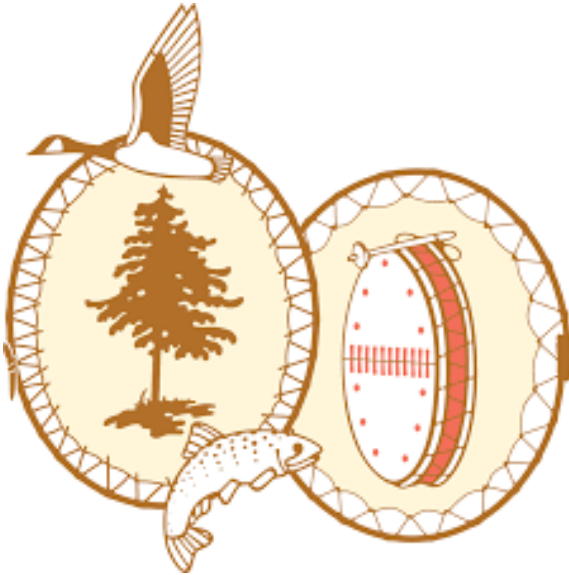


MARCH 26, 2026



LEADERSHIP CONNECT FORUM
CREE NATION GOVERNMENT
DAY 1: MARCH 18, 2026

NOTES/TAKEAWAYS

RACHEL MACLEOD
CONSULTANT

Key questions:

Describe current issues (social, mental health, etc.) prevalent in your community?

How have you structured your administration to respond to these issues?

How do you collaborate with regional entities?

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Welcoming remarks by the Chairman & Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, Paul John Murdoch.

We don't know each other as well as we know ourselves. Bill Namagoose shared his experiences from the "old days" as a band manager, and Jack Diamond served as the treasurer. There were only three people managing the local band operation. One transpiring moment was when Bill expressed his frustration in a letter to Jack, stating, "Dear Jack, I am so mad at you....." When Jack read and responded to the letter, they both copied the chief on their correspondence. Despite having just three people in the office, they continued to circulate heated letters back and forth.

Quote from Bill Namagoose: “When we were asked to read our letters aloud, it became clear how immature my letters were, and Jack felt similarly foolish after reading his.” This analogy highlights that we are slowly moving in that direction, which is why it's essential for us to come together. We need to sit down as a group and learn from one another.

The purpose of the meeting is to develop/identify *Concrete Calls to Action* within the Next 3 Days (2.5 Days):

1. We should not take for granted the importance of learning about the structures of local and regional organizations.
2. We must address the significant issues facing our communities as there are many social problems at home.
3. We need to develop a new appreciation for the Cree Nation Government. It would be beneficial if leadership could bring their Director Generals and staff to our next discussions.
4. Political leadership must commit to working collaboratively, rather than in isolation or silos

QUOTES FROM THE GRAND CHIEF OF GCC:

“We cannot take for granted that we know each other's institutions. We need to spend time getting to know each other's institutions.”

“We need to address the very serious problems that we have at home. And we do have very serious problems. And I think that's one of the reasons why it's very important that we talk about these things together face to face.

“I hope that we identify concrete calls to action that all of the organizations, the local directors, bring their staff because I do see that everybody's committed to their organization.”

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Welcoming remarks by Jeannie Pelletier, Chair of CHB:

Ms. Pelletier has been serving as the Chair of the CHB for one year now, and states that the most important aspect of work is collaboration. She emphasizes the importance of collaboration, stating that "we do it together. No one organization can build alone."

Acknowledge leaders are present, including the grand chief, representatives from the Cree Nation government, community chiefs, the chairperson and executive director of the Cree School Board (Sarah), and colleagues from the Cree Board of Health and Social Services.

Social Determinants of Health mentioned that the Regional Public Health Director highlights that approximately 80% of a person's health is shaped in the community and focuses on conditions people live in daily:

- safe housing, access to healthy food, access to good jobs, strong families, and a supportive community.

These conditions are the social determinants that influence health.

Achieving this requires collaboration and commitment from everyone involved. Having experienced PTSD from past work as a nurse in Eeyou Istchee, I can attest to the challenges faced. There is a need to strengthen culturally safe practices in Eeyou Istchee for the well-being of workers and employees. There is also a need to take care of workers as they are part of the community's essential.

The recommendations outlined in the (Awash-USchiniichisuu Shikasheimuun) Cree Youth Protection Commission's report aim to bring about necessary changes in the current youth protection system and reinforce Cree culture, tradition and family values in the delivery of services. She acknowledges Jonathan Sutherland and Taria Matoush for their contributions under Pimhtehau in the work of the Cree Youth Protection Commission and the launch of the family group conferencing in which to support families involved in youth protection. Ms. Pelletier also emphasized the rising rates of diabetes within Eeyou Istchee and the chronic diseases that affect eenou/eeyouch. The implementation of the NISK model, a new model of care under CBHSSJB. The model will be coordinated in a culturally grounded service.

QUOTES FROM THE CHAIR OF CREE BOARD OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES OF JAMES BAY, JEANNIE PELLETIER:

“People need to be felt supported and respected and involved in every step of the way. This is their right.”

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“When we realign our resources, efforts, and knowledge, we will create something much stronger and more meaningful for our people. This is the Cree way of working together, fostering partnership, respect, and unity.

“It is essential to spark new ideas within the Cree Nation because no organization can succeed alone.”

****Aim for partnerships that extend beyond today and bring real lasting change****

“The Cree way of working together is in partnership, respect and unity. “

“Let’s listen to each other openly. Let’s challenge one another but respectfully.”

“Partnership that extend beyond today and bring real lasting change.”

Welcoming remarks from Christina Biron, Interim Executive Director of Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay:

Being present and actively participating in the engagement process is crucial. It’s important to acknowledge everyone’s hard work and encourage everyone to stay focused and not get distracted. Everyone deserves to be recognized and heard. Her intentions are to be, “open, listen, understand and to be authentic in the engagement process.”

Emphasized how much the health board can do, but the intention for the presence in the meeting is to engage and listen.

Expresses her gratitude and acknowledge the leadership that is committed in meeting within the next days.

QUOTES FROM THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CREE BOARD OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES OF JAMES BAY, CHRISTINA BIRON:

“It’s the relationships we create and the trust we build. It’s those small, consistent efforts over time that will lead to meaningful change.”

“Validate the safe environment for our children to thrive.”

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Welcoming remarks from Chair of Cree School Board, Sarah Pash:

She expresses her appreciation for collaboration and breaking down silos to address issues in our communities. She thanks the leadership in CSB for their support.

She mentioned the 2nd Symposium for special needs and the focus in bringing everyone together and hoping to gather information to better serve and support community goals and needs. Also recognizing important work that needs to be done in our communities. We aim to gather information from these communities to better support their needs. Surveys will be conducted to assess and address the requirements at the local levels, including the northern, coastal, and inland hubs, with priority on local needs. CSB will provide guidance on which areas to concentrate on.

She emphasizes the growing concern in absenteeism and the importance of literacy in children and students, noting that literacy significantly impacts our upbringing and potential as adults. The attendance rate is alarmingly low, with absences reaching 70%, which is equivalent to missing two full school years. By the end of secondary five, a child may have missed almost four years of school. This affects literacy, numeracy, and potential success in a child’s life. The school board needs partners and collaborators to tackle this concerning issue of absenteeism.

Mental health is still affecting students, even after post covid. The students’ wellbeing in their mental health has drawn concerning issues in anxiety, panic attack and other mental health concerns.

“It takes a community to raise a child”. – One of the most beautiful things in this gathering because we carry that responsibility in our communities.

QUOTES FROM THE CHAIR OF CREE SCHOOL BOARD, SARAH PASH:

"When we all take upon our roles of service, because we believe in the potential of us communities, we believe in the potential of our young people, and we believe in the potential of our children. And that really is, that really is the calling of our education system."

"We need community collaboration. We need elders in our schools, and we need partnerships such as CTA and cultural departments. We can't do this alone".

"We believe the potential of our people and the potential of our students".

"How powerful it is in working together in collaboration"

"We have to ensure that the entire community is involved in the success of the school, the success of our students."

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Welcoming remarks by the Director General of Cree School Board, Caroline Mark:

Ms. Mark expressed her gratitude and thankful to be part of the meeting by Teams. She would like to emphasize the importance of our roles in fostering a brighter future for our children and grandchildren. Her and the school board are dedicated to strengthening Cree culture and language while preserving liyuuituun. Acknowledging and recognizing the value of the Cree language is essential, and it is equally important for parents to encourage and support their children's learning environments, as well as to assist their teachers. Ms. Mark would like to thank everyone for being here to discuss these vital issues. She expressed her appreciation and will commit to listening in through the meeting and taking notes of the discussions.

Chair and GC of GCC.

We have a constitution, we have the handwriting of the chiefs, it is the creation of the Grand Council of the Crees in 1975. Signed by the chiefs.

JBNQA agreement states, “The purpose of the mandate of the Grand Council of the Crees shall be the mandate that’s given to it by the communities by the members of the communities”.

The Grand Chief stated that eeyou/eenouch need to go back to basics and start at community level.

ROUNDTABLE SHARING BY COMMUNITIES:

Chief of Cree Nation of Eastmain, Raymond Shanoush:

From 2003 to 2019, our community faced significant social issues, especially after Covid, impacting youth and families. With 20 years of experience in youth sports development, I transformed the Sports Department into the Sports and Health Department.

In 2003, the graduation rate was only 2%, and their goal now is to reach 90-100%. Low attendance frustrated teachers, prompting to take corrective measures. Targeting the 44% youth unemployment rate and related issues like drug and alcohol abuse.

For the 20-64 age demographic, unemployment was around 40%. The approach focused on four key pillars: collaboration with schools, local businesses, and organizations while

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promoting health, education, attitude, and respect. Reinforced policies that ensured everyone had the chance to participate, fostering community engagement.

They launched after-school programs to combat boredom among students, highlighting a high level of student engagement. In Eastmain, where diabetes rates were high, they raised awareness about nutrition and provided healthy food initiatives, addressing food insecurity and supporting families with breakfast programs.

Confronting social issues such as sexual abuse, drug use, and domestic violence is essential. Many young parents struggle to help their children academically, driving some to return to school for inspiration. The community also faces challenges with gambling, which impacts family finances and overall well-being.

In their 2023 consultations with community members led to a focus on a strategic plan to address these social problems. Key goals include reducing unemployment and creating trade skills programs. Engagement is vital for success and support each other in these efforts.

They will promote initiatives through community billboards and work collaboratively to create effective policies for lasting change.

Chairman/Grand Chief of GCC responds:

- Astonished by the information shared by the Chief of Eastmain, Raymond Shanoush
- Encouraged the bravery of addressing the social concerns of Eastmain
- Addressed the transparency shared by Eastmain

Health break: 11:24am – 11:38am

Chief of the Cree Nation of Wemindji, Frank Atsynia:

Sharing the everyday challenges faced in Wemindji reveals various levels and categories within our communities. Some key issues include:

- Poverty
- Food insecurity
- Poor health as a result of these challenges
- Income disparities and their impact on long-term well-being in our children and communities
- Housing shortages, which are not discussed enough
- Homelessness, a critical issue that requires more attention
- The drastic increase in the cost of living

Key questions:

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Additionally, there are significant educational and employment gaps. We often overlook those who are struggling, which leads to broader social issues.

Other concerns include:

- Mental health and substance abuse
- Crime and safety within the communities
- Discrimination in various forms, including racism and sexism, which we inadvertently perpetuate
- Cultural and social disconnecting
- Challenges faced by youth

As Chief Frank Atsynia has asked, “Are we doing enough?” We need to focus on providing comfortable homes for our community members.

Deputy Chief of the Cree Nation of Wemindji, Charlotte Ottereyes:

She shared the various challenges, especially those of from Waswanipi and Wemindji. One significant issue she expressed is dealing with is intergenerational trauma. However, the youth have the ability to break that cycle.

Charlotte Ottereyes once said, “For you to move forward, it must come from within you. I have never used alcohol or drugs in my life because I wanted to break that cycle.”

Establishing mentorship programs would greatly benefit the communities and young parents. “It is crucial that we actively listen to our youth, understanding that listening involves engagement.”

She discussed about creating safe spaces for young people to express themselves. To be compassion and humility are essential during the process.

Thomas Mark, Director of Community Services from the Cree Nation of Wemindji.

Thanks, the leadership present at this gathering and would like to touch on what the chief shared and relate it to his role in community services.

Their roles and responsibility collaborate on many reports, such as EEPF, local governance, and justice, to address health and social issues holistically. Their community engagement with the band, particularly with Miiyuumaatsiun, is vital.

Key questions:

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Their aim to identify existing partnerships and foster continued collaboration and to work extensively beyond in daycares to encompass Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 6, where they incorporate Cree values and principles into the curriculum.

It is essential to structure effectively and work alongside other entities, such as Miiyuumaatsiun. The roles and responsibilities relate to health and wellness, ensuring collaboration and partnerships with local entities and organizations.

The organization engages in annual planning with these organizations to strengthen partnerships. Statistics from the school committee indicate positive outcomes, such as a 68% increase in school attendance following the implementation of programs under Miiyuumaatsiun.

The focus on community engagement conducts workshops that are age-appropriate, covering topics such as:

- Sports academy
- Behavior
- Attendance
- Respect
- Educational awareness
- Bullying

Additionally, the department offers an existing language program and tutoring for students in Secondary 4 and 5.

Chairman/Grand Chief of GCC responds:

- With encouragement and motivation, I was motivated by the presentations from the communities

Lunch break: 12:15 – 1:26pm

Chief of Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation, Gaston Cooper:

The community faces significant interconnection and health challenges that must be addressed such as.

- Unemployment remains a critical issue, with substantial barriers for the youth.
- There is a clear lack of commitment to maintaining employment; participation rates in educational programs are alarmingly low.
- Many students prefer to study at home rather than attend school, which hinders their educational progress.

Key questions:

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- Social issues, particularly related to drugs and alcohol, are rampant in the community.
- “We have the highest diabetes rates in Eeyou Istchee, and chronic diseases are on the rise, severely impacting our quality of life.”
- With 57% of the population under the age of 30 and more men than women, targeted interventions are necessary.
- Housing shortages lead to overcrowded conditions that create significant stress and social issues within families.
- Address the fact that many men are homeless due to various reasons, which raises critical concerns during cold seasons. With this concern, there is an urgent need to build a shelter for the homeless community and establish a community kitchen.
- Mental health challenges are prevalent, with high levels of stress and trauma affecting our community, particularly after the loss of multiple elders in a short period.
- Access to specialized mental health services in Ouje-Bougoumou is severely limited, and crisis response and long-term care services are insufficient.
- Collaborative efforts with entities such as the Justice Department, EEPF, and Miiyuumaatsiun are essential for progress.
- After-care services for clients returning from treatment are lacking, demanding immediate attention.
- There is an alarming statistics showing youth as young as 14 years old are selling drugs in schools. Despite attempts to gather data from EEPF, those efforts have been unsuccessful.
- It is imperative that we begin collecting local statistics to effectively plan and tackle these pressing issues.

There are many requests from people seeking financial or food assistance due to illnesses or disputes. They are suffering in silence, and we need to reach out to them.

“The challenges faced by each community are similar, with attempted suicide being a significant concern.” It is essential to gather more data to collect accurate statistics on these issues.

Chief Gaston addressed to focus on one issue at a time. There will always be challenges in the future. “Finish what we started today”.

“Together, we can work to make Eeyou Istchee a better place for everyone.”

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Director of Health and Social Department, Janie Wapachee continues the roundtable for Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation.

As continued by Chief Cooper, she discussed the establishment of a partnership table where all entities are invited to meet monthly. This partnership table aims to provide solutions to the issues presented, explore collaboration opportunities, and develop a community calendar to prevent scheduling conflicts. They identified several red flags, including vandalism and drug dealing. She emphasized the need to work together on wellness initiatives and collaborate with the Cree Health Board (CHB). This collaboration should also include the implementation of a nutrition policy.

She stressed the importance of sharing financial resources with the CHB covering some expenses. Financial literacy is an important focus, especially since many families are engaged in fundraising activities due to illnesses and medical conditions. Additionally, aftercare is vital following traumatic events and crisis interventions. The need to raise awareness about elder abuse and promote language and cultural initiatives. Lastly, a land-based camp is being constructed outside of the community for grief, mental health and cultural importance support.

Angel Mianscum, Deputy Chief of Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation:

She shared and reflected on what Raymond Shanoush emphasized on the need for more home-based family counseling, addressing issues such as land disputes, nepotism, and intergenerational racism.

Chief of Cree Nation of Waskaganish, Greta Cheechoo:

As she mentions the similarities, she also expressed the different needs from each community, which are the significant social issues in the communities. She expresses her gratitude for the gathering to discuss collaboration. Over the past three years, the community faced multiple crises, prompting an "emergency meeting" to identify key challenges. The purpose of the “emergency meeting” is to *find* solutions.

Key questions:

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The youth raised concerns about overcrowding, the housing crisis, and drug and alcohol violence. In response, the community developed a safety plan, which includes short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies, involving key stakeholders like the Justice Department, Cree Health Board (CHB), Eeyou/Eenou Police Force (EPPF), Wiichiiwewin, the Mobile Treatment Program, and the Wellness Centre.

For interventions, the needs to offer workshops at the Wiichiiwewin Centre and promote healthy lifestyles. However, a major barrier is getting people to attend these workshops.

The goal for the community is healthy people, a happy family and a healthy community, which requires listening to listening to the youth and build trust. She highlighted the need of more trained social workers to address ongoing issues and trauma from the residential school trauma, which a lot of Eeyouch are still suffering. She also emphasized by the late Billy Diamond, who highlighted the need for better trauma support but was sadly excluded from the JBNQA.

Deputy Chief of Cree Nation of Waskaganish, Katelyn Hester:

She expresses her gratitude and appreciation for the forum that has been initiated, something she had hoped for.

She highlighted the main concerns in Waskaganish.

- Lack of Self-Identity: Understanding "What it means to be Eeyou."
- Lack of Awareness: Many community members are unaware of the issues at hand.
- Gambling and Addictions: These problems are becoming prevalent.
- Violence: Youth are carrying weapons in the community for self-protection.
- Special Needs: Individuals with special needs must not be forgotten; they require significant support and services. A dedicated facility is needed for them.
- Education: Youth with special needs are often punished in schools and directed to adult education programs, despite not committing crimes. They should not be treated differently from other students.

Key questions:

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- **Social Media Issues:** The impact of social media has spiraled out of control, leading to problems such as cyberbullying and fights being recorded.

The local youth department are actively trying to develop solutions to these challenges. The Community Resilience Initiative aims to address social issues in collaboration with local stakeholders, including the EEPF, CHB, justice systems, schools, community services, committees, wellness societies, and others.

Each entity is encouraged to share their actions, roles, and responsibilities to explore how they can collectively work to reduce these issues and collaborate more effectively in the future.

“We’re in this together and that we are working for our people.”

Deputy Chief of Cree Nation of Chisasibi, Thomas Shem.

He genuinely expressed that he did not prepare anything for this forum but will include Paula Napash in the projects they worked on together. He addressed that there are 6,000 people in Chisasibi.

He mentioned that people have grown accustomed to traveling down south rather than meeting in our Eeyou Istchee. There are social issues affecting homes, and the wellbeing of children is a major concern due to drugs and alcohol. It is obvious who the bootleggers and drug dealers are based on the accessories and purchases that can be seen outside their band homes. There needs to be a study on a broader perspective and understand the root causes of these issues.

“Our communities are facing serious problems, including killings and murders. We are witnessing numerous overdoses and heart attacks due to drug addiction.”

Regarding the CSB, his uncle was part of the JBQNA. "We established our own curriculum but forgot where we came from." There should have been a lesson or subject in high school that addresses our heritage in history as a subject. Today, spoken Cree language is a concern and is often considered "weak" when we cannot speak properly and pronounce correctly and is mocked or laughed at. “We should not laugh at one another when we try to speak Cree.” He highlighted the importance of in working together as entities to combat the issues of drug and alcohol abuse.

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Paula Napash, Deputy Director of Operations, Cree Nation of Chisasibi:

There is a significant amount of work to be done in Chisasibi due to various challenges. CNC has 29 departments, and the history of colonization and residential schools continues to affect us. The impacts of Hydro Québec's development have been profound, with the river no longer freezing, altering traditional practices and leading to social issues.

Homelessness is a major concern, with many individuals facing precarious living situations, including:

- Sheds
- Porches
- Couch surfing
- Shelters for men and women

Evictions and the challenges of reintegrating individuals from detention further complicate the situation. Many people lose their homes and jobs, contributing to homelessness. A temporary shelter does exist, but it underscores that this issue is a community-wide concern.

Since COVID-19, work ethics have declined, and there is a noticeable lack of motivation to work. Children are struggling with identity crises due to insufficient practice in the liyuutuun and liyuuyimuun languages, highlighting the absence of Elders and youth in community gatherings.

Chisasibi is evolving as a multicultural community, creating a demand for new facilities, including special needs services and funeral homes. “We are still not seeing new developments since the relationship agreement.”

In housing, there are ongoing infrastructure issues with new units. There were 691 applicants for social housing but only a limited number of units available, resulting in a severe housing crisis. Overcrowded living conditions increase risks of social issues, including domestic violence.

- The pressure of social media complicates the work of housing officials, demanding more positions in private housing initiatives. A collaborative approach is essential to address these pressing issues effectively.

Chairman/Grand Chief of GCC.

- He shared that he sat in their housing selections and saw a lot of the social issues they face and recognized the need of a social worker within housing departments.

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Health Break: 3:49pm-4:13pm

Flipchart is put in place to write ***Calls to Action*** and will later be compiled for Rodney Mark to review (he could not be here due to family emergency).

Chief of Cree Nation of Mistissini, Michael Petawabano.

“As Chief of Mistissini, I recognize the importance of addressing our community's social challenges. We all face similar issues.”

There was a Community Forum that took place in the spring of 2025 and a recent event in March. The purpose of the forum was to address and find solutions in reducing violence in Mistissini. From the forum, there were 800 action items from the people. “If we can’t learn to work together, we won’t accomplish anything.” Despite our invitations, not all entities attended, highlighting our collaboration challenges. “We are killing each other now. That is a fact.”

This is a community issue, and we need regional partners. The disappointment of lack of involvement was stated, “Everyone has their own agenda,” especially when some stakeholders do not engage. “This is just the beginning; we must implement action items to address these concerns.”

Statistics from the EEPF reveal that Mistissini has the highest crime rate among local communities.

- Action items include Short-term, Mid-term, Long-term.

The Priority Areas:

1. Security and Surveillance
2. Youth Engagement and Protection
3. Bush Programs
4. School Campaigns
5. Healing

Immediate Safety Measures:

- Controlled entry points
- Surveillance cameras
- Neighborhood watch initiatives
- Addressing bootlegging and drug dealing
- Enforcing curfews

Community priorities include:

- banning traffickers and ensuring reporting systems are in place.

Key questions:

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- **Healing and Treatment Infrastructure:** This issue isn't solely financial; there are surpluses to build necessary facilities.
- **School Concerns:** Community engagement in schools has diminished. Attendance issues affect 300-400 students in Eeyou Istchee, leading to potential dropouts.

“We are here together to work collaboratively.”

- **Addressing Homelessness:** Homelessness often relates to substance abuse, and building shelters alone may not resolve the issue. We must uphold Cree values and prioritize helping one another.
- **Leveraging Strengths:** We can draw on community spirit, church support, and existing cultural programs. Collecting data on our events can help assess effectiveness.
- **Challenges and Barriers:** “We cannot do this alone.”

“We must engage the community and form partnerships to implement necessary measures. “

“Walk the talk.” – Michael Petawabano

Deputy Chief of Cree Nation of Mistissini, John S. Matoush.

He addressed the challenges that come with leadership. There's a significant amount of work to be tackled, and it's essential to revisit our programs and services. Mistissini's constitution and relevant policies also require attention, as there are many areas that need reassessment. He highlighted the needs and enabling certain programs to operate independently instead of depending on the band to manage them. Focus needs to shift toward effectively delivering these programs and services, as the risk losing touch with culture and traditional values. It's crucial to weave Cree values and principles into existing laws.

Additionally, he addressed the need to clearly define the responsibilities of each entity and organization involved. There are noticeable gaps in service delivery that must be addressed.

The question we should be asking ourselves is, “How can we unite and collaborate to tackle these challenges?”

He mentions that we as leaders find ourselves repeatedly facing the same issues, which is discouraging.

Key questions:

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Chairman/Grand Chief of GCC:

The Chair of the GC of the GCC has expressed his condolences and sympathies regarding the recent tragedy in Mistissini. We hear your concerns, and we stand with you.

- “We must stop waiting for a crisis to ignite action.”

Chief of Cree First Nations of Waswanipi, Irene Neeposh.

She was unable to attend the meeting due to personal reasons, as her mother is currently in the hospital. Although she didn’t prepare a presentation, she wanted to express her deep appreciation and gratitude to the individuals from other communities who shared their insights.

During her three years as Chief, she has identified the lack of housing as the major issue, leading to a homelessness crisis affecting 20-30% of the population. “We are not adequately addressing the needs for addiction support and intervention,” she stated.

The troubling reality is that children are being removed from their homes without a pathway for their return. Families aren’t receiving the necessary interventions, leaving parents and families without the outreach they desperately need. This leads to children being displaced and disconnected from their roots. The system in place is predominantly western and fails to reflect Indigenous values.

There is a glaring lack of justice for Eeyouch individuals. Many are committing crimes yet remain free. “The victims are forced to coexist with their aggressors,” she pointed out. “There must be justice – a crime is a crime.”

This situation creates a period of grief for the families affected. She believes that many people are not driven by passion in their work but rather by financial motivation. The pervasive poverty mindset continues to be an obstacle, as seen with developments like Hydro-Québec in Chisasibi or forestry projects in Waswanipi.

These challenges hinder our development and undermine human potential. “CHB didn’t do this for me, CNG didn’t do this and neither did the Chief,” she remarked, highlighting a sense of entitlement that has emerged.

- It’s crucial to define family structures and start discussions to create effective plans moving forward. The bureaucratic issues also need to be addressed, and special projects should be developed to better meet our community's needs.

Supper break: 5:25 pm – 6:45pm

Key questions:

Describe current issues (social, mental health, etc.) prevalent in your community?

How have you structured your administration to respond to these issues?

How do you collaborate with regional entities?

Chief of Whapmagoostui First Nation, Robbie Kawapit.

He expressed the need to focus more on liyuutuun and liyut’kween (traditional medicine), which are vital aspects of traditional teachings. In the past, the Cree people always supported and helped one another. Cree language plays an essential role in our identity as Cree people. It’s crucial for the youth to understand traditional ways and values, even simply expressing concepts in Cree, like “lighting up a fire,” which helps shape their identity.

As part of their journey in learning about Cree culture and language, it’s important that our younger generations connect with these teachings. Unfortunately, we’re seeing our elders becoming more distant as English becomes more prevalent among children and youth. While there are still a few who fully embrace the Cree way of life, we as Cree people are gradually adapting to Western influences, including social media and the internet. These are the platforms where our children often seek knowledge.

If Crees don’t actively pass on their traditional medicinal knowledge, it risks being lost. “We must continue to share this wisdom, especially as our elders impart their teachings.” Moreover, there’s a growing concern that the youth aren’t interested in learning; they should also learn the value of being mobile by foot.

Creating nearby camps dedicated to cultural eeyou and language initiatives could be an effective way to engage our children and youth. The significance of our Cree language is deeply tied to our connection with the land, and we worry about it diminishing.

- To address this, we need a more structured approach as part of our plan—setting up inland and coastal camps that focus on programs for traditional medicine, language, and Cree culture. Establishing eeyou dwellings in the community for the purpose of practicing eeyou medicine will help us maintain and strengthen our cultural identity as we confront these challenges.

Deputy Chief of Whapmagoostui First Nation, Rachel Kawapit.

We need to sit together and work together on the issues and concerns that we all encounter as leaders.

“Let’s not quit but to continue working together.”

Chief of Cree Nation of Nemaska, Clarence Jolly.

Thanks everyone at the table, especially Shawn Iserhoff for organizing the meeting.

Key questions:

Describe current issues (social, mental health, etc.) prevalent in your community?

How have you structured your administration to respond to these issues?

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He expressed the need to discuss the enduring effects of residential schools because our parents and grandparents faced profound grief, as essential care and love were lost when children were taken from their families. Survivors deal with ongoing trauma and PTSD.

The deportation of Nemaska in 1970 and subsequent relocations had significant psychological impacts, leading to division within our community. Boarding school students experienced serious consequences from being away from home, which affected their mental health.

The development of Route du Nord in the 1990s brought increased access to alcohol, complicating social issues and contributing to family separations, particularly among men.

Today, the fast-paced world of social media makes it challenging for parents to maintain control over their children’s internet access. The anxiety from Covid and forest fires has only added to our struggles, demanding quick adaptations.

In response to firearm incidents in Nemaska, the community provided gun cases for secure storage and hired security personnel to enhance public safety. While these efforts are essential, the financial burden of sustaining them poses a challenge.

Deputy Chief of Cree Nation of Nemaska, Teddy Wapachee.

He expressed his appreciation during the meeting held today. He addressed concerns related to sports and recreation, health and well-being, and arts and culture. These are the areas on which we will focus to help the people of Nemaska. He also wanted to touch on the silos that were mentioned numerous times throughout the day.

Key points included:

- The Miiyuumaatsiun committee
- Other committees
- Assessments on what is working and what is not

These were just a few items he wanted to address.

Walter Jolly, Nemaska.

Shared his point of view in education and learning the Cree traditional ways. Learning traditional practices is still a learning process.

Key questions:

Describe current issues (social, mental health, etc.) prevalent in your community?

How have you structured your administration to respond to these issues?

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His father travelled to Mistissini to buy a canoe/boat with a motor. Motor broke down and his father made a hand-made piston ring out of his tools. He managed to get the motor going; the analogy of the story, “There is a solution to every problem”.

Chief of MoCreebec, Michael Jolly.

A total of 136 housing units were developed, yet CMHC remains largely unrecognized within the community. Residents are grappling with a severe shortage of housing and available land. Housing stands out as one of the pressing challenges we face. There is no emergency shelter for those affected by domestic violence, and substance abuse issues are widespread, impacting everyone in the community.

We find ourselves in a position where we cannot pass effective laws or provide necessary corrective measures. Many individuals experience lateral violence, and mental health issues continue to rise. Access to social funding is severely limited, as many are not classified as First Nations. The escalating cost of living compounds the problem, making it difficult to secure quality food.

One individual shared, “The education I have now has granted me freedoms I never had before,” proudly noting that he generated 1.2 million through his business. When asked, “How will you invest in the MoCreebec people?” he reflected on the importance of the community’s future.

There’s also concern about language and identity, as expressed by Michael Jolly: “Why doesn’t Mike speak Cree? I gave up.” This brings us back to the question, “How do you build a stronger nation?” We need to seize the opportunity to foster dialogue, create synergy, and form partnerships to tackle the challenges our community faces head-on. Truth and Reconciliation remain key themes in this journey.

Deputy Chief of MoCreebec, Terrence Kataquapit.

Concerns about absenteeism often trace back to parental issues. In many cases, older siblings end up caring for their younger brothers and sisters because their parents are unable to do so. As a result, these children miss out on essential experiences of growing up, focusing instead on taking care of their siblings. There are also serious worries about children coming across needles on the streets. Another pressing issue is the lack of funds for funerals, which creates significant challenges due to limited financial resources. Finding ways to secure funding for funeral costs remains a crucial concern.

Additionally, there is a shortage of services aimed at supporting elders with medical health issues. While the health department in MoCreebec primarily focuses on youth, there are

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efforts to include resources for older individuals. For instance, they are bringing in a foot care nurse to assist diabetic patients, ensuring they receive proper treatment.

“The collective goal is to learn from one another, as that is the only way we can move forward and achieve what we set out to do.”

Health break: 8:26 pm-8:35 pm

Director of Youth Protection, Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, Taria Matoush:

“Every Child Matters” – A Vision for Culturally Grounded Youth Protection Services**

Introduction of Leadership: Ashley Iserhoff and Alyssa Mark, Assistant Directors of Youth Protection, are dedicated to enhancing youth protection services. Alyssa's educational background significantly contributes to this mission.

Cree Child Rights: Emphasizing the United Nations’ recognition, every child has the right to a secure and protected environment, including safety, physical health, and mental well-being.

Concept of Protection: Youth Protection operates under strict laws to prioritize child safety and development. Many parents seek help but find limited services, highlighting the need for extended support.

Cree DYP Program Development: The Cree Nation is unique in having a Cree Direction de la Jeunesse et du Protection program, unlike the other jurisdictions managed by non-Indigenous authorities.

Governance & Legal Authority: The Cree Nation Government and Cree Health Board are developing a youth protection program aligned with Cree cultural practices, overseen by a Cree Commission, ensuring that all workers are Cree and decisions reflect Indigenous values.

Cultural Continuity: The Cree Nation has the opportunity to reform the childcare system to better reflect Cree-based approaches, addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children.

Process of Youth Protection: The youth protection procedure includes reporting, evaluation, orientation, implementation, and review, addressing the significant volume of distressing cases reported.

Key questions:

Describe current issues (social, mental health, etc.) prevalent in your community?

How have you structured your administration to respond to these issues?

How do you collaborate with regional entities?

Statistics and Challenges: For 2024-2025, 2,484 RTS calls highlighted severe issues, including child abuse and neglect. The high volume of cases reveals systemic failures in addressing children’s rights.

Resource Allocation: The current expenditure of \$11 million on foster care placements could be redirected toward community programs that better support families.

Moving Forward: Recommendations include:

- Developing a Cree Youth Protection Program in line with Eeyou/Eenou traditions.
- Empowering the Cree Commission to guide youth protection efforts.
- Focusing on independent living opportunities for youth aging out of care.

Call to Action: “Help us to help these children,” emphasizes the shared responsibility to improve the youth protection system by embracing Cree values for sustainable solutions.

Chairman/ Grand Chief of GCC:

Acknowledges all the presenters from Day 1. “We hear you.”

Small video clip is shown to the group – bringing back that voice back. A video about Family Group Conferencing

“The voice of the child is lost when they are taken”

Day 1 adjourned: 9:48 pm