

pimâcihitâtân nêhiyawêwin



2025 Keep Our Language Alive Conference Summary Report

YXE Cree Speakers Society

MESSAGE FROM THE YXE CREE SPEAKERS SOCIETY

Thank you to everyone who attended and sponsored the 2025 pimācihitātān nēhiyawēwin: Keep Our Language Alive Conference, held May 26 and 27, 2025. The conference took place at the Dakota Dunes Resort, located on traditional Whitecap Dakota Unceded Territory.

This was the third annual Cree Language conference presented by the YXE Cree Speakers' Society. The theme of the 2025 conference was "Awakening the Spirit of the Language". Through our consultations we heard of the limitations when language teaching and strategies are separated from spirit. The focus on the Plains Cree "Y" dialect has been deliberate. We have learned that most institutions are mandated to support all Indigenous languages with limited resources, hence our decision to narrow the focus and then share what we learn with others.

The conference sessions revolved around the idea of "māmawīcihitowin" - all helping together. Since this project started in 2021, we have seen a resurgence of grassroots language warriors developing and providing opportunities for Cree language learners. This momentum is incredibly powerful as we share our diverse gifts to meet the diversity of learners. Each year the pimācihitātān nēhiyawēwin conference agenda is in response to direction from past participants.

We are so proud we were able to provide simultaneous translation throughout the entire conference, and many speakers delivered their messages in Cree. We are committed to continuing to model the change we aspire to in our daily lives.

Based on the success of our conferences, and the generous support of our sponsors we are pleased to announce we have set a new goal – to inspire aspiring speakers, teachers and instructors, community leaders, and policy makers in their journey to reinvigorate Indigenous language development, and to do this at a national level. On September 28 – 29, 2026, we will host a national Cree language conference at the Dakota Dunes Resort.

Thank you again to everyone who attended the conference, and to our sponsoring organizations. We are so grateful for your support and for helping us Keep Our Language Alive!

ēkosi pitamā,



Milton Tootoosis

THE 2025 CONFERENCE AGENDA

Day One: Monday, May 26

The conference began with a pipe ceremony followed by a hot breakfast.



Opening remarks were provided by a panel of Elders which included Alex Ahenakew, Mary Lee and Ira Horse. This was followed by a session entitled "The Spirit of the Language" led by Jeff Wastesicoot.

The afternoon session began with a Panel the theme of which was "mamawicihitowin (all helping together) globally". Speaking from an international perspective was Dr. Wilton Littlechild who brought forward a United Nations Message on UNDRIP.

Representing the national voice was Bram Lerat, Assembly of First Nations. Bram spoke about the Indigenous Languages Action Plan.

Finally, Dr. Miriam McNab and Harry Lafond provided a regional perspective on the spirit of the language.





Dr. William Ermine

Dr. Morris Cook presented on “Stories of the North: Engaging and Educating with the Cree Language.”

Day One of the conference concluded with a presentation by Dr. Willie Ermine, with a session entitled “Connecting Concepts.”

Day Two: Tuesday, May 27



Ira Horse and Winston Walkingbear

The second day of the conference opened with a community-based focus from Ira Horse and Winston Walkingbear session entitled “mamawichitowin (all helping together).”

Speakers participated in a session entitled: "mamawichitowin" (all helping together) from the international perspective. Session participants included Joan Greyeyes - Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, Darlene Brander - Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Center, Dr. Norine Tourangeau - First Nations University of Canada, and Kelly Cardinal - Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools.



Darlene Brander, Dr. Norine Tourangeau, and Kelly Cardinal



Dr. Lanny Real Bird

Dr. Lanny Real Bird led a session in Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL).



Bernie Makokis

Bernie Makokis provided remarks from the Iyiniw Education & Training Institute.



Clarence Whitstone



Dorothy Thunder

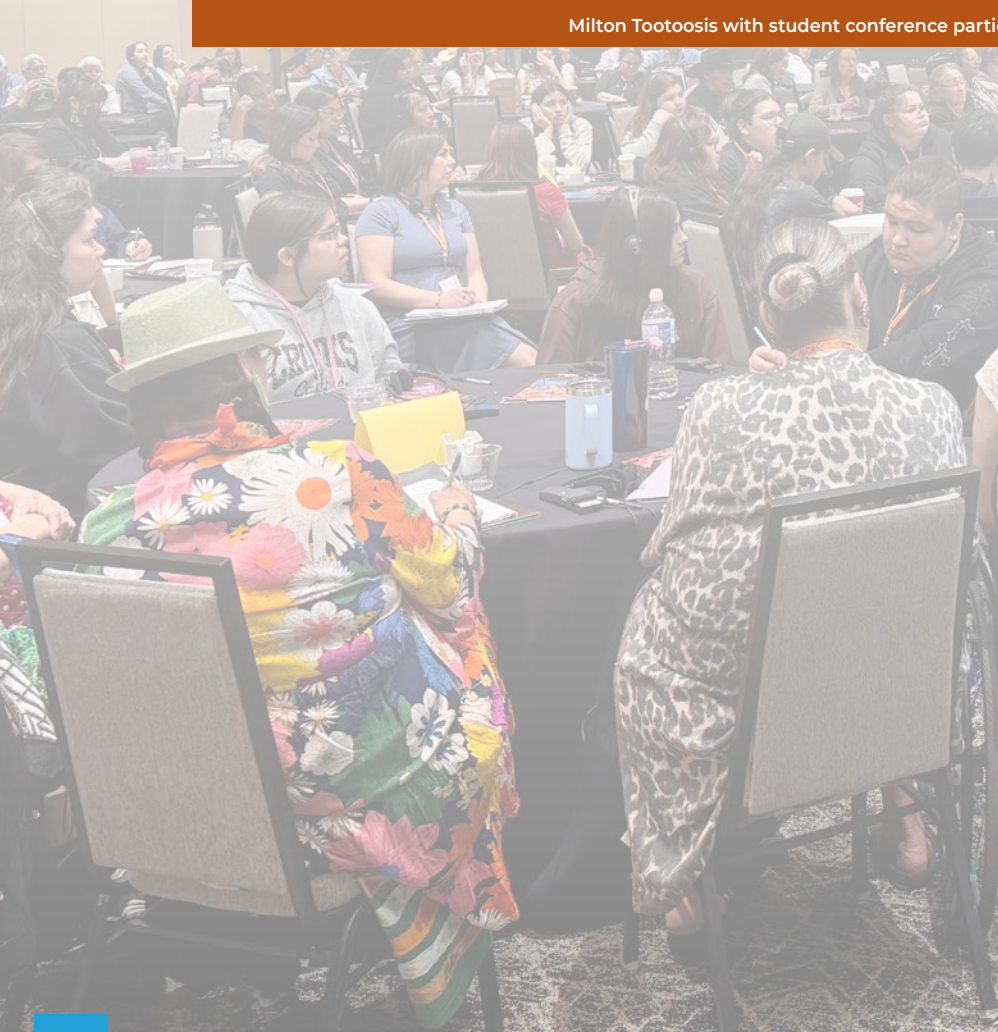
The final conference session was entitled "Using Mathematics, Natural Music and Other Disciplines to Teach Cree," by Dwayne Lasas.

Simultaneous translation for the conference was provided by Clarence Whitstone and Dorothy Thunder.

Educational resources were also available for sale from Turning the Tide Bookstore.



Milton Tootoosis with student conference participants



Shelly Tootoosis with young conference participant Silas Lerat.



Conference Sponsor Diocesan Coordinator of the Office of Justice and Peace, Catholic Pastoral Centre, Myron Rogal introduced Elder Mary Lee.



Marc Okihcihtaw opened Day 2 of the Conference with a song.



Milton & Shelly Tootoosis

Conference Participation

Fifty five of the 200 conference participants completed the Conference Evaluation.

A breakdown of how participants who completed the evaluation identified themselves is as follows:

Elders – 19

Teachers – 12

Teacher Associates – 2

Community Leaders – 5

Government Officials - 0

High School Students – 9

Post-Secondary Students – 4

Other Ally (youth worker, community health worker, cultural coordinator, administrator) - 3

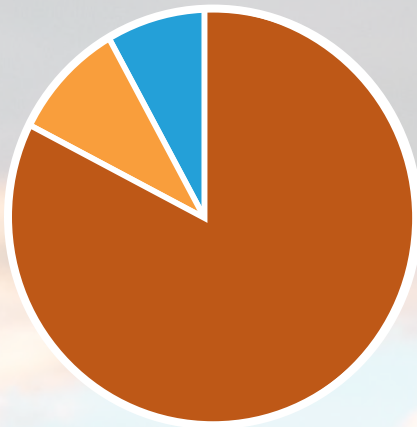


Cree Immersion in Communities

Of those who completed the evaluation and who were from a First Nation, 14 have Cree Immersion in their community, 24 do not, and 14 were unsure.

Conference Value

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being 'very valuable', participants were asked if the conference advanced their knowledge of how we can develop and retain the Cree Language in our communities. Overall, the majority of participants (49 of the 55) gave the conference a score between 4 and 5.



Value of Conference:

44 - Very valuable

5 - Valuable

4 - Somewhat valuable

Participants also felt the conference speakers were very knowledgeable and very experienced. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being "very knowledgeable" 48 participants scored the speakers between 4 and 5.



48 - Very knowledgeable/experienced



5 - Not as knowledgeable/experienced

MOST INTERESTING THINGS LEARNED AT THE CONFERENCE

Participants were asked the most interesting or most useful thing they learned at the conference. The most mentioned topics have been collated into the themes below:



Testimonial

Myron Rogal, Diocesan Coordinator of the Office of Justice and Peace at the Catholic Pastoral Centre provided feedback on take-aways from the 2025 Conference and how participating in the Conference has informed his work:

- Language, ceremony, and culture are inseparable.
- Awe and respect for the history of resilience that has and continues to transmit the Cree Y dialect
- Observation and hearing through table conversations of the present lack of young men who are learning and teaching the language outside of formal educational settings.
- Investing in opportunities for spaces where Indigenous languages can be learned and experienced that are intergenerational.
- Investing in decolonizing Indigenous languages, “waking them up” after generations of calculated suppression
- Witnessing at my table and around the room, the high capacity for language to build unity amongst nations, communities, families, and individuals.

Ideas to Develop and Retain the Cree Language in Communities

Participants were asked how they will use the information shared at the conference to help develop and retain the Cree Language in your community. The responses are summarized into the following themes and listed in order of the number of times the idea was mentioned.



1. Teach Cree to Others (family, children, students)



5. Use technology/visual aids/audio aids with students/body acting/media stories/mobile apps



2. Communicate in Cree when possible



6. Invite Speakers to Schools



3. Create resources (language list, school language programs)



7. Continue learning (from Elders, by attending language conferences, taking courses, listening)



4. Continue cultural teachings

Speaker Feedback

Speakers were asked for their thoughts on the conference and how their participation at the conference can inform their work. Comments received included the following:

- There is a high capacity for language to build unity amongst nations, communities, families, and individuals.

Interest in Hosting a Cree Language Conference

Just under half of the participants (about 20) who completed the evaluation said they would be interested in hosting a conference in their region. Many provided locations and ideas.



Yes, I am interested in hosting a conference – 20



I might be interested in hosting a conference in the future – 13



I am not interested in hosting a conference – 9

Interest in Attending a National Cree Language Conference

The majority of participants who completed the survey (47) said they would be interested in attending a national conference.



Yes – 47



Maybe – 4



No – 2

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KEEP OUR LANGUAGE ALIVE

pekopayi level



Poundmaker
Cree Nation



ayisiyiniw level



wītaskīwin level



FIRST NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
OF CANADA

wāhkōtowin level



MLT AIKINS



First Nations
Power Authority

TinyEYE
Therapy Services

