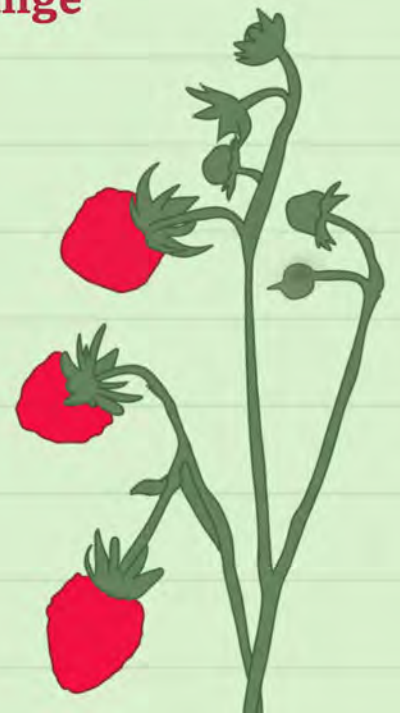




Gaagige  
Zaagibigaa

# 2023 Year In Review

Embracing  
Transformation:  
Fueling Growth  
Through Change



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# Allow Us to Re-Introduce Ourselves



Gaagige Zaagibigaa (GZ) is a grassroots Indigenous led organization committed to fostering self-determination in Northern Ontario through transformative food system initiatives. We cultivate reciprocal relationships, provide funding interventions, and offer support to strengthen community and household initiatives. GZ recognizes the importance of food self-determination as crucial for Indigenous empowerment, revitalization, reclamation, resilience, and wellness. Our organization is dedicated to decolonizing administrative processes, establishing lasting capital resources and assisting communities and households in developing resilient, self-reliant food ways and food systems on their own terms. Our support extends to individuals, households, communities, and various projects. Currently, we back a diverse range of projects related to food self-determination, autonomy, and security, cultural reclamation, youth kinship, knowledge sharing, health and wellness, and community building.



# Our Name: Gaagige Zaagibigaa

(Gah-gi-gay Zah-gi-bi-gah)

GZ began in 2020 under the name, The Northern Ontario Indigenous Food Sovereignty Collaborative, we used this name in the interim and went through the Anishinaabe practice of naming the organization throughout the 2020 and 2021 years. This process involved asking our Elder Gene Nowegejick to ask the Ancestors for a name, through ceremony. When the name came to Elder Gene the leadership and other council members who spoke the language had several conversations to finalize it. The name Gaagige Zaagibigaa was presented, discussed and approved with the remaining council in October 2021. The languages of the Anishinaabe, Mushkegowuk, and Anishinew, are verb-based languages that are difficult to translate into English, it is common for translations to be one or two words when in reality the word means so much more in its original language. For simplicity sake we provide the common translation below.

*Gaagige means forever  
Zaagibigaa means cultivating or  
budding  
Gaagige Zaagibigaa - Forever  
Cultivating*

# Foreward

Forever blooming, forever growing, forever cultivating. I would like to start by acknowledging our ancestors who were so loving, thoughtful, and forward-thinking. That despite the odds they faced in the active separation of our ways of being, they found ways to ensure we would one day reclaim those ways.

Gagiige Zaagibiga exists to help in the reclamation of those ways. Food work is heart work, and as an organization we approach this work with the understanding that we exist solely to support our Anishinaabe people and communities in reclaiming these ways passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial. We have supported this work in multiple ways including our community granting stream. In partnership with communities this stream has not only helped those communities feed their people but more importantly they have been able to support their people in connecting to their ways of being. We are also very proud of our Sovereign Household Granting program that helps to support individual families, reclaim, restore and rediscover those ways that connect us to who we are as the original people of this lands.

I would like to take some time to acknowledge the staff of GZ, past and present who put their heart and soul into the work, the path of decolonization is not an easy path, it can be bumpy and challenging. Often you have to exist in two worlds that can be at odds with one another. It can be challenging in very personal and surprising ways. I would also like to acknowledge the Stewardship Council and the Steering committee as we navigated those rough waters.

This work has been so rewarding and heart filling, in a time when we as the original people of turtle island continue to feel the effects of systems that have been designed to eliminate us. We can relish in the fact that we are still here, not just surviving, but thriving and a part of the solution. We hope that you enjoy the stories shared in this report and that you continue to engage with us and walk with us on our journey towards the reclamation of our food systems.

With respect,

Shelly Livingston  
Steering Committee Lead  
Stewardship Council Member



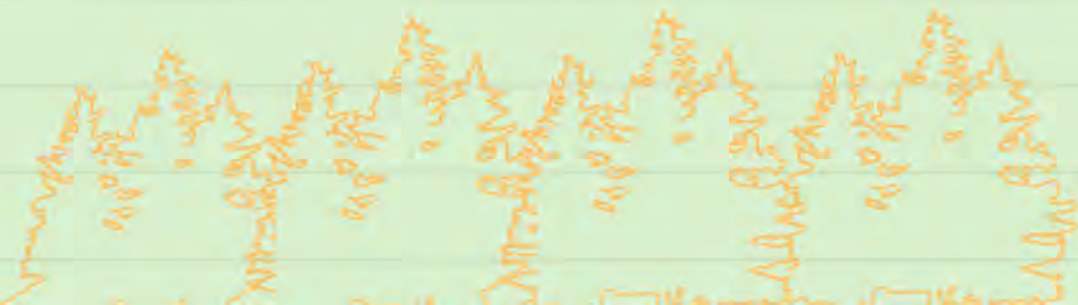
# Reflections



The wording Food Sovereignty doesn't align with our perspective as an organization, nor is it language that is accessible to all members of our communities. We don't claim sovereignty over the land; our bond with the land relies on reciprocity and deep ancestral relations. Let's swap out sovereignty with "self-determination," signifying the power to shape one's own food systems and food ways. Communities have long possessed their own capacity for self-determination over their food systems, despite the impacts of colonization and the systematic removal of Indigenous peoples' inherent rights. GZ's purpose is to support these pathways, making it easier for people to access necessary support to navigate pathways to food self-determination.

Food Self-Determination can manifest by incorporating traditions into daily actions. This includes activities like fishing, enjoying a cup of cedar tea, harvesting manoomin, attending a cultural camp, learning to prepare traditional foods, nourishing relationships, cultivating food, engaging in hunting, foraging, amongst many others. It emphasizes the autonomy and empowerment of communities and individuals to determine and control their own food-related practices, policies, and systems. This approach highlights the right of communities and individuals to shape their food landscapes in a manner that aligns with their cultural, social, and economic priorities, while fostering independence, revitalization, reclamation, resilience, and overall health and wellness.

As GZ continues on our path, guided by our principles and objectives, we have encountered hurdles in making the journey of decolonization through food self-determination accessible and inclusive. Meeting families and communities where they are at has been a critical piece of this work. Despite facing challenges, we continue to navigate through them, allowing each challenge to foster growth within our organization and help to strengthen our foundation.



# Our Logo

In 2023, GZ was thrilled to have Storm Angenecob create our logo, a collaboration we were immensely pleased and eager to unveil to all. Storm is an Ojibwe artist from Lac Seul First Nation, Treaty Three Territory born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Currently based in Red Lake, Ontario. Many of her works include animals and birds as representations of herself or those close to her. Storm continues to practice her art through painting, digital art and practicing beadwork.



# Governance & Operations

GZ seeks to take a community-based governance approach with the project being driven by a Stewardship Council that is representative of the communities we serve in Northern Ontario. Our Council oversees big picture and more long term decisions while guiding our direction as an organization. The Steering Committee exists as a sub-committee of the Council, they are actively engaged in more of the day to day decision-making processes and are entrusted with the operational oversight of GZ. The Stewardship Council currently consists of six members and they are: Elder Gene Nowegijick, Shelly Livingston, Amberly Quakegesic, Jana-Rae Yerxa, Kanina Terry, Donald Meekis. The Steering Committee consists of 3 council members and they are : Shelly Livingston, Kanina Terry and Amberly Quakegesic.





# The Folks Facilitating The Work



GZ operates as a modest grassroots organization, presently consisting of four team members alongside our Stewardship Council. GZ recently expanded our team by hiring two new full time staff members to serve as Community Relations Leads for the Northeast and Northwest regions. In their roles at GZ, the Community Relations Leads will be actively engaged in community, fostering lasting reciprocal relationships, and supporting individuals, households, and communities in achieving their unique goals and visions of self-determination by providing hands-on and on the ground support as needed.

GZ operates in a flat organizational structure with fluidity, continuously expanding, evolving, and adapting to the dynamic nature of on-the-ground work. In line with this, we anticipate continuous growth of our team in the future.

GZ is presently situated within the MakeWay Shared Platform as we actively work towards our goal of establishing ourselves as an independent organization.





# The Folks Facilitating The Work

Lak is an Indigiqueer artist and advocate from Treaty 3 territory. Born to Anishinaabe parents, Lak developed a close connection with the land from Red Lake to Thunder Bay. Their formative years included exposure to pivotal political movements advocating for Indigenous rights, shaping their worldview and igniting a passion for social justice and community well-being. After studying Sociology and Indigenous Learning at Lakehead University, Lak prioritizes grassroots community work and advocacy. They have dedicated their time to co-organizing, creating, and hosting workshops, keeping the personal motto of 'community over commodity' close to heart, evident in their collaborative art projects across Thunder Bay. Lak identifies as nonbinary, uses they/them pronouns, and is from Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation and the Caribou clan.



*Lak Williams*  
Community Relations Lead  
Northwest





# The Folks Facilitating The Work

Quinn Meawasige is Anishinaabe from Serpent River First Nation. He graduated from Algoma University with a Bachelor of Arts in Community Economic and Social Development and a Certificate in Anishinaabemowin from Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig. Quinn became a founding member of the Waterways Collective, an Anishinaabe paddling collective whose work involves bringing Anishinaabe youth out to pictograph sites in their home waters, a wild rice revitalization initiative, and a contaminants testing project. Quinn is an active harvester, fisherman, hunter, gatherer, forager, and outdoor adventure seeker. He is always working to make land and water-based learning opportunities accessible for his family, community, and peoples.



*Quinn Meawasige  
Community Relations Lead  
Northeast*





# The Folx Facilitating The Work

Chico is a non Indigenous autistic queer with Italian/English/Icelandic ancestry, raised in Nakina, ON, on Treaty 9 territory, and in Ottawa on unceded Algonquin territory. She has a deep connection to the land, learning to forage and fish from a young age. As a classically trained chef with a background in nutrition, she supports Indigenous communities in reclaiming their traditional rights and self determination, standing in solidarity for land back and autonomy over food systems. Recognizing her and her ancestors' privilege she actively engages in the continuous process of learning and unlearning. Also an artist influenced by graffiti, she contributes designs to GZ's graphics, publications and resides in Lək̓ʷəŋən Territory, volunteering some of her time at a local community kitchen and embracing her role as an Auntie.



*Chico Cichelly*  
*Social Media Communication*  
*& Admin.*





# The Folks Facilitating The Work

Amber Sandy is a queer Anishinaabe artist, facilitator, auntie and passionate dog mom from Neyaashiinigmiing (Chippewas of Nawash First Nation). She resides and works in N'Swakamok (Sudbury, Ontario) and she serves in the role of Project Director at Gaagige Zaagibigaa. Amber's work is deeply rooted in supporting Indigenous self-determination, particularly through traditional land-based practices. As both an artist and advocate, Amber embodies her commitment to Indigenous empowerment and upholding relations with human and non-human kin in the world around her. Her artistic repertoire encompasses a diverse array of natural materials, including leather, beadwork, quillwork, tufting, and birch bark. Guided by mentors and inspired by her Anishinaabe roots, her work serves as a tribute to the intricate relationships between humanity and nature.



*Amber Sandy*  
*Project Director*



# Research & Evaluation

As part of GZ's commitment to decolonizing administrative work, our focus extends to research, data collection, and evaluation efforts. We aspire to approach evaluation with an Indigenized perspective. Our goal is to implement a community-based evaluation approach, empowering and supporting communities and individuals to pose questions that are most appropriate to their work and communities. Through a relationship centered approach within communities, we aim to gather research and evaluation through culturally appropriate methods like storytelling and sharing. In contrast to colonial mandated reporting, this evaluation process not only reveals the outcomes of grantee work but also emphasizes the priorities and interests of communities. Annual evaluations and reports will foster self-reflection and contribute to the continuous improvement of GZ as a whole.



## SPIRIT

Spirit is invited to programs in many ways and are supported by many communities. In the group process, spirit is visiting the program, such as helping staff, and or supporting positive energies in the program space. In the one-on-one process, spirit is supporting the individual. When Spirit moves, it weaves and helps us remember what we have already received.



## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are reflected to illustrate whether the program follows traditional protocols and other guidelines that ensure a strong relationship is made. The land-based process is relationships with spirit, ancestors (nurturing the land and natural world which feeds the past and next generations), individuals, family, program partners, community, and funder.



## PROCESS

Process is the ways the programs conduct programming; such as group process, one-on-one process, and land-based process. Process also covers what is done in the program planning and the way those plans are implemented (e.g., choices that are made given limitations with funding, design limitations given the scope of funding, etc.)



# SHSP Initiatives



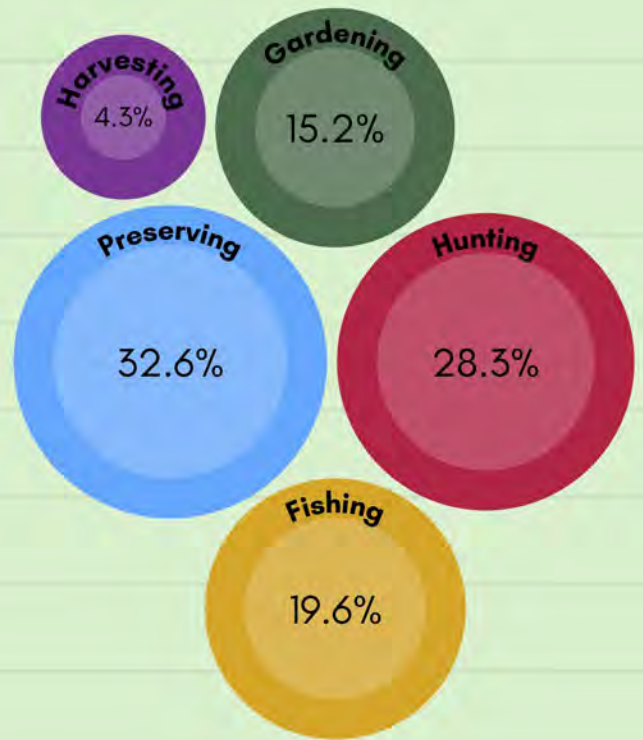
In 2023-24 there has been a rise in various forms of food preservation including but not limited to: freezing, dehydrating, pressure canning, and smoke houses with 32.6% of families using the SHSP to help preserve their foods.

Following preservation, many households secured PALs (Possession and Acquisition Licenses) to use firearms when hunting as well as get the tools necessary to snare or clean their game.

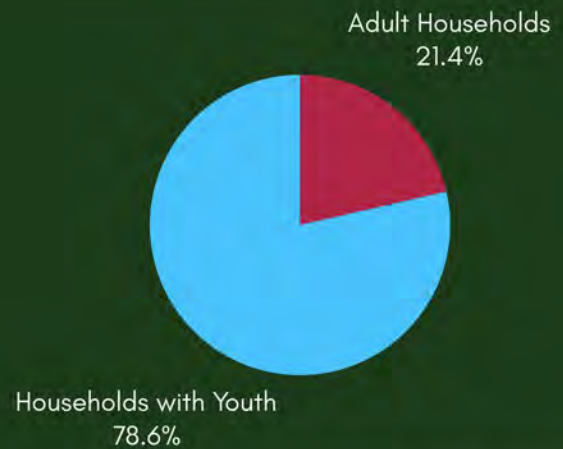
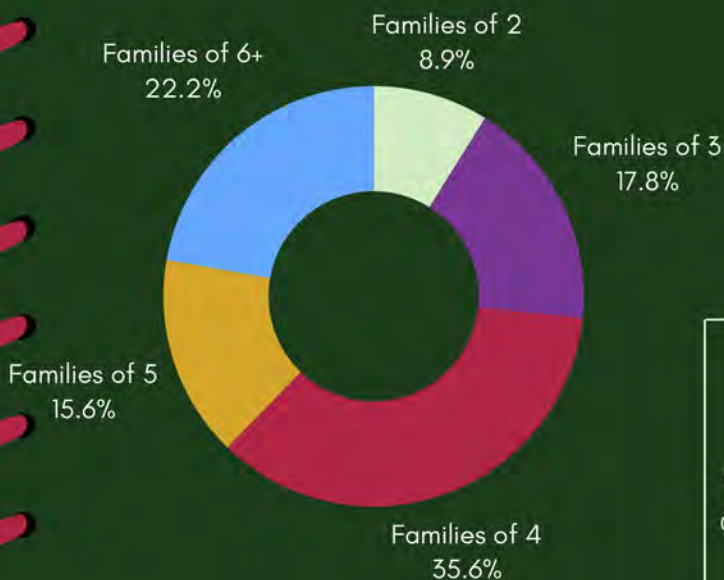
Fishing was the third most popular activity wherein households acquired fishing gear and assistance in transportation methods to navigate the waters.

Gardening efforts were a close follow up to fishing, with 15.2% of households beginning or expanding their garden beds.

Harvesting is separated from gardening as it includes foraging efforts such as gathering medicines, fungi, and the sugar bush.



# Households



Many of the households have consisted of larger families with 35.6% families of four and 22.2% having a household of 6+.

Over three quarters of the households have youth under the age of 30 living with them, many of which highlight the importance of passing down knowledge to the next generations.

# Carla Duncan , Grantee



We are thrilled to showcase the successful use of grant funds by Carla Duncan, a recipient from Muskrat Dam. The grant enabled Carla and her family to engage in their traditional annual moose hunt, strengthening their bond with the land.

With the additional support from the funds, Carla and her family enjoyed quality time outdoors hunting and preparing traditional foods. They successfully harvested 4 moose, providing ample meat for their winter stock. The meat was used to create sausages, pepperettes, pepperoni, pancakes, stew, and smoked meat, catering to their large family consisting of 10 households.

During the hunting expedition, educational activities were included for the younger members, teaching them how to properly process a moose, utilizing edible parts such as the heart, kidney and liver.

Looking to the future, Carla plans to enhance their outdoor experience by acquiring a canvas tent to establish an outdoor kitchen and dining area, promoting a sense of community and unity among their extended family.





# SHSP Grantee Photos



# SHSP Grantee Photos



# Granting 2023-24

This year, GZ adopted a new approach to grant allocation through our SHSP. We chose to reach out to past applicants who were unsuccessful in their initial submissions. Our staff worked one on one to assist them in submitting successful applications.

This method proved to be highly effective as many applicants had brilliant ideas but needed further support and assistance with the application process. This experience was a valuable lesson for the GZ team, enabling us to better meet the needs of the communities and individuals we serve.



# Looking Ahead



We are excited for the launch of our new website, complete with refreshed branding. This will serve as a central hub for accessing information about GZ, applying for funding, and staying updated on upcoming events and grant opportunities. The streamlined grant intake process will enhance efficiency for both applicants and staff in alignment with the harvesting seasons.

This year we will be hosting our bi-annual gathering, Maamigin, in collaboration with 'Great Lakes Cultural Camp' in Atikameksheng First Nation for what promises to be a spectacular event in October.

We're thrilled to launch a podcast where participants can share their project narratives, swap insights, and connect with peers. This also provides us a platform for participants to share the impacts of receiving these funds with a larger audience, including our funders. We hope this will enhance the path to self-determination, emphasizing the significance of storytelling and oral knowledge sharing.

GZ is developing a youth-specific grant program to empower the next generation in shaping their food systems. We believe that by engaging and empowering youth, we can catalyze transformative change that reverberates through generations, promoting health and wellness through food.

In summary, the horizon for GZ in 2024, and beyond, holds much promise and opportunity as we continue our journey towards fostering sustainable food systems rooted in self-determination and community empowerment.



# Working With Us

GZ provides diverse funding opportunities to aid Indigenous communities, households, and individuals in their pursuit of increased autonomy.

We welcome collaboration and engagement from Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, corporations, industries, foundations, and charities that align with our beliefs, morals and goals. Join us in exploring opportunities to work together with Gaagige Zaagibigaa in meaningful, relevant, and impactful ways to support Indigenous communities, households and individuals across Northern Ontario.

Let's engage in a conversation. If you're interested in exploring potential collaborations with GZ whether financial or non-financial, feel free to get in touch.



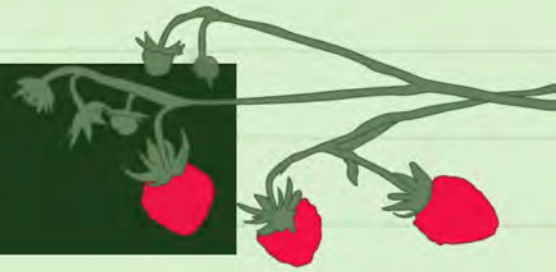
# Chi Miigwech



Chi Miigwech to our Funders,  
Partners, Steering Committee,  
Stewardship Council, Makeway,  
everyone in the community who chooses  
to establish and nurture reciprocal  
relationships with us, and to QZ's  
original staff for bringing QZ into  
existence.



# Funders



Breakfast  
**CLUB**  
of Canada  
TM

**THE ARRELL FAMILY**  
FOUNDATION



**feed opportunity**

Maple Leaf Centre for Action on Food Security



**MakeWay**



the  
**SPROTT**  
FOUNDATION



**community food centres**  
CANADA good food is just the beginning



**McConnell**

**LAWSON**  
FOUNDATION

