



2025
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



This year, we shared a **Living Land Acknowledgement:** a video filmed in community, spoken in Indigenous languages, and offered as a gift of truth, love, and presence.

SCAN TO WATCH:



Rooted in Place

As an Indigenous-led organization in the heart of St. John's, First Light is rooted in this place and the people who call it home. These lands shape how we gather, how we grow, and how we walk forward together.

We did a lot this year.
We gathered. We grew. We celebrated.
We supported. We remembered.

We built new spaces, held old traditions, and stood with each other – through grief, joy, and everything in between.

These pages hold more than numbers. They share the stories, relationships, and care that carried us forward.

Thank you for walking with us.





Our Purpose

At First Light, we create spaces that uplift, connect, and support Indigenous communities and nations. Grounded in culture, care, and kinship, we walk alongside our community through programs, services, and advocacy rooted in truth, trust, and friendship.



We Gathered

In circles, kitchens, classrooms, and community rooms, we came together. Through programs rooted in culture, care, and connection, we created spaces to laugh, learn, share, and simply be. Gathering is how we remember who we are – and who we are to one another.



3,466

connections through
community programs

Braided Programs

Programs that feel like home, shaped by your voice.

Each program belongs to one of our five program circles – soft categories that make it easier to find the right fit, whether you're looking for quiet healing, shared meals, cultural teachings, or time on the land.

On the Land

Programs shaped by seasons, land, and cultural practice.



Steady Ground

Healing and support for lived experiences and recovery.



Good Energy

Staying active, connected, and energized together.

Kettle's On

Casual drop-in spaces to connect, chat, and share time.



Our Ways

Programs with a specific cultural focus, open to all.






“This past year has been one of change, growth, and connection, filled with moments that reminded me why I love what I do. Having the opportunity to share my own experiences and how we incorporate Indigenous cultures into our everyday practices that reflects who we are as a people has made this year **especially meaningful.**”

- *First Light Early Learning Staff Member*

57 safe and loving
childcare spaces where
little ones learn, laugh,
and grow



Our **Elders in Residence** program creates space for shared stories, gentle guidance, and cultural connection. Whether through one-on-one visits, group teachings, or informal conversations, Elders offer grounding presence and wisdom rooted in lived experience. These moments are more than support – they are relationships that hold history, healing, and the heart of who we are.

ELDERS IN RESIDENCE

1,200+

moments of
learning and support



"He knows that the staff of First Light
can see him as human,
even when mad, and that coming
here for a chat can help him rather
than harming himself or others."

- First Light Social Supports Staff Member

Shared moments of
connection and healing:

3,168

**PEER & CULTURAL
SUPPORT**

We Grew

We kept building this year – brick by brick, program by program, relationship by relationship.

Growth showed up in new spaces, new staff, and new opportunities to serve community. Every step forward was grounded in the same foundation: culture, care, and collective strength.





HARVEY HOUSE

10

new transitional
housing units

Harvey House is now open – a transitional housing facility for women and 2SLGBTQIA+ relatives with lived experience of violence. Staffed 24/7 by Inclusion Case Managers, it offers support in daily living, wellness, and culturally rooted care.

Named in loving memory of *Andrew Harvey*, a friend, colleague, and community-builder, this space carries his legacy: a home for safety, connection, and new beginnings.





This year, our team grew stronger and even more prepared to meet crisis with compassion, safety, and cultural care.

We deepened our skills, grounded our response, and strengthened our readiness to show up when it matters most.

18

staff trained in ASIST suicide intervention

53

staff completed Naloxone and Opioid Response training

99

training
sessions held

1,517

participants with
deeper knowledge of
Indigenous cultures



Through stories, teachings,
and lived experiences,
**Indigenous Cultural
Diversity Training**

participants gain a deeper
understanding of Indigenous
cultures and histories – and
leave with tools to support
truth, reconciliation, and real
change.

“Your training sessions
continue to leave a
lasting impact. [It] was
described by our team
as one of the most
positively influential
experiences they have
ever taken part in. It was
life changing.”

- Training Participant

OUR DIGITAL SPACE

In 2025, we launched our **refreshed First Light website**. It's more than a new look - it's a digital reflection of how we work, connect, and carry our values forward.

Whether you're looking for cultural programming, family services, or community supports, you'll find everything more accessible and connected than ever before.

You'll also find:

- Simplified menu & navigation
- A refreshed Community Events calendar
- Clearer pathways to learn about programs and services
- A dedicated Truth and Reconciliation section, featuring the 42 Calls for Change



VISIT US:



This year, we worked closely with the City of St. John's and partners across Canada to draft a decolonization toolkit, deepen local relationships, and advance truth and reconciliation.

From the Inclusion Advisory to the Joint Coordinating Committee on Indigenous Rights (JCCIR), we're proud to support community-led change in municipal spaces.

LEARN MORE



28 of 42
CALLS FOR CHANGE

currently have work
underway to advance truth
and reconciliation in St. John's

We Celebrated

Joy is medicine. This year, we made space for it to shine. From Spirit Song performances to quiet creative moments, we honoured the power of Indigenous culture, identity, and expression. Celebration reminded us of our resilience, our stories, and our strength.



900+
attendees



23
events



70
artists

This year, our performance space came alive with music, story, laughter, and shared experience. From intimate workshops to full-house shows, we welcomed hundreds of events that invited community to gather, express, and connect.



326

performances, workshops,
and community events

6,556

people engaged through art,
culture, and shared experience

This year, our Justice Supports team launched the **Community Justice Table** at Spirit Song – a space for justice-involved community members to showcase and sell their artwork.

Each piece represented hope, skill, and resilience. Artists were recognized their work, helping them reconnect with community, culture, and themselves.

"I just can't stop looking at it, it's been a while since I had money in my hand. \$20 is a lot when you're in prison. Thanks, I really appreciate this."

- Community member,
post Spirit Song sales



14

artists featured

\$1,285

returned directly to
artists through sales



“Being in multiple spaces
that honoured both
queerness and Indigenous
values made me feel
truly seen.”

- First Light Staff Member

150+

community members came
together in celebration of Pride



“Seeing so many people come together on National Indigenous Peoples Day was amazing! It felt like multiple parts of the urban community came together; you could feel the support for the Indigenous community.”

- First Light Staff Member



NATIONAL
INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES DAY

2,000+

attended celebrations


We Supported

Every day, our teams walk alongside community members through challenges, grief, healing, and hope. From patient navigation to housing support, harm reduction to wellness counselling, we met people where they were, offering steady care rooted in trust and respect.



133

interactions to
support renewal
of Status Cards



Our **Indigenous Patient Health Navigation** team walks with community members through some of their hardest moments, offering comfort, support, and cultural care during medical travel and treatment. This year brought deep loss and transition, but also profound connection. Patients, escorts, and staff leaned on each other with honesty and heart, reminding us that care is more than logistics – it's relationships.

2,109
patients helped

6,706
supportive interactions



“[Housing] is one less thing to worry about which always prompted more stress. Now I have much much less of stress, **thanks to you.**”

Resident Relative upon securing housing June 2024

38

people found a stable place to live

7,538

connections wove together stability, care, and belonging



Every ride is part of someone's healing journey. Our **Medical Transportation** team ensures clients get to and from appointments safely, with compassion and care. For those traveling far from home, this program offers not just a ride but consistency, connection, and peace of mind.



17,079

medical rides provided

23,934

passengers supported on their journey to care

We are so blessed and thankful for your team of hardworking, friendly, and compassionate staff for their patience and support during our time here in the city. All the drivers and dispatch are outstanding and so friendly. We travel a couple times a year and are **forever thankful** for this service provided to us.”

Passenger message
after July 2025 visit



Guidelines for additional
naloxone have been revised.
Naloxone kits **not been revived in 2-3**
years. Please see an additional dose of
Naloxone.

NALOXONE



34

Naloxone kits
provided

9

lives directly
saved

42

community members
directly connected with
harm reduction supplies

27

community members
connected with phones
and digital tools to stay
safe and supported

The background of the entire page is a photograph of an outdoor gathering. In the foreground, a table covered with a white cloth holds various traditional items: a jar of yellow liquid, a dark stone on a wooden slice, a knife with a feather handle, and other objects. The background shows people sitting at tables under a white umbrella, with a red overlay on the left side.

52


community members
supported through justice-
related care and connection

2,468

supportive interactions for
community members
navigating the justice system

“If it wasn’t for First Light I
wouldn’t be here, I’ve been
trying to get on this [healing]
journey, and you guys
gave me the extra push
that I needed.”


Community Member on
First Light Justice Supports



"I have continued to grow as a wellness counsellor over the past year. The people I see for counselling teach me just as much as I teach them. It is a collaborative process that I am honoured to be a part of and I take that responsibility seriously."

Michelle Corbett

Wellness Counsellor

A wooden Adirondack chair is positioned in a field of autumn leaves. The chair is made of dark, weathered wood and is set against a background of vibrant orange and red foliage. The ground is covered with fallen leaves, and the overall scene is bathed in a warm, golden light.

“I can't thank you enough for helping me all this time at my absolute worst, especially when I panic. Thank you so much for being a constant in my support team. I'd be so lost without you and I so much appreciate everything you do for me. And I know I'm one of so many whose lives you've made such a positive impact on.”

Counselling Client

WELLNESS COUNSELLING

First Light offers counselling for Indigenous adults (18+), using a strengths-based, person-centred approach to support wellness goals. Indigenous individuals can contact Michelle directly: no referral needed. Referrals can also be made on someone's behalf by individuals or organizations.



michelle@firstlightnl.ca



709-693-3477

We Remembered

This year, we held space for memory – for the people, stories, and teachings that shaped us.



We remembered those who walked with us, who led with love, who taught through song and silence. We honoured their legacy not just in words, but in the ways we continue their work: gathering, drumming, speaking our languages, and walking together in care.



ORANGE SHIRT DAY

On September 30, we gathered in community to honour Survivors, to remember the children who never came home, and to call for action.

As part of the Rally for Reconciliation, we wrapped colonial statues in orange shirts, transforming public monuments into powerful sites of truth-telling and remembrance.

Led by Indigenous voices, the rally included ceremony, drumming, youth and Elder speakers, and a strong call for systemic change. It was a day of grief, visibility, and collective action.

350+

people gathered

\$15k

raised at pop-up shop to
support reconciliation efforts

CHRISTOPHER SHEPPARD

Visionary leader, friend, and community builder

Chris brought light wherever he went - bright, bold, and full of ambition.

At First Light, he helped shape a future rooted in love, pride, and visibility for the urban Indigenous community. His legacy remains woven through our programs, our spaces, and the lives he touched.

May we keep dreaming boldly and leading with heart, just as he did.



SOLOMON SEMIGAK

Teacher, friend, and knowledge keeper



Solomon brought warmth wherever he went - steady, kind, and full of joy. He shared his love of drumming and teaching Inuktitut with generosity, lifting others through language, laughter, and song.

At First Light, he embodied the spirit of connection, guiding with humility and care. His legacy remains woven through our classrooms, our gatherings, and the lives he touched. May we continue to share language, laughter, and love - just as he did.


Our Elders carry knowledge, care, and teachings that reminds us where we've come from and helps us walk with intention toward what's ahead.

This year, a few of our Elders shared reflections on the paths we've travelled and the ones still unfolding before us.



"I am so proud to be part of First Light. I have seen First Light grow into a successful business and expand in so many fields, and they are there to offer their services to anyone who need it, in education, housing, employment, counselling, etc. First Light is a shining light for [the people of] NL."

Elder Ellen Ford



"Inside our hearts are tiny spaces where all knowledge and wisdom resides. We are people of strength! Sing your songs of love. Pray to keep our people strong. Be respectful, humble, and kind. Let our elders help lead the healing among our nations.

Only the laws of the spirit remain the same. Never be afraid to send prayers to people who are having a difficult time. **Be as gentle as a mild breeze of wind and as warm as the summer sun.** Stand alone but sometimes on the journey be wise enough to stand together.

Msit No'kmaq!"

Elder Marjorie Muisse

"All the work First Light does for the Urban Indigenous people in the cities and all the people in need is beautiful work. **They have helped so many people**, cared for anyone who walked in their doors and have treated our Elders with a lot of respect. I hope and know they will keep up the good work they are doing."

Elder Emma Reelis

Dear friends,

Together, we have walked through moments of deep challenge and sorrow, alongside moments of growth and renewal. Through it all, we have continued to stand together in the spirit of community, carrying one another with compassion and strength.

Our Strategy Wheel continues to ground us in what matters most: culture, connection, and care for one another. Every step we take, every program we build, every relationship we nurture is guided by that vision. Our commitment remains to walk gently beside community in ways that honour who we are and where we come from.

This year also called us to pause and remember those who have journeyed on to the spirit world. Loved ones, traditional knowledge keepers, teachers, and friends, whose presence continues to guide and shape our path. We hold their memories close, knowing that their kindness, teachings, and laughter are woven into the very foundation of First Light. Their light continues to guide us, reminding us to live with kindness, courage, and purpose. They showed us what it means to build community, and we honour them by continuing the work they began.





Amidst these moments of reflection, we have also witnessed resilience and hope. From the opening of Harvey House to the growth of our affordable housing and wellness supports, to our new website connecting more people to culture and community, we have continued to move forward together, led by the heartbeat of culture. Through ceremony, art, and shared learning, we have seen again that culture is medicine – a source of joy, belonging, and healing.

We also took meaningful steps toward reconciliation and inclusion, helping to advance the Calls for Change in St. John's and strengthening partnerships across governments, organizations, and communities. These relationships remind us that reconciliation is living work, built on honesty, humility, and shared responsibility.

As we look ahead, we do so with gratitude and determination. The road has not always been easy. But we walk it together, guided by the teachings of our Elders, the wisdom of those who came before, and our hopes for those to come.

To our Elders, staff, and Board of Directors, thank you for your continued love and dedication. Your spirit is the heartbeat of First Light. Together we honour the past, celebrate the present, and create a future filled with strength, connection, and possibility.

In friendship,

Stacey Howse
Stacey Howse
President and CEO



CHAIR
BLAIR BENOIT



VICE CHAIR
CATHERINE FAGAN



TREASURER
DAVID WORKS



SECRETARY
HASAN HAI



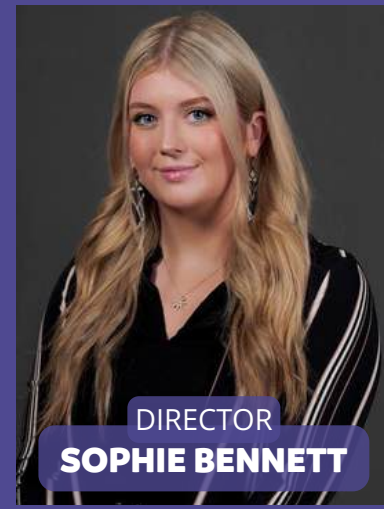
ELDER
EMMA REELIS



YOUTH DIRECTOR
LUCAS HISCOCK



DIRECTOR
LISA SMITH



DIRECTOR
SOPHIE BENNETT



DIRECTOR
PATRICIA KEOUGH



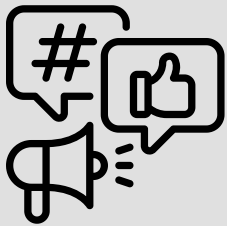
DIRECTOR
CHARLOTTE JEWczyk



DIRECTOR
LONI SLADE



DIRECTOR
MARGARET CRANFORD



1.65 M

digital connections bringing
community together



Connect with us!



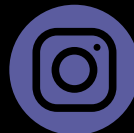
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FIRST LIGHT

St. John's Friendship Centre