The Link
Youth and Family Supports

Bringing Ourselves Home

GOVERNANCE. KINSHIP. RESPONSIBILITY.

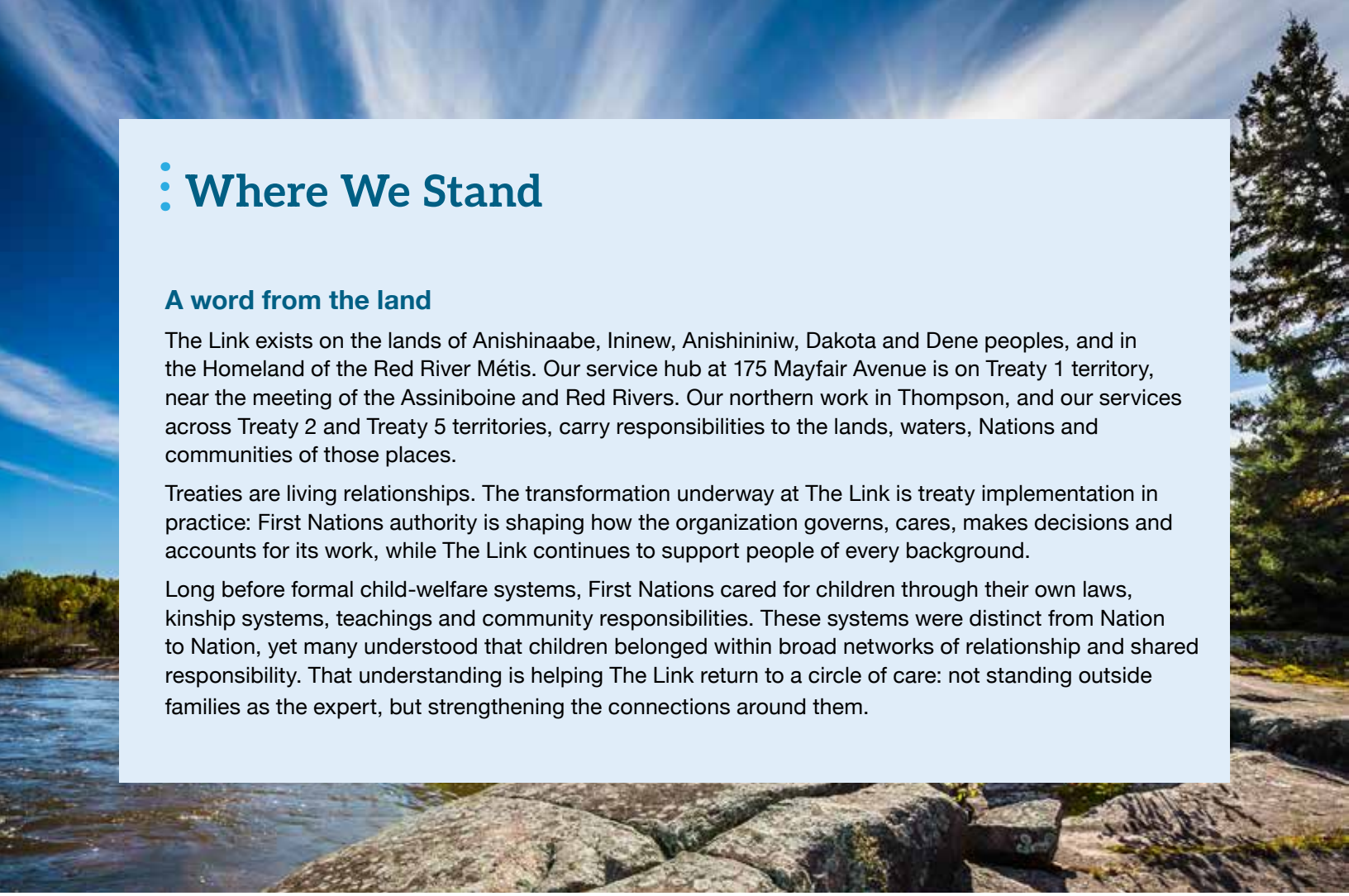
A new journey in how we care for children, youth and families.

Annual Report

April 1, 2025–March 31, 2026



Reach for the Stars



Where We Stand

A word from the land

The Link exists on the lands of Anishinaabe, Ininew, Anishininiw, Dakota and Dene peoples, and in the Homeland of the Red River Métis. Our service hub at 175 Mayfair Avenue is on Treaty 1 territory, near the meeting of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. Our northern work in Thompson, and our services across Treaty 2 and Treaty 5 territories, carry responsibilities to the lands, waters, Nations and communities of those places.

Treaties are living relationships. The transformation underway at The Link is treaty implementation in practice: First Nations authority is shaping how the organization governs, cares, makes decisions and accounts for its work, while The Link continues to support people of every background.

Long before formal child-welfare systems, First Nations cared for children through their own laws, kinship systems, teachings and community responsibilities. These systems were distinct from Nation to Nation, yet many understood that children belonged within broad networks of relationship and shared responsibility. That understanding is helping The Link return to a circle of care: not standing outside families as the expert, but strengthening the connections around them.

Who we are becoming

Brokenhead Ojibway Nation is an Anishinaabe Nation whose relationships with these lands, waters, families and neighbouring Nations extend beyond Canada. Anishinaabe people governed themselves, raised children through kinship networks, carried laws and teachings, and held responsibilities that did not depend on another government's recognition.

In 1871, First Nations and the Crown entered into Treaty No. 1 at Lower Fort Garry. Treaty was a relationship between Nations that already governed themselves, and its commitments have not always been honoured. Brokenhead experienced policies intended to displace First Nations authority over land, governance, families, culture and community life. Its 1998 Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement addressed land that should have been provided under Treaty No. 1, and the Nation has continued strengthening its land base and authority.

In 2025, that resurgence took another form: a Treaty 1 Nation assumed responsibility for an organization created within a different system of care. The Link still serves people across Manitoba. First Nations governance does not require one identity or worldview; it changes the foundation from which we care and makes room for First Nations knowledge alongside clinical practice, lived experience and family knowledge.

> *The path to decolonizing the child welfare system depends on returning the responsibility to care to Indigenous nations.*
> ***— Hon. Nahanni Fontaine, Minister of Families***

Table of Contents

Joint Message from the Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer	4
Year One: Governance Returned to Community	5
Our purpose, vision and shared understandings	6
Strategic direction, 2026–2028	6
Our Strategic Priorites	7
Our Community of Care	8
Belonging and Low-Barrier Early Support	9
Winnipeg Youth Resource Centre: a place to start	10
Family Strengthening and Prevention	11
Youth Crisis Stabilization System: one access point, different responses	12
Youth Resource Centre North: immediate help in Thompson	14
StreetReach: mobile outreach for safety	15
Care Close to Family and Community	16
Healing and Clinical Services	17
The Link Clinic: health care in a familiar setting	18
Pathways to Adulthood	19
Workforce, Culture and Learning	20
Challenges and Lessons	21
Stewardship	22
What We Owe the Next Year	23
Governance and Accountability	24
A New Generation of Leadership: Erica Straight-Bear	25
Miigwech	26

Joint Message from the **Board Chair** and **Chief Executive Officer**

This year, we began bringing ourselves home



The Link began as the Sir Hugh John Macdonald Hostel for Boys. It later became Macdonald Youth Services and, eventually, The Link. Names changed, programs changed and approaches evolved, but the organization remained shaped by systems that too often saw children and families through what was wrong, missing or needed to be fixed—and placed institutional and professional authority ahead of family, community and Nation.

On April 17, 2025, The Link and Brokenhead Ojibway Nation signed a Memorandum of Understanding that began the formal return of the organization to First Nations governance.

We have come to understand this as more than a change in ownership or structure. It is repatriation. It is treaty implementation. It is First Nations people reclaiming the authority to shape how children, youth and families are cared for within an organization that serves all Manitobans.

As responsibility returned to First Nations people, we began asking what becomes possible when First Nations ways of knowing and caring shape the organization. Our teachings start from a different place: children are gifts and relatives; families carry knowledge and strength; people belong to one another. Healing happens through relationship, and relationship takes time.

Bringing Ourselves Home names what we are returning to and building. Public services become stronger when First Nations knowledge, clinical practice, professional expertise, lived experience and family knowledge work together.

A new governance structure does not, by itself, remove colonial ways of working. They can remain in language, policies, forms, rules, supervision, buildings, measures of success and assumptions about the people we serve. Our responsibility is to find those places, challenge them and change them. We must also be accountable for whether children, youth and families can feel the difference.

This first year established a new foundation while services continued every day. Honest assessment also identified workforce pressures, funding uncertainty and gaps between programs that must be addressed if transformation is to last.

Miigwech to Brokenhead Ojibway Nation for bringing us home; to the children, youth and families of every background who continue to trust us; and to our employees, Board of Directors, Member and community partners who are helping us imagine what this organization can become.

Candace Olson
Board Chair

Victoria Fisher
Chief Executive Officer

Year One: Governance Returned to Community

A foundational milestone

The return to First Nations governance defined 2025–2026. It established Brokenhead Ojibway Nation Chief and Council as the sole Member of The Link and created a foundation for deeper change.

Date	Milestone
April 17, 2025	The Link and Brokenhead Ojibway Nation signed a Memorandum of Understanding, formally beginning the transition to First Nations governance.
July 2025	The Joint Transition Team held its first meeting in Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, bringing together governance, leadership, youth and community perspectives.
Summer–fall 2025	Comprehensive due diligence reviewed governance, financial, operational, human-resources and program records, supported by site tours and engagement with employees, community, funders and partners.
Summer–fall 2025	Program redesign began, examining how services could become more connected, accessible and responsive across The Link's community of care.
September 2025	The governance transition was completed, establishing Brokenhead Ojibway Nation Chief and Council as the sole Member of The Link.
November 2025	Wendall Sinclair Jr., Erica Straight-Bear and Pamela Kent joined the Board as BON-appointed Directors.
January 2026	The 2026–2028 Strategic Plan was finalized.
Early 2026	The Link advanced program redesign, workforce changes and new funding approaches to align operations with its emerging direction.
March 2026	A CEO transition began, aligning executive leadership with the new governance and strategic direction.
March 31, 2026	The first transition year closed with First Nations governance established, a new Strategic Plan in place, and significant organizational and service transformation underway.



Our purpose, vision and shared understandings



Our purpose

We walk alongside children, youth and families as an inclusive community, strengthening and empowering a sense of belonging, pride and purpose.



Our vision

A First Nations-led service model of excellence where governance, programs and partnerships reflect community authority, and where all families experience lifelong pathways to healing, belonging and stability.

Our work begins with a young person as a relative connected in spirit, mind, heart and body; to family, kin and community; and to land and language. We understand that:

- identity and belonging are protective;
- healing is a lifelong journey;
- kinship is a way of working;
- the land is a teacher and a relative;
- lived experience is expertise; and
- helping one another is everyone's work.

Strategic direction, 2026–2028

Developed with leadership, employees, youth, families, partners and governance, the 2026–2028 Strategic Plan translates the transition into four priorities.

Wholistic Service Framework

Connect prevention, family support, crisis response, residential care, clinical services, housing and transition supports so people can move between them without repeatedly starting over.

Organizational Sustainability

Strengthen financial, data, quality, infrastructure and risk systems; examine whether funding matches program expectations; and direct resources toward governance priorities.

Governance and Accountability

Define governance relationships, decision rights and accountability under Brokenhead Ojibway Nation while meeting public responsibilities across Manitoba.

Workforce Transition

Recruit and retain strong employees, develop leaders, strengthen supervision and learning, and build a workforce that practises through relationship, respect, accountability and high standards.

The Link
Youth and Family Supports

Our Strategic Priorities 2026-2028



Wholistic Service Framework:
Support families early and keep children connected to their culture, land, and community.



Workforce Transition and Leadership:
Grow a strong, culturally safe team with Indigenous leadership for today and the future.



Governance and Accountability:
Ensure decisions are led by the Nation, with strong accountability and youth voices included.



Organizational Sustainability and Stewardship:
Build stable funding and partnerships that reflect our Nation's priorities and community needs.

Our Community of Care

The Link is a First Nations-governed network offering immediate assistance, family support, crisis response, stable homes, healing services and preparation for adulthood. Our services are offered in Winnipeg and Thompson. Our Northern Services reflect the communities, relationships, knowledge and realities of Northern Manitoba, shaped by the people they serve, the communities they work alongside and the relationships that define life across the region. From Thompson, Youth Resource Centre North, Wuskwatim, Transition House and StreetReach North create multiple ways for young people to access support. Together, they provide emergency shelter, residential care, outreach, practical assistance and support through the transition toward adulthood.

A young person may first arrive for resources, connection or crisis support, then explore opportunities to access counselling, health care, housing or school support. A family using respite may request access to clinical care or family programs. A young person being cared for at a Healing Home may become seek out transitional services as they prepare for the next stage of their journey.

Our services are organized by purpose, not a required sequence:

1. **Belonging and low-barrier early support** create welcoming places to connect with culture, practical resources and trusted people before a situation becomes an emergency.
2. **Family strengthening and prevention** bring support around caregivers and young people to preserve relationships, reduce instability and prevent more disruptive interventions.
3. **Urgent, crisis and safety responses** provide phone, text, mobile, outreach, educational and short-term stabilization options matched to the level of need.
4. **Residential care close to family and community** provides safe, purposeful care while strengthening the relationships that continue beyond a stay.
5. **Healing and clinical services** offer immediate, short-term and longer-term therapeutic support, specialized family work and access to primary health care.
6. **Pathways to adulthood** connect education, employment, community participation, life skills, housing and sustained transition support under the Skills4Life umbrella.

47
Young people and their families supported through Caring Connections

basic needs met
7,426
times at the Winnipeg Youth Resource Centre

3,361
overnight stays provided through the Winnipeg and northern Youth Resource Centres

11,906
calls received by the Youth Crisis Stabilization System

790
mobile crisis responses dispatched

183
young people served through Life Train

Belonging and Low-Barrier Early Support

Culture, identity and connection

Indigenous Initiatives helps young people across The Link connect with culture, identity, land and one another. The team works to make cultural opportunities and First Nations knowledge part of everyday services.

Opportunities include ceremony, teachings, land-based activities, language, traditional practices, medicines, shared food and time with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, cultural helpers and peers.

In 2025–2026, Indigenous Initiatives moved to a new location at 175 Mayfair, creating more space to gather. The Link also strengthened relationships with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and First Nations organizations, recognizing that no one person or team holds all cultural knowledge.

A renaming exercise began, and **Heartberry Lodge** emerged as a name for this place of gathering, learning, relationship and cultural connection. Culture should not be something a young person must leave their regular program to find.

The Youth Hub: resources before crisis

The Youth Hub is designed for low-barrier, repeat access. Young people ages **18–29** do not need to be in crisis, be admitted to a program or have a formal referral. Open seven days a week, the Hub brings together food and clothing, showers and laundry, harm reduction, mental-health and addictions support, cultural programming, housing and employment assistance, advocacy, referrals and system navigation.

Someone may come only for food; another may need identification, income, housing, health or mental-health support. No visitor must follow a set pathway or complete a program.

The **Hub is not the Winnipeg Youth Resource Centre**. The YRC provides immediate practical assistance and overnight shelter and can respond when needs are urgent. Crisis services respond to acute psychosocial situations. Skills4Life offers structured support around defined goals. The Hub operates between and alongside these services: it makes a broad range of resources available without requiring circumstances to become an emergency first.

Return visits allow staff to know a young person over time and connect specialized help as circumstances change. The Link Clinic adds primary health care in the same service environment.





Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the program served approximately 12,775 to 14,600 participant visits, including 5,475 Elder visits. Participants received three meals and two to three snacks daily, resulting in approximately 73,000 meals and snacks served annually. Approximately 90% to 95% of participants identified as Indigenous. The program was supported by six Indigenous staff members and three Indigenous volunteers, for a total Indigenous workforce of nine individuals.

Winnipeg Youth Resource Centre: a place to start

The Winnipeg Youth Resource Centre provides immediate, low-barrier support seven days a week. It combines basic-needs assistance, overnight shelter, crisis support and connections to other services in one point of access.

Young people may need food, clothing, hygiene supplies, a shower, shelter or help with housing, mental health, family circumstances or other systems. They may connect on their own or through a caregiver, school, provider or professional. They need not identify the right program in advance: staff address the need in front of them and connect what comes next.

Winnipeg YRC activity, 2025–2026

Measure	Result
Basic-needs supports provided	7,426
Young people receiving basic-needs supports	994
Overnight stays	1,791
Young people using overnight shelter	289
Child-protection reports	10
Suicide-risk assessments	5

Recorded connection routes included **287 walk-ins**, **418 call-ins**, **166 parent or caregiver contacts**, **783 professional contacts** and **289 shelter self-referrals**. These routes describe ways people reached the centre and should not be read as a count of unique individuals.



Family Strengthening and Prevention



Kent Road Lodge: respite as prevention

Kent Road Lodge supports families caring for children and youth ages 8–17 who are experiencing significant mental-health challenges and where ongoing stress or caregiver exhaustion may put family stability at risk. Its purpose is to provide meaningful support before circumstances escalate to the point where a child may need to enter care.

Kent Road pairs short-term, out-of-home respite with support for caregivers. The Link's multidisciplinary clinical team works with families at home on routines, behaviour management, de-escalation, skills and confidence.

In 2025–2026, Kent Road Lodge supported **91 families** and recorded **194 family visits**.

The program grew from an identified need: families caring for children and youth with significant mental-health needs required more support before challenges escalated to crisis, placement breakdown or a more disruptive intervention. Rather than asking one organization to solve that gap alone, the General Child and Family Services Authority, Winnipeg, Rural and Northern Child and Family Services, and The Link worked together to develop a different response.

That partnership brought together child-welfare knowledge, family relationships, clinical and community expertise, and The Link's capacity to provide short-term respite and support. Shared referral and planning bring the family, agency, Authority and The Link around one plan, allowing respite to be paired with practical strategies, relationship work and other supports that strengthen the family beyond the stay itself.

Kent Road demonstrates what can happen when organizations respond to an identified need by building something together.

Caring Connections: a stay with a purpose

Caring Connections provides short-term residential support when a young person or family needs additional help to stabilize a difficult situation without losing sight of the relationships and living arrangements they are working to preserve. In 2025–2026, the program supported 47 young people and their families, responding to family conflict, instability, risk of entering care, preparation for reunification and other significant transitions.

The residential stay creates time and space to address what is contributing to the instability. Clinical and family supports are brought alongside the young person and the people caring for them to strengthen relationships, work through conflict, clarify what is needed for a safe return, and put supports in place for what happens after discharge. The measure of success is therefore not simply that a young person had somewhere to stay, but whether the stay helped create greater stability when they left.

For some families, that meant helping prevent further disruption. Caring Connections supported sibling groups to remain together during periods of instability rather than being separated across emergency placements. For others, it supported the work of bringing a family back together.

Across the program, the same principle applies: a short stay should contribute to a longer-term outcome. Caring Connections uses residential support as an opportunity to reduce immediate pressure, strengthen family and caregiver relationships, stabilize placements and build connections that can continue after the young person leaves.

Rebuilding Connections: program redevelopment

Rebuilding Connections demonstrated the impact of family-preservation and reunification support. Over the life of the initiative, it supported 277 families, facilitated approximately 4,262 family visits and contributed to 45 reunifications involving approximately 100 children.

The results showed what intensive, relationship-based support can make possible for families, and also exposed a significant challenge: a program can demonstrate strong outcomes but requires a structure that is sustainable.

By the end of 2025–2026, the funding and service model for Rebuilding Connections could no longer sustain the program as it had been designed. The program closed at the end of the fiscal year, but the evidence, experience and lessons developed through the initiative reinforced both the need for family-preservation and reunification services and the need to structure them differently - with funding, referral pathways, service intensity and accountability better aligned with the realities of the child and family services sector.

That learning became the foundation for the next stage of the work. In the following reporting period, The Link undertook a comprehensive community engagement exercise to develop an intensive in-home family preservation and reunification service, bringing together experience, dreams and commitments to sustain meaningful impact for families.

Youth Crisis Stabilization System: one access point, different responses

The Youth Crisis Stabilization System is a coordinated group of services structured to provide effective and supportive crisis response services for youth and their families. Its 24-hour point of access matches responses to need, with the aim of addressing psychosocial crises, reducing unnecessary entry into child welfare, preventing placement breakdown and connecting mental-health and community supports.

Responsibilities are shared. **The Link provides Intake, the Mobile Crisis Team, the Crisis and Support Text Line and the Brief Therapy Team. Marymound operates Youth Educational Services and the Crisis Stabilization Units as partner components of the same system.**

2025–2026 system activity

Measure	Result
Calls received	11,906
Mobile-team dispatches	790
Brief Therapy Team referrals	349
Crisis Stabilization Unit admissions	469
Youth Educational Services referrals	159
Youth Educational Services clients supported	78

Mobile Crisis Team

Operating since 1998, the Mobile Crisis Team provides assessment and triage and can dispatch an in-person response in Winnipeg and surrounding areas. Crisis response teams operate 24 hours a day, available for mobile response and support.

After more than 25 years in operations, The Link commissioned an independent review of the Mobile Crisis Team structure and approach. Youth, caregivers, employees, Link programs, community organizations and First Nation-led organizations participated, and models in Canada, the United States and Australia were reviewed. Interviews, focus groups and surveys recorded **194 participant interactions**.

Participants valued response in homes and community settings. They asked for greater responsiveness, communication, follow-up, staff consistency, community relationships, cultural safety, representation and trust. Youth also sought earlier help, respectful communication, more choice, less reliance on police and attention to underlying causes.

Recommendations bring clinical knowledge and lived experience together on teams and call for stronger training, simpler documentation, greater mobility, better partnerships and cultural supports. They include follow-up within **48 hours**, short-term case management and service navigation. Proposed measures include response time, user experience, follow-up and outcomes—not only calls and dispatches.

Mobile Crisis Team Redesign: Moving Recommendations into Practice

The Mobile Crisis Team redesign moved from consultation and recommendations into implementation during the year. The work focused on making crisis response **more responsive to youth and families, less administratively burdensome, more consistent across shifts, and better connected to what happens after the immediate crisis.**

Several elements of the redesigned model were initiated or implemented:

- **A renewed direction for MCT — "Walking alongside youth and families."** This established a clearer expectation that crisis response should work with young people and caregivers, not simply assess the presenting crisis.
- **Simpler intake and assessment.** When a community response is required, staff now collect only the information necessary for dispatch. The Mental Status Examination was replaced and the interview summary refined to make documentation more useful to crisis practice.
- **A My Support Plan for youth and families.** Young people receiving a community visit are provided with a written support plan identifying strategies and next steps. Completion reached approximately **85–90%**.
- **Changes to recruitment and workforce development.** Degree requirements were removed to broaden pathways into crisis-response roles and increase opportunities for candidates with lived or living experience. Role-play scenarios were added to interviews, and mandatory-training tracking was strengthened.
- **Follow-up after crisis.** MCT introduced ongoing follow-up for young people admitted to the Crisis Stabilization Unit and follow-up with young people who remain in the community, moving the service beyond a single crisis encounter.
- **Better measures of impact.** New indicators began tracking more than call and dispatch volumes, including the proportion of crises settled on site, completion of My Support Plans, and the relationship between intake and community dispatch.

The remaining recommendations point to the next stage of redesign: stronger service navigation and greater integration with community organizations.

Brief Therapy Team

The Brief Therapy Team (BTT) provides focused, short-term therapeutic intervention for young people and families who need more than an immediate crisis response but may not require, or be able to wait for, longer-term therapy. Support is generally provided over six to eight sessions, creating an opportunity to work on the issues contributing to the crisis rather than ending support once the immediate situation has stabilized.

In 2025–2026, BTT received **349 referrals**. Common presenting concerns included **parent–child conflict, self-harm and other at-risk behaviours, and mental-health concerns**. Through focused therapeutic work, the team helps young people and caregivers better understand what is happening, identify strategies for managing difficult situations, strengthen communication and relationships, and develop a plan for moving forward.

BTT also serves an important **bridge within the continuum of care**. For some young people, a brief intervention is enough to address the presenting concern and strengthen the supports already around them. For others, the work identifies a need for more sustained therapeutic involvement. In those situations, BTT can help connect young people and families with longer-term services, including **Connect Therapy**, rather than requiring them to begin again with an entirely separate process.

This gives families an option between a single crisis intervention and longer-term counselling: **enough time to understand what contributed to the crisis, begin addressing it and determine what level of support is needed next.**

Crisis Stabilization Units and Youth Educational Services

Marymound's Crisis Stabilization Units offer short-term residential stabilization when community response is insufficient. In 2025–2026, they recorded **469 admissions**; average age was approximately **14**, average stay **2.12 days**, and **85% returned to the same address after discharge**.

Marymound's Youth Educational Services supports young people whose crisis or mental-health circumstances affect school. YES received **159 referrals** and supported **78 clients**. Together, system components range from phone or text support to mobile response, therapy, educational help and temporary stabilization.



Youth Resource Centre North: immediate help in Thompson

Youth Resource Centre North provides 24/7 shelter, practical assistance, referrals and connections to other services in Thompson. In 2025–2026, it recorded **2,498 walk-ins** and **1,570 overnight stays**.

It has **four short-term shelter beds for ages 12–17, two transitional beds for ages 18–20, and two designated-intake assessment beds.** This keeps immediate help closer to northern families and networks.

YRC North and the Winnipeg YRC share an



immediate-access role, but they are distinct operations serving different regions. YRC North is also linked to Thompson-based residential, transition and outreach services, creating a northern pathway that reflects local circumstances and relationships.

The centre also provides an important connection point within Thompson's network of services. Young people who arrive for immediate assistance can be connected with residential, transition, outreach and other community supports rather than having to identify and navigate those resources independently. Its relationships with other northern services help information, planning and support move with the young person as their circumstances change.

For families and communities, having this capacity in Thompson means that immediate support can be provided **closer to the relationships and resources that are already part of a young person's life**. Where appropriate, planning can involve family, caregivers, First Nations, agencies and community partners, helping maintain connections while decisions are made about what support is needed next.

StreetReach: mobile outreach for safety

StreetReach responds to children and youth at high risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation. Workers connect where youth spend time, maintain relationships, help locate missing young people, support safe returns and connect health, housing, addictions, education and other help.

The Link contributed through **StreetReach North** and **one StreetReach South worker in Winnipeg**, collaborating with child and family services, law enforcement, families, caregivers and community providers.

StreetReach North provides a permanent outreach presence in Thompson and surrounding communities as part of Tracia's Trust. Its location in the North allows relationships with young people, families and regional partners to be developed and maintained locally. This is particularly important when a young person is missing, moving between communities or experiencing circumstances that increase their vulnerability to exploitation.

The connection with **Youth Resource Centre North** strengthens that response. Outreach workers can connect young people with a familiar, 24/7 location for shelter and practical assistance, while YRC North can connect young people back to StreetReach when exploitation or significant safety concerns are identified. StreetReach North staff also identified **land-based work as a strength**, creating additional opportunities for relationship, connection and engagement outside conventional service settings.

The embedded StreetReach South employee supported outreach, relationships, locating youth, information-. In Winnipeg, The Link contributed one employee to StreetReach South, working as part of the larger multi-agency response. The role supported mobile outreach, relationship-building, efforts to locate missing and high-risk youth, information-sharing and coordination between partners.

Being embedded within StreetReach also created connections back into The Link's broader Winnipeg services. Where appropriate, young people encountered through outreach could be connected with **shelter and basic needs, crisis response, clinical and family services, housing and transition supports**, providing additional options beyond the immediate StreetReach intervention.

Care Close to Family and Community

Healing Homes: care that stays connected

The Link's Healing Homes provide residential care for young people requiring different levels of stabilization, specialized support and longer-term care. Across the five homes, the focus is not only on what happens while a young person is living there, but on what remains around them when residential care ends.

A Healing Home is not intended to become the centre of a young person's life. Family and caregivers, siblings, school, friendships, culture, community, interests and future goals all extend beyond the walls of the home. Residential care is strongest when it protects and strengthens those connections rather than replacing them.

During 2025–2026, teams continued to focus practice on the everyday conditions that contribute to stability: consistent relationships with staff, predictable routines, participation in school and community, meaningful family involvement, and opportunities for young people to build skills they can carry forward. Planning increasingly considered not only how a young person was doing in the home, but whether they were developing stronger relationships, greater stability and connections that could continue after discharge.

The goal of a Healing Home is not to build a young person's life inside residential care. It is to help strengthen the life they have beyond it.

Northern Residential and Transition Services: maintaining connection closer to home

In Thompson, Wuskwatim and Transition House provide residential and transitional support as part of The Link's broader northern network of services. Together with Youth Resource Centre North and StreetReach North, they allow young people to move between immediate assistance, residential care, outreach and transition support within the region.

Wuskwatim provides residential care for girls ages 12–17. In 2025–2026, it supported 102 family visits. The number of family visits is particularly important: residential care creates greater value when young people can continue relationships with parents, siblings, extended family and other significant people while receiving support.

Transition House supports older youth as they develop the skills and stability required for greater independence. During the year, it supported 68 family visits. Its role recognizes that transition to adulthood is not simply about learning independent-living skills; young people also need relationships, community connections and people they can continue to rely on as formal supports decrease.

Having residential and transition capacity in Thompson also allows planning to remain connected to the young person's family, First Nation, school, community and regional service network. Partnerships with families, First Nations, child and family services, schools, health providers and community organizations help ensure that residential care is one part of a broader plan rather than an isolated intervention.

This is especially important when young people eventually leave residential care. The relationships and resources surrounding them become the longer-term support system. The purpose of northern residential care is therefore not only to provide a safe place to live today, but to strengthen the connections that can support a young person tomorrow.



Healing and Clinical Services

Different levels of therapeutic support

Healing is rarely linear, and no single form of support works for every person or family. Clinical knowledge works alongside family knowledge, lived experience, culture, relationships and the goals people identify for themselves. The role of Clinical and Family Services is therefore broader than counselling alone: it provides different levels of therapeutic support and helps connect people to the right level of care as their needs change.

The continuum includes immediate counselling, sustained therapy, post-crisis intervention, group and family work, specialized assessment and clinical consultation. These services also work across The Link's broader programs, allowing clinical expertise to support young people and families in residential care, crisis services, family programs and community-based settings.

Connect Therapy provides more sustained counselling for individuals, couples and families. More than 100 people and families accessed Connect during the reported service period. Demand remained significant, with an approximately two-month wait for service. Connect also provides an important next step for young people and families who have completed a shorter intervention through the Brief Therapy Team but would benefit from continued therapeutic support.

Drop-In Counselling provides a more immediate, lower-barrier option without requiring people to enter a longer referral process. More than 70 people accessed drop-in counselling in the available reporting data. For some, a focused conversation may provide the support they need; for others, it can help identify concerns that would benefit from more sustained therapeutic involvement.

Momentum extends the continuum through structured group-based therapeutic work, creating another option alongside individual and family counselling. Group delivery also allows people experiencing similar challenges to learn and work alongside others rather than relying exclusively on one-to-one intervention.



The year also included investment in **specialized clinical capacity**. Two employees became trained **Caring Dads facilitators**, strengthening The Link's ability to work with fathers and father figures, while four employees became certified in the **Marschak Interaction Method**, adding specialized capacity to better understand caregiver-child relationships and inform family work.

Importantly, this expertise does not sit within one clinical program. Kent Road families can receive support in their homes; crisis services can create pathways into longer-term therapy; Hub visitors can access drop-in counselling; and residential teams can draw on clinical consultation. This allows therapeutic support to be brought closer to where young people and families are already receiving service.

The direction is toward a more connected clinical continuum: not asking people to fit a single therapeutic model, but creating different ways to access support, move between levels of care and bring clinical expertise into the broader work happening around a young person or family.

The Link Clinic: health care in a familiar setting

The Link Clinic brings primary health care into the same environment where young people and community members are already accessing practical, housing, mental-health and other supports. The clinic provides assessment and treatment, prescriptions, wound care, sexual-health services, immunizations, mental-health referrals and harm-reduction supports. For people who face barriers to conventional health care — including homelessness, food insecurity and experiences of racism or discrimination within health systems — this creates another way to receive care without having to navigate a separate system.

In 2025–2026, draft reporting data records **258 active patients, 643 clinic visits and 193 requests for harm-reduction support**. The significance of the clinic is not only the volume of care provided, but its location and approach: health needs can be identified and addressed alongside the other circumstances affecting a person's wellbeing.

Bringing immunization into the community

The clinic also became the base for a significant immunization initiative. With funding secured from the Public Health Agency of Canada Immunization Partnership Fund, The Link developed the Registered Nurse Immunization Program to increase access to and uptake of routine vaccines, with a particular focus on Indigenous youth and other marginalized populations in downtown Winnipeg.

Rather than relying only on people to seek out vaccination through conventional health settings, the program combined registered-nurse-led education, proactive community outreach, accessible immunization clinics and partnerships with local organizations. Between October 2024 and December 2025, 21 education and outreach events reached 548 people, including 18 immunization clinics attended by 480 people.

The initiative also responded to emerging public-health needs. During the May 2025 measles outbreak in Manitoba, for example, The Link used a community event to provide targeted measles-vaccine information and connect people with the clinic nurse for vaccination appointments.

The impact extended beyond providing individual vaccines. Among 349 people registered with The Link's primary-care clinic whose vaccination status was tracked, the evaluation found measurable increases across several routine immunizations between September 2024 and December 2025, including influenza, COVID-19, hepatitis B, Tdap and HPV. The largest percentage increase was for Men-C-ACYW vaccination, which increased by 31%.

The evaluation concluded that the initiative expanded access to vaccine education and immunization for vulnerable populations and demonstrated that community-based education, accessible clinics and care delivered by

Pathways to Adulthood

Skills4Life: one umbrella, different supports

Young people move toward adulthood at different rates. **Skills4Life is The Link's umbrella for programs that build skills, experience, stability and relationships for adulthood.**

The 2025–2026 source identifies four main areas under the umbrella: **Life Train, Positive Alternatives for Youth, Independent Living Services and Housing First.** They share a purpose but are not interchangeable:

- **Life Train** focuses on education, employment and practical life skills.
- **Positive Alternatives** for Youth offers structured community participation, mentoring and responsibility-building.
- **Independent Living Services** provides more sustained transition support across housing, budgeting, education, employment, systems and relationships.
- **Housing First** focuses more directly on obtaining and maintaining housing.

Young people may use one service or move among them as goals change. Independence means greater choice, confidence and stability—not doing everything alone.

Life Train and Asset Building

Life Train supports school, employment and adult-life goals. It served **183 participants**, with **123 intakes** and **137 closures**. Its **Asset Building Program** supported **10 participants** to build practical financial and personal assets.

Positive Alternatives for Youth

Positive Alternatives for Youth, or PAY, uses community involvement and mentoring to build responsibility, work habits and positive connections.

The **Community Service Support Program** helps youth complete court-ordered service through supervision, mentoring, transportation and placements. **Eighty young people** participated.

The **Fine Option/Community Service Program** enables eligible obligations to be completed through community service. During the year, it served **four youth and 115 adults.**

Youth Positively Involved in the Community (YPIC) combines community contribution, life and employment skills, leadership and healthy decisions through Lighthouse. It recorded **14 participants.**

Independent Living Services

Independent Living Services provides sustained help with housing, budgeting, education, employment, systems, relationships and practical responsibilities.

In 2025–2026, **50 young people** received Independent Living Services. The program recorded **18 intakes** and **15 discharges**, with **35 young people active at March 31, 2026.**

Housing First

Housing First is part of the Skills4Life family for youth and young adults whose movement toward independence depends on stable housing and support to maintain it. It works alongside Independent Living Services but has a stronger focus on tenancy stabilization, housing planning and preventing housing loss.

Housing support also addresses tenancy, income, budgeting, transportation, employment and relationships.

During 2025–2026, The Link began a practice reset across Skills4Life and Housing First. The work emphasized safety, youth voice, risk, housing progression, cultural supports, relationship repair and stronger documentation.

Together, the programs allow progress across education, employment, housing, finances, relationships and community participation.



Workforce, Culture and Learning

The people who carry the work

The transition in governance also requires a transition in how The Link recruits, prepares, supports and develops its workforce. During 2025–2026, the organization began rebuilding core human-resources systems, revising policies, strengthening Indigenous-priority recruitment approaches, participating in recruitment activities with Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, refreshing onboarding, and reviewing training and leadership development.

This work responds to more than vacancies or administrative processes. The quality and consistency of services depend on the people delivering them. Recruitment, retention, supervision, training and leadership development all influence the relationships young people and families experience every day.

Recorded learning activity included:

Learning Measure	Completions
Mandatory and standard training	412
Youth Care Practitioner 101	174
Cultural Connection	112
Leadership training	32
MACCP	15
Marschak Interaction Method-certified facilitators	4



The direction is broader than course completion. Culture must become visible in everyday practice, not only at special events. Supervision should ask whether decisions protect identity, dignity and kinship. Indigenous employees and employees with lived experience should be respected as knowledge holders. Training should connect to observed practice, reflective supervision and accountability.

The Link needs leaders who can manage programs and resources, but also develop people, support reflective practice, build healthy teams and lead through organizational change. Strengthening that capacity is particularly important as the organization moves from changing its governance structure to changing the systems and practices underneath it.

The workforce transition is ultimately about more than who works at The Link or how many courses they complete. It is about building a workforce capable of making the organization's new direction visible in the experience of young people and families.

Challenges and Lessons

Workforce stability is a service-quality issue

Recruitment, retention and human-resources capacity were significant challenges. Turnover and vacancies destabilized some teams and increased workloads, with employees and leaders absorbing responsibilities as recruitment continued.

Northern operations faced particular difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified Youth Care Practitioners, while some specialized roles remained vacant. Greater progress was also needed to recruit and retain First Nations employees and better reflect the people served.

Workforce stability affects relationships, timeliness and quality. Human-resources systems, recruitment, retention and leadership development are conditions for consistent care.

Strong results do not guarantee sustainable funding

Programs cannot depend indefinitely on short-term, project-based or uncertain funding when the needs they respond to are ongoing. The Link must increasingly connect evidence of impact with practical service models, shared investment from partners, and funding structures that reflect the actual cost of delivering effective services.

A collection of programs is not yet a continuum

The Link's breadth is one of its greatest strengths. Few organizations can respond across crisis, residential care, family support, mental health, health care, housing, basic needs, outreach and transition to adulthood. But having many services does not automatically mean they operate as one system.

Programs developed at different times, under different funding agreements and mandates, brought their own referral processes, documentation, eligibility requirements and ways of working. As a result, coordination sometimes depended more on individual staff relationships and informal problem-solving than on intentionally designed pathways between services. For young people and families, those gaps can be felt in practical ways.

When those connections are not deliberately built, people can encounter repeated assessments, different expectations, unclear hand-offs or responsibility shifting from one program to another. The opportunity for The Link is to make the organization easier to navigate from the perspective of the person receiving service, rather than the structure of the programs providing it.

The Wholistic Service Framework is intended to move that work forward by creating clearer pathways between programs, strengthening shared planning and communication, reducing unnecessary duplication and improving continuity as needs change.

Governance change must be felt in practice

Governance Changing who governs The Link is significant, but governance change becomes meaningful when it changes what people experience.That requires the systems beneath governance to move with it - workforce, leadership, policies, funding, program design, data, supervision and everyday practice. It means examining not only what services we provide, but how decisions are made, whose knowledge carries weight, how families are included and whether our systems strengthen rather than disrupt relationships and connection.

The measure of this transition will be whether young people and families experience greater dignity, belonging, safety, stability, connection and voice - and whether employees can see the same principles reflected in how they are supported to do their work.

Stewardship

Resources carry responsibility

The Link is entrusted with public funding, charitable contributions, property, partnerships and community trust to support children, youth and families. Stewardship means ensuring those resources are used responsibly, transparently and with a clear connection to the outcomes they are intended to achieve.

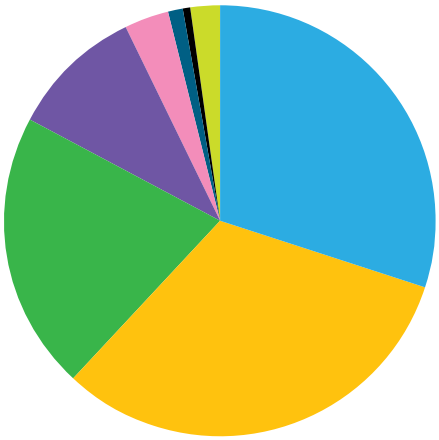
The organization's work is made possible through a combination of government funding, service agreements, charitable giving, in-kind contributions and partnerships across child and family services, housing, health, education and the community sector. These relationships contribute more than funding alone. Partners provide expertise, facilities, equipment, opportunities and connections that extend what The Link can offer young people and families.

Community support remained an important part of that work in 2025–2026. The draft content outline records 122 charitable gifts and in-kind contributions valued at more than $100,000, with Carte International, Ai-Kon and Clear Concepts among the key supporters recognized during the year.

2025-2026 Finances

Fiscal Year: April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026

Programs	Percentage	FY 2026
COMMUNITY SERVICES	30.06%	$7,002,638
HEALING HOMES - SOUTH	31.98%	$7,450,745
THE LINK - NORTH	20.83%	$4,851,480
SKILLS 4 LIFE	9.99%	$2,327,894
HEART TO HOME - SOUTH	3.38%	$788,100
ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS	1.13%	$264,108
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE	0.63%	$146,819
CAPITAL FUND	1.99%	$462,738
Total		**$23,294,522**



Programs	Percentage	FY 2026
Community Services	30.06%	$7,002,638
Healing Homes - South	31.98%	$7,450,745
The Link - North	20.83%	$4,851,480
Skills 4 Life	9.99%	$2,327,894
Heart to Home - South	3.38%	$788,100
Administration and Operations	1.13%	$264,108
Social Enterprise	0.63%	$146,819
Capital Fund	1.99%	$462,738

What We Owe the Next Year

Bringing ourselves home is not complete because governance has changed. The next responsibility is to make that change visible and felt in every program, policy, workplace relationship and decision. Our measure is whether First Nations authority is real and whether all children and families experience deeper dignity, belonging and care.

Priorities for the next stage

Priority	Next-year focus
Wholistic Service Framework	Connect prevention, crisis, residential, clinical and transition supports around children, youth and families; clarify access, referral and hand-off pathways.
Governance and treaty accountability	Continue governance implementation, clarify decision rights and demonstrate how Nation authority creates public benefit.
Organizational sustainability and stewardship	Align financial, data, quality, risk and operational systems with long-term priorities; pursue sustainable funding for effective services.
Workforce transition and leadership	Recruit, retain and develop people who can lead culturally grounded, high-quality services, with particular attention to First Nations representation and northern workforce pressures.
Outcomes and voice	Define a focused set of meaningful outcomes and show how youth, family, employee and community feedback changes practice.
Crisis-service redesign	Distinguish completed changes from future recommendations and advance an approach that is responsive, mobile, culturally safer, connected to community and attentive to what follows a crisis.

Governance and Accountability

Accountable to Nation and community

Brokenhead Ojibway Nation is the sole Member of The Link. The Board carries governance responsibility within that relationship and is accountable for ensuring the organization's direction, resources and practice reflect Nation authority. That authority is exercised in service to a broad public purpose: caring for children, youth and families throughout Manitoba.

The Link is governed by a Board of Directors that provides governance, fiduciary oversight, strategic direction, and accountability. Following The Link's formal repatriation to the governance of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation in September 2025, the Board also plays an important role in supporting the organization's transition toward First Nations-led governance and culturally grounded services.

Role	Detail
Board Chairperson **Candace Olson, BA, JD**	Governance, law, organizational leadership and governance transformation.
Board Vice-Chairperson **Wendell Sinclair Jr.**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Treasurer **Ryan Kwan, CPA, MPAcc**	Governance, financial oversight and fiduciary responsibility
Board Director **Kaeden Merasty, BComm**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Brandy Kowal, MSWI**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Caroline Christie, BA, JD**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Suhir Sandhu, MBA**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Alyssa Mariani, BA, JD**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Gordon Chandler, CPA**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Erica Straight Bear**	Board governance and organizational oversight.
Board Director **Pamela Burke-Kent**	Board governance and organizational oversight.

Public Interest Disclosure

The draft content outline records **no disclosures and no investigations** under *The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act* during the reporting period.

A New Generation of Leadership: Erica Straight-Bear

When Brokenhead Ojibway Nation assumed governance of The Link, the shift was about more than who held authority. It was an opportunity to think about how responsibility is shared and how different generations contribute to the decisions shaping the organization.

As one of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation's new Directors on The Link's Board, Straight-Bear brings the perspective of a young mother, community member, professional and student. Around the Board table, she has quickly become a trusted contributor. Straight-Bear shares her perspective and is not afraid to ask a difficult question. She brings thoughtfulness, confidence and a willingness to challenge assumptions—qualities that strengthen governance and the decisions that come from it.

Her path to the Board has been one of taking opportunities and building on them.

In 2024, Straight-Bear enrolled in an administrative assistant training program followed by a six-month work placement. The goal was to return to the workforce and create new opportunities for herself and her two children.

The following year, she began working full time with Brokenhead Ojibway Nation Development Corporation, contributing to a portfolio of Nation-led projects that included The Link, The Elswood at 269 River Avenue, Freed & Freed, and Phase 1 of the Commercial Greenhouse Development. Through that work, she became involved in important milestones for the Nation, both on stage and behind the scenes.

Alongside her professional work, Straight-Bear has remained active in her community through hand drumming and ceremony. In November 2024, she helped guide a kindergarten class through the Bear Song for Remembrance Day, with her own daughter among the children learning beside her. In January 2026, Manitoba Minister Nahanni Fontaine invited her to open an event at the Manitoba Legislative Building with a drum song, carrying that same practice into one of the province's highest civic settings.



Straight-Bear has also been part of The Link's transition from its earliest moments. Initially, she witnessed and supported that work through her role with the Development Corporation. Today, as a Director, she shares responsibility for its governance. Straight-Bear returned to school full time at Red River College Polytechnic to study Business Administration, adding formal education to the professional, community and governance experience she is already building.

Her path—from community involvement, to employment, to education and governance—reflects something important about this moment. Leadership is built through participation, responsibility, curiosity and a willingness to contribute. First Nations governance is about reclaiming responsibility for decisions affecting our people. Its strength over time will also depend on leadership across generations: experienced leaders sharing what they know, younger leaders bringing their own knowledge and perspectives, and both carrying responsibility together. Straight-Bear is part of a generation already stepping forward to carry that responsibility.

Miigwech

The future belongs to young people

This year changed who governs The Link. The years ahead are about what that change makes possible for young people. We want children and youth to encounter an organization that sees their strengths before their challenges, keeps family and important relationships close, respects identity and culture, listens when they say something is not working, and stays connected as their needs and goals change.

Under First Nations governance, we have an opportunity to build differently - bringing First Nations ways of knowing, caring and being alongside professional knowledge, family expertise and lived experience to create stronger services for everyone who comes through our doors. For us, this is treaty implementation in practice: First Nations leadership shaping a system of care that welcomes all children, youth and families.

When every child is received as a gift and a relative, all Manitobans are stronger.




HOPE
END HOMELESSNESS
WINNIPEG


GA
General Child and Family
Services Authority


Canada


SOUTHEAST
CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES


MNPHA
Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association


Manitoba


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The Link
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Connect with The Link

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102-83 Churchill Drive
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