School Board for the holding of regional gatherings/work sessions by the

Cree Culture and Language teachers in order to improve communication among them (particularly those teaching the same grade level) so that they can mutually benefit from their collective experience.

6. *THAT WAYS BE FOUND IMMEDIATELY FOR THE ELDERS, WHO LIVED BY HUNTING, TO TEACH THE CREE STUDENTS OUT ON THE LAND ABOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF NATURE AND CREE CULTURE.* This knowledge was traditionally imparted to the youth in the bush and retention of this information is enhanced when it is learned in this setting.
7. That each local school administration will give high priority to the implementation of recommendation '6' (the one above). This will include special efforts to identify required funding, equipment and to encourage the cross-cultural understanding among the staff to facilitate the undertaking of this initiative. The parents of the students should be invited to participate in the implementation of this recommendation.
8. For Recommendations 5, 6, and 7 (the three above), in addition to any other specific required undertakings, the Cree School Board is asked to carry out consultations with the school principals, community education administrators, parents and teachers to consider adjustments to the school calendar in order to facilitate their implementation.
9. That teacher trainees receive, in addition to their regular training program, instruction from Crees, including Cree elders, who have lived on and learned from the land. This training should be oriented towards the retention of Cree knowledge concerning the land, animals, water, climate, plants and the whole of nature.
10. That the Cree School Board undertake measures to facilitate the training of Cree language specialists. Also, that is ensure that a bank of language specialists be put into place [to work with the Cree Language Commission] to record the Cree language and the Cree oral traditions. In addition to ensure that existing materials be organized and necessary measures are undertaken to see to the continued development, promotion and protection of the Cree language and that such measures continue to improve and increase.
11. That the Cree School Board, Cree Regional Authority and Cree Communities put into place the means to ensure (in multi media formats) the ongoing recording, storage and publication of the Cree oral traditions (including legends, stories, songs,

music, teachings, knowledge, [including that concerning technologies - the making and use of traditional tools and clothing, and the preparation of traditional food and medicines] and personal, historical and political statements). New words and in addition especially the language of the hunting way of life should be recorded and published. That the efforts done in this regard will be such as to substantially increase the amount of such information that is recorded and published each year.

12. That efforts be undertaken by the James Bay Cree Tele-Communications Society to make the Cree Culture and Language more available on television in the Cree communities and elsewhere.
13. That Cree local governments and the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee (Grand Council/Cree Regional Authority) undertake measures with the Cree entities to make the Cree language increasingly visible in public places in the Cree communities and in meetings. Also, that the written material used in meetings and resulting from meetings be made available in the Cree language.
14. That the Cree Entities and governments hire Cree translators to make the Cree language materials more available and to facilitate the increased use of Cree in meetings. Also, that the Grand Council/Cree Regional Authority hire a Director of Cree language programs and initiatives.
15. That all Cree institutions and Cree individuals are hereby encouraged to facilitate the involvement of the Cree youth, parents and elders in efforts aimed to ensure the retention, promotion and development of the Cree language, the Cree way of thinking and of all of the Cree oral and intellectual tradition. This will include in the case of the Cree School Board, the increased involvement of parents and elders in the teaching of the Cree Language and Culture in and outside of the classroom. Local gatherings should be held many times each year to improve local involvement and input into education.
16. It is recognized by this Assembly that the Cree parents by tradition have the foremost responsibility for the education of their children and that this is particularly important in respect to language and in particular in regards to the retention of language. Therefore, it is recommended that all Cree institutions and specifically The Cree School Board (especially through parent-teacher committees), The Cree Board of Health and Social Services, The Cree Regional Authority, and the Cree Communities put into place the means and undertake the initiatives necessary to support this responsibility of the parents.







## **Cree Language Commission 3 Year Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018:**

The 2015 Strategic Plan suggests the following for a proposed Cree Language Commission:

**VISION:** The Cree Language Commission's vision is to enhance the prestige of the Cree language in Eeyou/Eenou Istchee and promote its use as a living language that defines Eeyou/Eenou nationhood.

**MISSION:** The Cree Language Commission is a key advisory body to the Cree Nation on Cree language with the guidance, knowledge and wisdom of our Elders.

**MANDATE:** The Cree Language Commission's mandate aims to protect the Cree language by restoring pride and a sense of belonging through recognition of the legitimacy and value of Eeyou/Eenou Istchee's ancestral language.

The mandate of the Cree Language Commission is to:

- Promote the use of the Cree language in all aspects of Cree life
- Empower Eeyouch/Eenouch to maintain and strengthen our ancestral language.
- Develop and enrich the Cree language in order to realize its potential in the expression of contemporary Cree culture.
- Preserve vocabularies and place names associated with Cree traditional lifestyle and ancestral knowledge.
- Foster and promote the use of Cree in the workplace environment.
- Monitor the evolution of the Cree language in Eeyou/Eenou Istchee and report to Cree leadership as required.
- Assist and inform administration, businesses, individuals and interested groups in the standardization of Cree syllabics and roman orthography for the enrichment of the Cree language.
- Promote the benefits of Cree fluency and literacy.
- Protect and promote the use of Cree syllabics as the primary writing system.
- Liaise and collaborate with Cree communities and Cree entities to achieve the above mandate.

The 2015 Strategic Plan also suggests the adoption of a Cree Language Act:

As part of its mandate, one of the first priorities of the Cree Language Commission is to assist the Cree Nation Government in the drafting of a Cree Language Act which will serve to guarantee the rights of Cree people to their language; ensure the preservation of the Cree language for future generations; and set parameters for the use of the Cree language in the public domain, including the workplace.

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# Appendix H

## Language Commissions Around the World

The *Cree Language Commission Strategic Action Plan, 2015-2018* includes information on a number of Language Commissions from around the world. This information is represented below:

### Office québécois de la langue française – Québec

**Language:** French

**Establishment:** 1977

**Budget:** The Office's budget for the fiscal year 2013-2014 is \$24.7 million. It is entirely funded by the Gouvernement du Québec.

**Population served:** 8.081 million (2012)

**Language status:** French is the official language of Québec and one of two official languages of Canada. 81% of Québec's population speaks French as a first language whereas only 3% of Canadians living outside of Québec speak French.

**Language health:** French remains stable in Québec but is endangered in the rest of Canada.

**Legislation:** The French language and the rights of French language speakers are protected by the *Charte québécoise de la langue française* enacted in 1977. Also known as Bill 101, the *Charte* enshrines five fundamental linguistic rights for all Quebecers:

- The right to government and professional services in French
- The right to speak and be heard in French
- The right to a French-speaking workplace
- The right to services in French in business and consumer transactions
- The right to a French language education

**Organizational Structure:** The *Office québécois de la langue française* is an agency of the *Gouvernement du Québec* that answers directly to the Minister responsible for the *Charte québécoise de la langue française* (the *Ministre de l'Immigration et des communautés culturelles*). The Office is composed of eight members and one Chief Executive Officer. It oversees the activities of two other language agencies, the *Commission de la Toponymie* and the *Conseil supérieur de la langue française*. As part of its organizational structure, the Office includes two permanent working committees, one that informs on officialisation and the other that monitors the language situation in Québec. The employees of the *Office québécois de la langue française* are all considered public servants and are entitled to the same salary scales, benefits and job security as all other government employees.

**Mandate:** The *Office québécois de la langue française* was established as a result of the *Charte québécoise de la langue française*. Its mandate, as defined by law, is:

- to define and conduct Québec's policy pertaining to officialisation, terminology and francization of public administration and businesses;
- to establish French as the normal and habitual language of work, communication, commerce and business;
- to help define and develop francization programs as intended by law and follow their application;
- to watch the evolution of the language situation in Québec and report to the Minister every five years;
- to ensure respect of the *Charte*, acting on its own or following the reception of complaints;

- to establish research programs necessary to the application of the law and to carry out studies planned by these programs.

In order to carry out its mandate, the Office has the power to:

- take appropriate action to ensure the promotion of the French language;
- assist and inform public administration, businesses, individuals and groups in matters concerning the correction and enrichment of the French language;
- receive observations and suggestions on the quality of the language as well as the difficulties of applying the law, and report these to the Minister.

**Challenges:** Although it continues to enjoy a privileged status in the province of Québec, the greatest challenge faced by the French language is the external pressure and influence exerted by English, the majority language of Canada and the language of technology and American popular culture. Immigration from non-French speaking countries also poses a threat as the trend for second language acquisition favors the English language.

## **Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit (Inuit Language Authority) – Nunavut**

**Language:** Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun (designated under the common name Inuit Language)

**Establishment:** 2009

**Budget:** The Inuit Language Authority's budget for the fiscal year 2013-2014 is \$2.2 million. It is entirely funded by the Government of Nunavut.

**Population served:** 35,591 (2013)

**Language status:** The Inuit language is one of three official languages of Nunavut (with French and English). 83% of the population speaks Inuktitut and/or Inuinnaqtun.

**Language health:** Despite the high proportion of speakers in the overall population of Nunavut, the Inuit language is threatened.

**Legislation:** The Inuit Language Protection Act was passed in 2009. It is the only legislation in Canada that aims to protect and revitalize a First Peoples' language. The

main objective of this law is to increase the population of Inuit who can speak and read their language fluently. It also aims to protect the rights of Inuit people to access services in their own language. It provides every Inuit person with:

- The right to public services in the Inuit language;
- The right to speak and be heard in the Inuit language, including in the workplace;
- The right to services in the Inuit language in business and consumer transactions;
- The right to an Inuit language education.

The Inuit Language Protection Act also has provisions that regulate marketing, communications and signage.

**Organizational Structure:** The Inuit Language Authority reports to the Minister of Languages. It has a board of at least five members, recommended by the Language Commissioner, in consultation with the Minister of Languages. The Authority has a secretariat whose activities are managed by an Executive Director and whose employees are all considered public servants and are entitled to the same salary scales, benefits and job security as all other government employees.

**Mandate:** The Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit's duties, as required by law, are to expand the knowledge and expertise available with respect to the Inuit Language, and to consider and make decisions about Inuit Language use, development and standardization. As part of its mandate, the Inuit Language Authority:

- develop, through consideration of the oral traditions and usage, diversity and modern needs of the Inuit Language, standardized terminology or expressions in the Inuit Language;
- publish, promote and maintain a database of all the standardized terminology or expressions in the Inuit Language;
- develop and publish competency levels or standards of Inuit Language use or correctness, including with respect to any dialect of the Inuit Language in local use;
- upon receiving a request from the Minister, the Languages Commissioner or an organization, consider proposed terminology, expressions, documents, standards, competency levels or communications in the Inuit Language and provide recommendations in response;

- establish and administer in accordance with applicable law, an award program, to recognize outstanding achievement by an organization or individual in implementing the requirements of this Act or in contributing to the development, promotion or protection of the Inuit Language.

In order to carry out its mandate, the Authority has the power to:

- document and preserve traditional or historic terminology, regional variants or dialects, expressions and accounts of the Inuit Language;
- identify research requirements and deficiencies relating to the use, development, learning, linguistic structure, vitality or standardization of the Inuit Language;
- undertake or supervise and publish research to address the requirements and overcome the deficiencies identified;
- promote quality, coherence, balance, accessibility and the avoidance of duplication in the research;
- share information with an organization, academic institution or individual, within or outside Nunavut, with the objective of expanding the available knowledge about and expertise in the Inuit Language, language development or standardization more generally; and
- undertake or supervise research that the Minister or Executive Council may request.

**Challenges:** Although the Inuit language is spoken by the majority of Nunavut's residents and is protected by law, there is a disproportionate allocation of funds for the promotion and protection of Nunavut's three official languages. There are more funds allocated annually to the protection of the French language, despite the fact that it is the mother tongue of less than 500 Nunavut residents. This situation indicates that despite legislation and the creation of an infrastructure to promote and preserve the Inuit language, Nunavut continues to follow Canada's lead in putting most of its efforts at protecting colonial languages.

The Inuit language also faces a major threat from the increasing presence of English as the predominant and favored language of young Inuit households. Transmission of the Inuit language between parent and child is seriously compromised as young parents strive to give their children a better chance at academic success by introducing them to the English language.

## **Oqaasileriffik (Greenland Language Secretariat) – Greenland**

**Language:** Greenlandic Inuit

**Establishment:** 1999

**Budget:** Budget information is not available. However, Oqaasileriffik derives all its funding from the Government of Greenland.

**Population served:** 56,370 (2013)

**Language status:** Greenlandic is the official language of Greenland since 2010. 88% of Greenland's citizens are fluent.

**Language health:** stable

**Legislation:** Two pieces of legislation protect the Greenlandic language: the law of Greenland Selfrule of 2009 and the Greenland Language Integration Act of 2010.

**Organizational Structure:** The Greenland Language Secretariat is an independent institution that reports to the Government of Greenland's Ministry of Culture, Education, Research and Church. Its board is composed of five officers, a chairman and a vice-chairman. In addition to its office staff, the Greenland Language Secretariat oversees the work of two committees, the Place Names Committee and the Personal Names Committee.

**Mandate:** The Greenland Language Secretariat's mandate is:

- to collect and maintain information on Greenlandic language and language usage;
- to participate in Nordic Boards and working groups in language matters and to join the ICC Language Board;
- to stay updated on changes in the spoken Greenlandic language; and
- to carry out research on Greenlandic.

**Challenges:** Although Greenlandic is the sole official language of Greenland, and is spoken by 88% of the population, Greenland's centuries-long association with Denmark which provides roughly 50% of their annual budget, translates into a clear preference for Danish or Danish speaking individuals in public office and positions of power. Monolingual Danish speakers constitute only 12% of the population yet

are largely considered as the post-colonial elite. Some sectors, including the judiciary, still conduct all their business in Danish.

## **Te Taura Whiri te Reo Maori (Maori Language Commission) - New Zealand**

**Language:** Maori

**Establishment:** 1987

**Budget:** The Maori Language Commission's budget for the 2013-2014 fiscal year is \$5.2 million. An additional \$8 million in special projects funding over the next 4 years was announced in the 2013 New Zealand budget. The Maori Language Commission gets its core budget from the Government of New Zealand.

**Population served:** 4.443 million (2012)

**Language status:** Maori is one of the three official languages of New Zealand with English and New Zealand Sign Language. 24% of Maori people speak their language which accounts for 3.5% of the total population of New Zealand.

**Language health:** endangered

**Legislation:** The Maori Language Act was passed in 1987. It declares Maori as one of the official languages of New Zealand and regulates signage and access to services in the Maori language. It guarantees due process in the Maori language in New Zealand's courts and provides for Maori language instruction and immersion schools.

**Organizational Structure:** The Maori Language Commission is an independent government agency that reports directly to the Minister of Maori Affairs. The Commission consists of one full-time Commissioner who is also the Chairperson of the Commission and four members. The Commission is supported by a secretariat headed by the Executive Director. The secretariat implements policy decided upon by the Commission.

**Mandate:** The Maori Language Commission's mandate is:

- to initiate, develop, coordinate, review, advise upon and assist in the implementation of policies, procedures, measures and practices designed to promote the Maori language as an official language of New Zealand.
- to contribute to the growth and maintenance of the Maori language as a living, widely used means of communication with a legal status equal to that of English.

As part of its mandate, the Commission

- promotes the Maori language and, in particular, its use as a living language and as an ordinary means of communication;
- issues certificates of competency in the Maori language and certifies interpreters and translators;
- reports to the Minister upon any matter relating to the Maori language that the Minister may from time to time refer to the Commission for its advice;
- implements Maori language policy.

**Challenges:** After nearly going extinct in the early 1970's, the Maori language enjoyed a brief revival during the 1980's and 1990's due in large part to proactive measures aimed at language preservation. These efforts at saving the Maori language from extinction initially yielded a modest increase in the number of speakers. However, recent population data has revealed that the Maori language has entered another steady period of decline.

In addition, provisions of the Maori Language Act have proved to be difficult to enforce since there is a chronic shortage of skilled Maori-speaking labor. This has been particularly true in the education sector and has seriously impeded the right for Maori speakers to be served in their own language. The Maori Language Commission's efforts have been plagued with lack of focus, resources, funding and expertise which has recently led its members to re-evaluate the Commission's priorities and strategies.