

# Broadening HORIZONS

Advancing exploration and innovation across disciplines,  
bridging social, cultural, scientific, and technological domains.

**Annual Report  
2024/2025**

Northern Ontario Research, Development, Ideas and Knowledge



# About NORDIK Institute

NORDIK Institute is a community-based research organization affiliated with Algoma University. Incorporated in 2006, NORDIK grew out of the university's Community Economic and Social Development program due to the demand for localized data, research and place based solutions. Today, NORDIK empowers communities worldwide to achieve their objectives by partnering to increase their capacities and to connect them to university and other expertise. We undertake diverse initiatives with foci on Northern, Indigenous, rural and smaller urban communities. Our mission is to promote more vibrant, caring and sustainable communities through research, dialogue, analysis

and reflection dedicated to the practice of holistic community development. NORDIK's approach to community development and research emphasizes the interconnectedness and mutual importance of four pillars of resilience that support healthy, vibrant and fulfilling places: cultural vitality, social equity, environmental sustainability and economic diversity and growth.

## Vision

Northern Ontario is a sustainable, inclusive, and self-sufficient region at the forefront of reconciliation and community development.

## Strategic Goals

**1** 

Advance Partnerships for Indigenous Research Sovereignty.



**2**

Foster Local & Regional Evidence-Based Dialogues on Issues Critical to Northern and Indigenous Communities.



**3**

Cultivate Northern Research Talent with a Supportive, Inclusive Team-Based Atmosphere.



**4**

Connect students, researchers and community in projects that contribute to social, economic & environmental sustainability, and justice for Northern and Indigenous communities.

# Board of Directors

**Dr. Brett Goodwin**

**Corina Artuso**

**David Marasco**

**Dr. Derek Rice**

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**Kramer Rousseau**

**Krista Bissillon**

**Lauren Doxtater (Chair)**

**Steven McCoy**

## NORDIK Institute Team

**Director of Research:** Dr. Tamanna Rimi

**Director of Operations:** Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone

**Research Coordinator:** Dr. Jude Ortiz

**Manager of Communications:** Amy Boyer

Dr. Ushnish Sengupta (Algoma University)

Dr. Vivian Jiménez-Estrada (Algoma University)

Dr. Zamilur Rahman (Algoma University)

Dr. Michael Twiss (Algoma University)

## Research Associates

Dr. Aaron Gordon (Algoma University)

Dr. Ahmed Aziz (Algoma University)

Prof. Andrea Pinheiro (Algoma University)

David Thompson (RAIN, SSMIC)

Dr. Edward Turgeon (Algoma University)

Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone (Algoma University)

Elizabeth Garcia (Colombian Ambassador in Bolivia)

Dr. Gayle Broad (Algoma University)

Haley MacLeod (WCS Canada and Trent University)

Dr. Jody-Lynn Rebek (Algoma University)

Dr. Laura Wyper (Algoma University)

Dr. Linda Savory-Gordon (Algoma University)

Dr. Melanie Goodchild (Algoma University)

Michael Burtch (Artist, Art Historian)

Dr. Nusrat Aziz (Algoma University)

Dr. Pedro Antunes (Algoma University)

Dr. Sean Meades (Algoma University)

Dr. Sheila Gurner (Algoma University)

Dr. Sue Chiblow (University of Guelph)

Dr. Tamanna Rimi (Algoma University)

Dr. Teryn Bruni (Algoma University)

## Employees This Year

Alexander Mirault

Mandar Velapure

Ajaz Shaikh

MD Soaib Hossain

Anne Arnott

Nadine Roach

Christopher Masha

Prince Dey

Elizabeth MacMillan

Quazi Sakib

Heather Fraser

Shahzada Shahzad

Itihaas Singh

Tara Burrell

Jennifer Deleary-Jewell

Taylor Barker

Kashfia Ashraf

Tricia Elie

Kendall Mitchell

Zeel Patel

Kiki Vtrie

## Student Placements

2 University student placements

10 Biology undergraduate interns

16 Indigenous high school interns

## Graphic Designer

Gabrielle Louttit, Associate RGD

# Director of Research Report

## Tamanna Rimi, Director of Research



This year, NORDIK Institute embraced the theme Broadening Horizons, reflecting our commitment to advancing exploration and innovation across disciplines and bridging social, cultural, scientific, and technological domains. This work demonstrates the power of community-based research to create space for new ideas, deepen relationships, and shape solutions to complex challenges facing Northern Ontario and beyond.

Our projects reflected both breadth and depth: advancing Indigenous research sovereignty, addressing labour market and economic shifts, supporting youth pathways to education, fostering cultural resilience, and initiating new approaches to environmental stewardship and data-driven

decision-making. Whether through grassroots collaborations, cross-sectoral dialogues, or international partnerships, our teams worked at the intersections where knowledge systems meet and innovation flourishes.

In alignment with our strategic goals, of our 24 active projects this year:

- 9 projects advanced partnerships for Indigenous research sovereignty,
- 19 projects fostered local and regional dialogues on issues critical to Northern Ontario and Indigenous communities,
- 17 projects cultivated research talent in a supportive, inclusive, and team-based atmosphere, and
- 18 projects connected students, researchers, and communities in initiatives that strengthened social, economic, and environmental sustainability and justice.

These numbers tell only part of the story. What stands out most is the collaborative spirit that animates our work: Indigenous-led initiatives in wellness and education, digital and interactive tools such as the Data North dashboard, cross-cultural engagements with newcomer and diasporic communities, and environmental monitoring efforts that bring science and community knowledge together.

This progress reflects the dedication of our research associates, researchers, assistants, staff, and students, as well as the steadfast support of our board, community partners, and Algoma University. Together, we are not only broadening horizons but also ensuring that the knowledge we co-generate is meaningful, inclusive, and transformative—laying the groundwork for sustainable and just futures.

# Director of Operations Report

## Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone, Director of Operations



The 2024-2025 year was a year of intentional growth for NORDIK Institute, putting in place the groundwork for an exciting new chapter. For the first time ever, we took on a second location to accommodate our growing team, in addition to increasing our arsenal of tools (e.g., a vehicle, drone, additional ground-penetrating radar equipment and training) that support the important work we do. We are excited to announce a new Memorandum of Agreement with Algoma University, extending our partnership until at least 2032!

As we reflect on nearly two decades of research and development, we are grateful for the relationships we have built and the impacts we have been privileged to contribute to. From leading the largest and most comprehensive air quality study in Canada to date in 2010, to attracting more than \$1 million to local economies for democratizing Great Lakes water quality in Northern Ontario; from building global collaborations in support of Indigenous sovereignty to partnering on more than \$5 million of project funds for survivors of the Shingwauk and Wawanosh Indian Residential Schools; and from increasing capacity for social enterprise in our region to co-hosting a national Indigenous entrepreneurship program; we are compiling what we have learned to ensure the sustainability of our organization and local communities into the future. As such, at the end of the 2024-2025 fiscal year, we began planning a business transformation that will be implemented in the following (2025-2026) year, ahead of our

20th anniversary in the fall of 2026. This business transformation includes the following activities:

- Develop our next five-year Strategic Plan (May 2027-April 2032);
- Refresh our website and communications;
- Implement new internal systems to improve existing practices;
- Develop a new strategic direction in community-centered artificial intelligence, machine learning, and technology, to launch at our 2026 Annual Meeting; and
- Implement new, permanent revenue streams.

We thank our new and long-standing collaborators for all the important work they do, and also recognize our funders and operational partners, including Algoma University, for enabling so much important work in local communities. We look forward to celebrating our 20th anniversary with you next year!

# Executive Summary

## By the Numbers

 **80+** Community Collaborations



**24** Key Projects

### GOAL 1

Advance partnership for Indigenous research sovereignty.



**9**  
Projects

### GOAL 2

Foster local and regional dialogues on issues critical to Northern Ontario and Indigenous communities.

**19**  
Projects



### GOAL 3

Cultivate research talent with a supportive, inclusive, team-based atmosphere.



**17**  
Projects

### GOAL 4

Connect students, researchers and community in projects that contribute to social, economic and environmental sustainability and social justice for Northern and Indigenous communities.

**18**  
Projects



**8** Projects initiated or co-led by an Indigenous organization or person.



**6** Projects involving community-based researchers.



**6** Projects involving Indigenous community-based researchers.

► **21 NORDIK EMPLOYEES**  
Full-time and part-time.

► **6 INDIGENOUS HIRES**

► **30 STUDENT PLACEMENT POSITIONS**  
In high school, college, and university.

# 2024-2025 NORDIK Institute Research Projects

Project Name	Project Lead	Contact information
Anji inaashkawun – Waves of Change	Dr. Jody Rebek Dr. Ahmed Aziz	jody.rebek@algomau.ca ahmed.aziz@algomau.ca
Batchewana First Nation Education Wellness Project	Dr. Teryn Bruni Dr. Jody-Lynn Rebek	teryn.bruni@algomau.ca jody.rebek@algomau.ca
Beyond The Numbers: Tracking Financial Well-Being Through Public Opinion	Dr. Tamanna Rimi Dr. Zamilur Rahman Dr. Ahmed Aziz	tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca zamilur.rahman@algomau.ca ahmed.aziz@algomau.ca
Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT)	Dr. Linda Savory-Gordon	inda.savory-gordon@algomau.ca
Community Engaged Artists	Dr. Jude Ortiz	jude.ortiz@algomau.ca
Culture, Language, Place and Belonging: The Sault Malayalee Association and the Transnational Cultivation of Associational Life	Dr. Sean Meades	sean.meades@algomau.ca
Data North	Dr. Tamanna Rimi Dr. Teryn Bruni Dr. Ahmed Aziz Dr. Zamilur Rahman	tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca teryn.bruni@algomau.ca ahmed.aziz@algomau.ca zamilur.rahman@algomau.ca
Evaluating LEAP	Dr. Tamanna Rimi	tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca
Global Decolonial Education Initiative - Strengthening networks for alternative education structures	Dr. Sheila Gruner	sheila.gruner@algomau.ca
GLOCAL - Global Mindsets for Local Regenerative Futures	Dr. Jody-Lynn Rebek Dr. Teryn Bruni	jody.rebek@algomau.ca teryn.bruni@algomau.ca
Innovations in Local Food Tracking: App Evaluation	Dr. Laura Wyper	laura.wyper@algomau.ca
IN SITU: Innovation in Rural Cultural and Creative Industries	Dr. Jude Ortiz	jude.ortiz@algomau.ca
Indigenous Women Storying and Interweaving their experiences of Gendered and Colonial Violence in Baawaating	Dr. Vivian Jimenez-Estrada	vivian.jimenez-estrada@algomau.ca
Intercultural, Experiential, Decolonizing Learning and the Faculty of Cross-Cultural Studies	Dr. Sheila Gruner Dr. Vivian Jimenez-Estrada Dr. Laura Wyper	Sheila.Gruner@algomau.ca Vivian.Jimenez-Estrada@algomau.ca laura.wyper@algomau.ca
International Student Experience, Language, Diversity and Acquisition	Dr. Sean Meades Dr. Laura Wyper	sean.meades@algomau.ca laura.wyper@algomau.ca
Keepers of the Circle Entrepreneurship Program	Amy Boyer Elizabeth MacMillan	amy.boyer@algomau.ca elizabethe.macmillan@algomau.ca
Leveraging Newcomers' Skill Sets to Tackle Labour Shortages in Northern Ontario	Dr. Tamanna Rimi Dr. Ahmed Aziz	tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca ahmed.aziz@algomau.ca
Living Wage Northern Ontario 2024 Update	Dr. Tamanna Rimi	tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca
Northern Ontario Labour Force Retention and Attraction in the Post-Pandemic Digital Economy	Dr. Nusrate Aziz Dr. Sean Meades	nusrate.aziz@algomau.ca sean.meades@algomau.ca
Sault Community Theatre Centre Project	Dr. Jude Ortiz Dr. Tamanna Rimi	jude.ortiz@algomau.ca tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca
Shingwauk Residential School Community Support Team	Tara Burrell	Tara.Burrell@algomau.ca
Upper Great Lakes Community-based Monitoring	Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone	elaine.ho-tassone@algomau.ca
V.O.L.T.: Valuing Ontario Libraries Toolkit	Dr. Sean Meades Dr. Tamanna Rimi Dr. Jude Ortiz	sean.meades@algomau.ca tamanna.rimi@algomau.ca jude.ortiz@algomau.ca
Weather radar stations support early detection and prediction of Spruce Budworm moth outbreaks in Eastern Canada	Jennie Pearce	jlpearce@shaw.ca

# NORDIK Welcomes New Research Associates

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## Dr. Zamilur Rahman

**Assistant Professor**, Computer Science and Mathematics, Algoma University

**Adjunct Assistant Professor**, School of Computer Science, University of Windsor

Dr. Rahman is an assistant professor in the Department of Computer Science and Mathematics at Algoma University. He also holds an Adjunct Assistant Professor position in the School of Computer Science at the University of Windsor, ON, Canada. Before joining academia, he worked as a software engineer in both Bangladesh and Canada.

His research interests include graph theory and its applications, complex network analysis, and data-driven analysis, with a focus on applications in mental health, economics, and decision sciences. He also explores the use of machine learning and natural language processing in these domains.

Dr. Rahman is currently involved in several collaborative, interdisciplinary research projects that aim to address socially relevant problems through computational methods. He is involved in the NORDIK Data North initiative and the Financial Wellbeing Project.

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## Dr. Michael Twiss

**Professor, Department of Biology, Algoma University**

Michael Twiss serves as a Full Professor of Biology at Algoma University and has expertise in the limnology (freshwater oceanography) of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system. His research focuses on aquatic biogeochemistry, water quality analysis, and winter limnology; he has published over 90 peer-reviewed scientific manuscripts.

He studied at universities in Ontario (Trent, Toronto) and Québec (INRS-ETE), and was a NSERC postdoctoral fellow at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on Cape Cod studying marine chemistry and geochemistry. From 1998-2002, Twiss was an assistant professor at Toronto Metropolitan University prior to spending 20 years at Clarkson University, most recently as the chair of its department of Biology. Over the past decade, Twiss has increasingly become involved with Great Lakes environmental policy where his expertise is sought at both international and national levels. He is an appointed member of the Great Lakes Science Advisory Board of the International Joint Commission (Canada/USA) since 2014 where he has led various working groups. As an elected member of the board of directors of the International Association for Great Lakes Research he served as its president (2018-2019). In Sault Ste. Marie, Dr. Twiss serves the community as a member of the board of directors of the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre. Twiss adheres to the Kaswenthwa (Two-Row Wampum) as a guiding principle for establishing and maintaining respectful relationships with Indigenous communities.



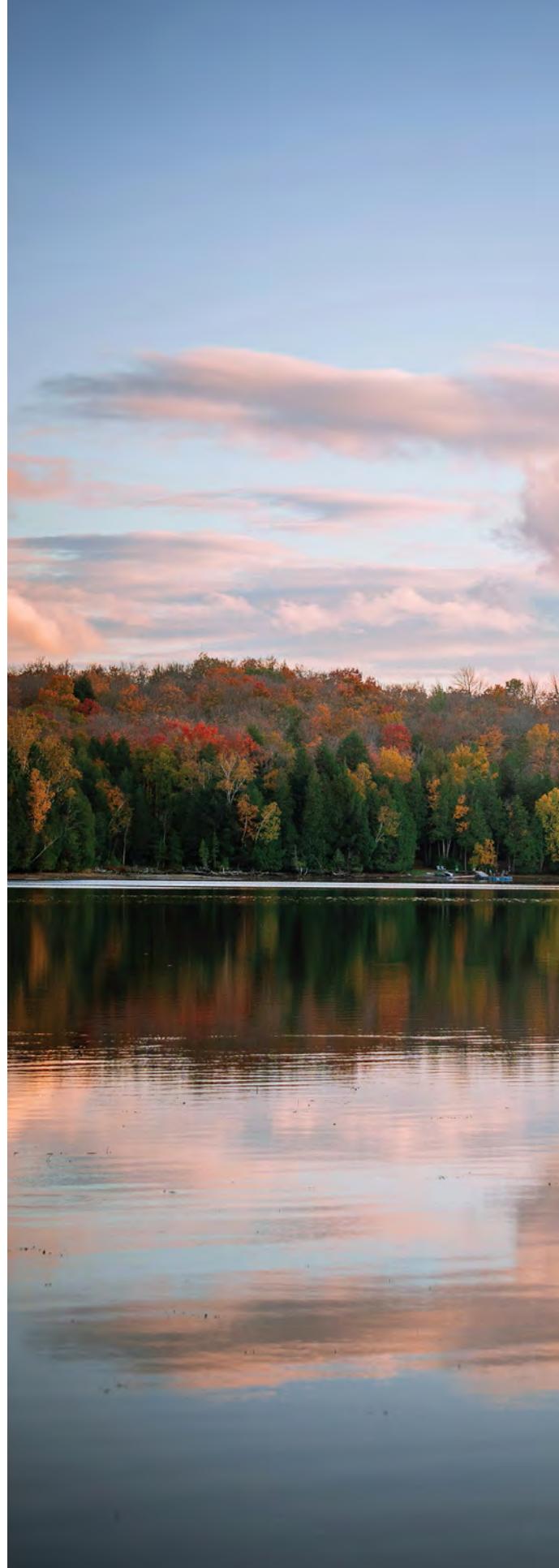
# Research

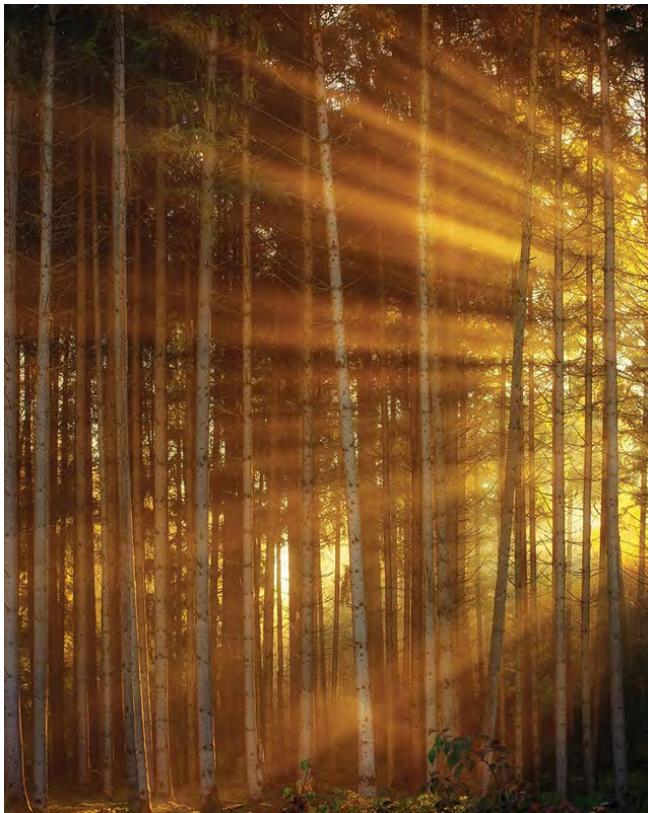
# Anji inaashkawun –

## Waves of Change

The Upper Great Lakes face diverse anthropogenic pressures, including pollution, invasive species, and climate change, threatening their ecological, economic, and cultural value. Protecting these lakes is vital for preventing future decline and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Great Lakes system. This project explores the potential for a community based freshwater stewardship plan in the Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma region. Led by NORDIK Research Associates Dr. Ahmed Aziz and Dr. Jody-Lynn Rebek, the project has a relational focus and aims to uphold Indigenous Knowledge and community stewardship in identifying freshwater challenges and co-developing sustainable responses. To ensure this project truly serves the needs and priorities of local communities, our team has formed an advisory circle including Indigenous water stewards and water walkers. It is Indigenous-led, with team members Courtney Vaughan and Amber McKay building and sustaining relationships with community members Liz Webkamigad, Constance Manitowabi, Joanne Jones, Joanne Robertson, and Dr. Susan Chiblow (NORDIK Research Associate).

Since May 2024, we have been grateful to partner with Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig (SKG) in hosting water circles, ceremonies, and storytelling sessions. We have also joined forces with NORDIK's Water Rangers team, Kiki Vetric, Ajaz Shaikh, and Carley Vinkle, to co-organize shoreline clean-up events at Bellevue Park. Additionally, our team has been engaging in knowledge dissemination and connecting with other researchers in the field by attending the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada (ASAC) and Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC) conferences. Also, our team has been actively pursuing external funding opportunities, including submitting applications to the Canada Water Agency's Great Lakes Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative Fund and the EcoAction Funding Stream. We are submitting an article for publication and have an article in press with Dr. Barbara Walls with more to come!





## Beyond The Numbers:

### Tracking Financial Well-Being Through Public Opinion

In today's world, understanding the financial health of a community is more important than ever. People want to know how stable their economy is and whether it's safe to invest, borrow, or plan for the future. Traditional tools used to measure financial health often rely on delayed data or complex indicators that don't always capture what people are feeling or discussing in real time. As a result, they often fail to reflect the lived experiences or immediate concerns of the public.

This project takes a new approach. Instead of focusing solely on numbers, we listen to conversations to understand whether people are feeling worried, uncertain, or optimistic. By analyzing public opinion, this project aims to develop a measure of financial well-being that reflects the real experiences of individuals and families. This measure can help identify and address financial challenges early. It can also support financial institutions in assessing the overall health of the financial system and tracking trends in household financial stress.

## Batchewana First Nation Education Wellness Project:

### The Hope and Healing

This year marked continued progress on the Hope and Healing Project in collaboration with the Batchewana Learning Center (BLC). While we are still refining a culturally informed brief screening tool to assess emotional and spiritual wellness among Batchewana First Nation youth, we have expanded our focus to systematically collect assessment and intake data within the program. This approach will enhance our ability to advocate effectively for student needs, monitor intervention progress, and document outcomes, ultimately supporting improved wellness programming and youth engagement. The project is led by Dr. Bruni, NORDIK Research Associate.

In Phase 1 of the project, we completed a literature review, developed our methodology, and are currently focused on building a robust data pipeline, including cleaning and organizing data. We are using multiple approaches to construct our measure. The next stage will be to validate our findings against established market indicators. We hope the outcomes of this project will contribute to positive change in people's everyday lives—especially at a time when many are facing financial pressures.

The research team includes:

Dr. Tamanna Rimi (Director of Research),  
Dr. Zamilur Rahman (NORDIK Research Associate),  
Dr. Ahmed Aziz (NORDIK Research Associate),  
Md Soaib Hossain (NORDIK Researcher),  
and Eyad Gad (AU Researcher).



# Bear Train

## Mask-wa Oo-ta-ban



### Preparation to approach senior levels of government to fund Mask-wa Oo-ta-ban (Cree for “Bear Train”)

Funding for passenger trains north of Sault Ste. Marie ended in 2015. The Missanabie Cree First Nation took on the leadership of train stakeholders to have the service restored, establishing MTA Inc. (an Ontario Not-for-profit corporation) for this purpose. MTA Inc. is prepared to obtain all necessary funding and to oversee the operation of the Bear Train, which will initially travel from Sault Ste. Marie to Oba Lake. The Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT) is the advocacy group supporting MTA.

In 2024, MTA Inc. finalized the new business case to present to senior governments. Letters are being sent to the Ontario and federal governments requesting meetings to discuss the funding requests. The new owner of the Agawa Canyon Railroad line, Watco, has agreed to operate this passenger train service in collaboration with MTA Inc. once funding is in place. A large media event organized by CAPT and MTA Inc. was held in December 2024. It was attended by many grassroots supporters. NORDIK Research Associate Dr. Linda Savory Gordon, serves as secretary on the boards of MTA Inc. and CAPT.



## Community Engaged Artists: Identifying a province-wide arts service organization

The identification of a model for a province-wide Arts Service Organization for Community Engaged Artists is nearing completion. This work is an important continuation of Thinking Rock Community Arts' 'The Stories of our Stories' project that began in 2018, identifying the need for an organization that could support Northern and rural Ontario artists who engage and collaborate with community members around art projects that address social issues and promote social change. A matrix of professional artists and administrators working in the sector, along with community developers provided experiential knowledge, deepened insights into their communities, and offered a wide variety of best practices to consider.

The final report will be available in early fall 2025. The project is a partnership between Thinking Rock Community Arts and NORDIK Institute.

The project team:

Dr Jude Ortiz (NORDIK Research Coordinator),  
Miranda Bouchard (Thinking Rock Community Arts),  
and Elizabeth MacMillan (NORDIK Researcher).

## Culture, Language, Place and Belonging: The Sault Malayalee Association and the Transnational Cultivation of Associational Life

Also supported by Dr. Eve Haque's *Language Loss, Community Vitality and Canadian Non-official Language Education Policies* project out of York University, Dr. Sean Meades and Research Assistant Sandra Kurian have begun an ongoing engagement with the Sault Malayalee Association, a voluntary civic association organized to bring together the growing community of Malayalee people in Sault Ste. Marie, who are indigenous to the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. Sparked by an interest in supporting non-official language maintenance of diaspora communities, the engagements began exploring the re-emergent important role of culture-based associations and mutual aid societies in Northern Ontario cities tied to contemporary migration trends. The first research project to emerge from the engagement, *Culture, Language, Place and Belonging: The Sault Malayalee Association and the Transnational Cultivation of Associational Life*, draws on interviews from members of the association to explore how it has impacted life in Sault Ste. Marie for Malayalee people and efforts to maintain culture, language, and connections to Kerala.



## Data North: Illuminating Paths for Progress in Northern Ontario

Data North project, initiated by the NORDIK Institute, addresses the critical challenge of scattered, siloed, and inconsistent data that hinders effective decision-making in Northern Ontario's rural and small communities. This data scarcity obstructs strategic planning and equitable service delivery, leaving many local needs—from healthcare and housing to economic development—unidentified and unmet. Our project responds by building a centralized, user-friendly data hub to empower local stakeholders with accessible, relevant information, moving beyond fragmented systems to tell a cohesive community story.

This past year, the project transitioned from planning to active community engagement, marking a significant step in broadening our horizons. A key achievement was a collaborative consultation on May 15, 2025, with leaders from the physical and mental health sectors. This session solidified partnerships and generated immense enthusiasm for a shared data-driven future. Together, we identified critical data gaps, including the need for granular local data, and highlighted pressing community health challenges such as physician shortages, housing and long-term care gaps,

and the need to connect health outcomes to social determinants like poverty and housing. The outcomes from this engagement are now directly shaping the development of the data dashboard, ensuring it is built on collaboratively identified community indicators.

The ultimate impact of Data North will be the strengthened capacity of Northern Ontario communities to drive their own development. The project fosters evidence-based dialogues and connects researchers and community partners to support sustainability and justice in the North. This initiative is a truly collaborative effort, with a dedicated approach to engaging Indigenous partners and other sectors like economic development and housing in upcoming consultations.

The research team includes:  
Dr. Tamanna Rimi (Director of Research),  
Dr. Teryn Bruni (NORDIK Research Associate),  
Dr. Ahmed Aziz (NORDIK Research Associate),  
Dr. Zamilur Rahman (NORDIK Research Associate),  
and Mandar Velapure (Project Coordinator).

# Evaluating LEAP:

## Advancing Equity in Post-Secondary Pathways

The NORDIK Institute, in collaboration with Algoma University, continued its comprehensive evaluation of the Learners Early Access Program (LEAP) to assess its effectiveness. LEAP was designed to support equity-seeking high school students—particularly Indigenous and Black youth—who have been historically underrepresented in post-secondary education.

Delivered at Algoma University's Brampton campus, the program aimed to build students' confidence and capacity, reinforcing that higher education is not only accessible but also an empowering and achievable next step.

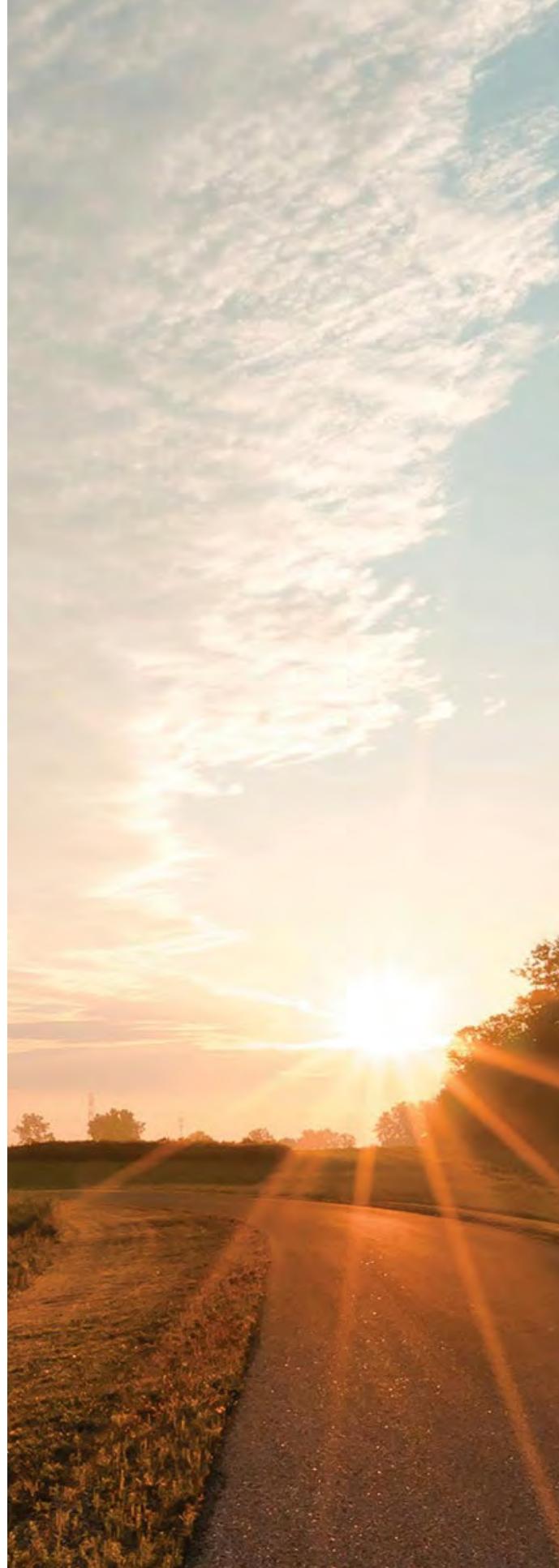
Using a Theory of Change framework, the evaluation assessed changes in both organizational and participant capacity across four key domains: Knowledge, Attitudes, Behaviors, and Relationships and Networks.

The research team drew on survey responses to gain insight into how LEAP supported student development and contributed to Algoma University's broader institutional goals around equity and access.

This reflective process will help guide future development of such program design, refine evaluation tools, and strengthen institutional and community partnerships. We completed the project by submitting the report for Winter 2025.

The research team includes:

Dr. Tamanna Rimi (Director of Research),  
Dr. Jude Ortiz (Research Coordinator),  
Dr. Zabid Iqbal (NORDIK Researcher),  
and Md Soaib Hossain (NORDIK Researcher),  
in collaboration with Algoma University, the Peel District School Board, and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board.



# Global Decolonial Education Initiative -

## Strengthening networks for alternative education structures



The Global Decolonial Education Initiative works with an international network of faculty, researchers, and community associates in Canada, Colombia, Bolivia, Ghana, Senegal and South Africa. The initiative opens spaces for dialogue and programming to support decolonization and self-determination in education, peace building and environmental justice/governance, and Peoples' diplomacy. It is led by Dr. Sheila Gruner (NORDIK Research Associate and Algoma University Faculty) and supported by a Canadian operational team, which in 2024-2025 included Kendall Mitchell (former Project Coordinator and NORDIK Intern) and Fernanda Arenas Suxo (Research and Education Assistant), and Sandra Kurian (Student Research Assistant).

In 2022 the initiative established the Institute of Peoples, Territories and Pedagogies for Peace (IPTP) which brings together students, faculty, staff, and community members through participatory and collaborative activities that strengthen a global network of universities, grassroots, Indigenous, and Afro-diasporic organizations, and allies.

In its third year (2024-2025), the initiative made significant progress in terms of network building. The IPTP, in collaboration with the FCCS, NORDIK, ACCANO, and members of Bachewana First Nation hosted a delegation of Indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders from Colombia in June 2024, who participated in grassroots diplomatic exchanges with Anishnaabe leaders, community members, and knowledge holders. Multiple panels and activities were organized on environmental justice, governance and biodiversity protection, including an artists' exhibit of works emphasizing Indigenous and Afro-descendant relationships to land, water and territory. This was followed by a delegation of IPTP/NORDIK Research Associates and allies' visit to Colombia in January 2025, marked by their participation in the First Interethnic Environmental Forum of Cesar. Both delegations' visits were essential steps in people's diplomacy toward the strengthening of existing relationships that allow for conversations on potential collaborations and future projects to take place.

A six-part webinar series on Autonomous and Decolonial Education concluded in May 2025, with over 500 participants and panelists from Canada, Colombia, Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Ghana, and other countries, illustrating the global impact of the initiative and the reach of its network.

Additionally, five new institutional agreements were formalized, with more underway in Ghana, Senegal, and Costa Rica, signaling continued expansion for the coming year.



## GLOCAL

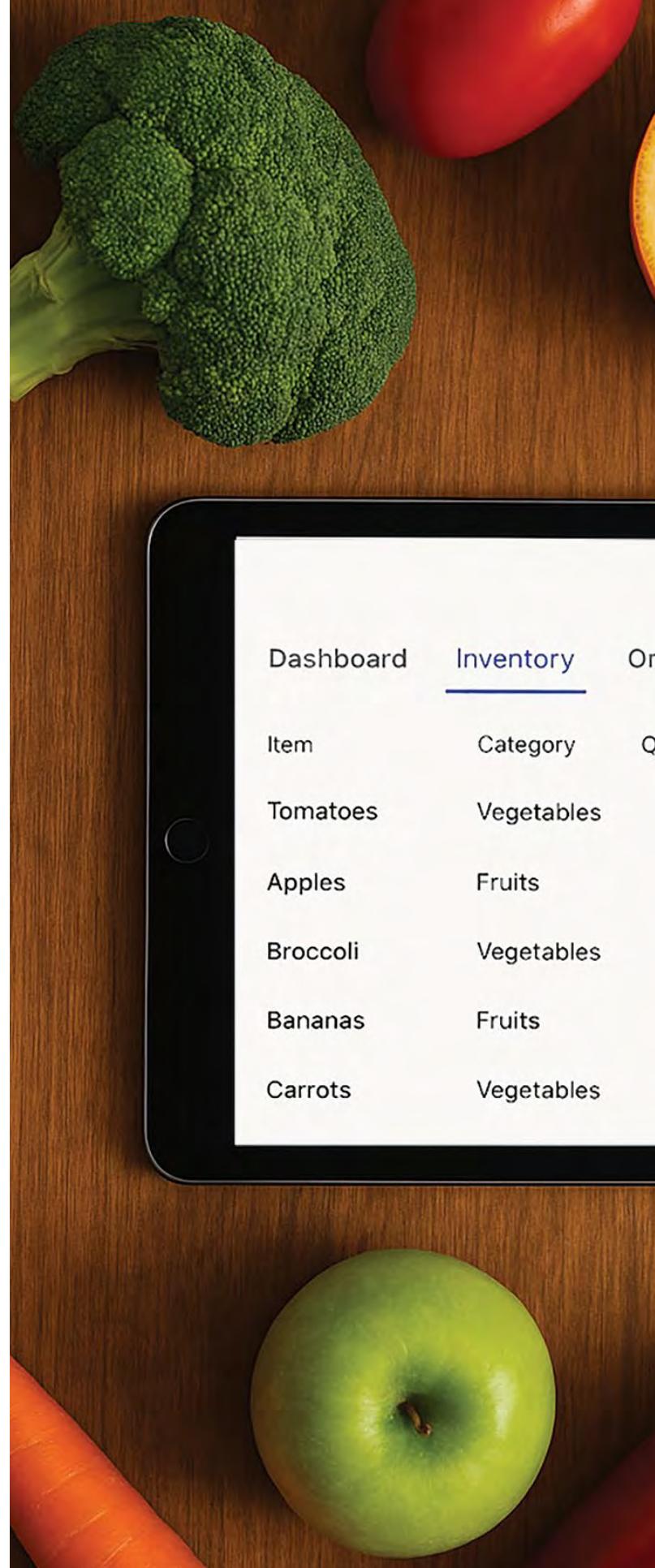
GLOCAL is currently in the final stages of completing a comprehensive scoping review that will be submitted for publication in the Fall of 2025. Led by Drs. Rebek and Bruni (NORDIK Associates) and Dr. Cooper, this research contributes timely and critical insights to the emerging field of inner-outer transformations as it will be the first detailed examination of how diverse change interventions affect social and environmental-wellbeing. As a transdisciplinary undertaking, the scoping review bridges diverse perspectives from fields including psychology, business, leadership studies, and sustainability. The [scoping review](#) illuminates vital gaps in the literature, areas for future research, and the need to critically shape new leadership development interventions. Through the synthesis of this diverse literature, the review establishes a critical foundational reference for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who are engaging in transformative practices for change. This review will be used to support the design and implementation of the sustainability-focused leader development intervention for emerging and experienced leaders.

Six members of GLOCAL shared their research at the 2025 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences Annual Conference in collaboration with the Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC). Additionally, the initiative has enlisted the expertise of a marketing company to develop a professional website and branding kit to showcase its research, pilot projects, and intervention. This investment was made strategically to strengthen GLOCAL's public presence and position the organization as a recognized authority in the field of inner-outer transformations. The interactive digital platform along with its online presence will communicate GLOCAL's research and programming to a diversity of stakeholders across public and private sectors internationally. The website will centralize knowledge dissemination for research projects, provide valuable open access resources, and create valuable connection opportunities for participants. For example, in Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (WU), Vienna University of Economics and Business, is working with us to offer an internship opportunity for students to engage in a Global Sustainability Challenge.

# Innovations in Local Food Tracking: App Evaluation Project

Harvest Algoma implemented its new software tracking application in October of 2024 in hope of combating the problem of inaccurate food tracking at the local level for their agency. The food tracking app was implemented to increase accuracy of food tracking, ease of use, and increased applicability for report writing. After one month of use, interviews were conducted by a faculty member and an intern with staff, volunteers, and agencies to determine if the current project scope and objectives had been met and what improvements could be made. Sixteen interviews were conducted comprising 4 staff, 5 volunteers and 7 agency representatives.

Overall the feedback on the new software application was positive with only a few changes suggested as people think it is both easy to use and extremely helpful with tracking the weights of their foods. The one-on-one training was felt to be enough on the whole and the app's report writing ability was appreciated while further detail extraction in the software for more specific reports was thought to be a future potential improvement. This research would also help plan future phases of their implementation project. Partners included NORDIK Research Associate and faculty member, Dr. Laura Wyper, from the Department of Community Economic and Social Development (CESD) at Algoma University, Harvest Algoma, David Thompson, Director of The Rural Agri-Innovation Centre (RAIN) at the SSM Innovation Centre, and RAIN intern Shacynne Anne G Sarroza.



# Policy recommendations growing place-based creative economies

The [IN SITU](#) research project focuses on innovation in cultural and creative industries in rural areas in the European Union. As a member of their International Advisory Board, Dr. Jude Ortiz notes Northern Ontario's culture sector faces similar challenges, particularly with regard to understanding its contribution as a community development and economic diversification strategy in creating vibrant, resilient places, and attracting investment to implement plans.

To address these deficits, the project's interim policy brief recommendations include: strengthen intra-sector integration and cross-sectoral collaboration to establish a robust support ecosystem; enhance opportunities for training, knowledge-building and development capacity and visibility; leverage culture and heritage assets for development; address policy gaps for culture to provide strategic directions and integration; and, address gender disparities to enhance visibility of and opportunities for female and diverse part of societies. Each of these recommendations, if implemented in Northern Ontario, would increase the sector's socioeconomic impact, and grow place-based creative economies that are increasingly shaping the world.

(Project Lead), and co-led by Dr. Laura Wyper and Dr. Vivian Jimenez-Estrada. The initiative responds to Algoma University's Special Mission and focuses on developing curriculum and programming from an intercultural, interdisciplinary and decolonial perspective.

The initiative intends to develop educational programming and courses, including a post-graduate program for the Faculty of Cross-Cultural Studies (FCCS) at Algoma University, and faculty training that considers alternative approaches to education and seeks to be inclusive of historically marginalized voices and worldviews.

The first year of the initiative (2024-2025) was characterized by consultancies and meetings to explore programming ideas and potential collaborations with other universities and organizations. FCCS faculty (Drs. Gruner, Wyper and Jimenez-Estrada, noted above) travelled with Anishinaabe elders and community members (Chief Dean Sayers and Constance Manitowabi) and team members of the Institute of Peoples, Territories and Pedagogies for Peace (IPTP) to Bogotá and Arhuaca communities in Colombia in January 2025, to explore opportunities of collaboration with universities and organizations there, as well as to gain insights into what possibilities exist for education from a decolonial and intercultural perspective. As a result, a proposal for a master's program under the Faculty of Cross-Cultural Studies at Algoma University was developed and submitted.

Additionally, a group of Algoma University students travelled to Colombia in March 2025 in the context of a Community, Economic and Social Development, and Sociology course on decolonial learning, territorial rights and peace. Students participated in the First Environmental Summit of the Peoples of Cesar, hosted in Valledupar, Colombia. Their visit was organized by the IPTP in collaboration with Algoma University.

The second year of the initiative is expected to further develop and solidify the networks of collaboration in the process of curriculum and programming development.

## Intercultural, Experiential, Decolonizing Learning and the Faculty of Cross-Cultural Studies

The Intercultural, Experiential, Decolonizing Learning is an initiative led by NORDIK Research Associates and Algoma University faculty members Dr. Sheila Gruner

# International Student Experience, Language, Diversity and Acquisition

With support from Algoma University's Teaching and Learning Centre, this emerging research project aims to illuminate the experiences of International students at Algoma University to document and reflect this critical moment in Ontario's polity where international students make up an increasing proportion of post-secondary students. It also aims to learn what kind of support services (if any) are needed to improve these students' experiences and inform the development or modification of services for international students at Algoma University and other post-secondary institutions. The research will involve the launch of a survey of international students in the Fall of 2025, followed by interviews and focus groups. Surveys have been translated into Nepali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Malayalam, and Hindi to increase the ability of students to respond at length, while the research team has recruited members to ensure that interviews and focus groups can be conducted in as wide a range of languages as prospective participants may wish.

The project team includes:

Dr. Sean Meades and Dr. Laura Wyper, NORDIK Research Associates from the CESD Department, and Julia Duncan from the Teaching and Learning Centre, as well as several student researchers, including Sandra Kurian, Kuljeet Kaur, Nisarg Mehta, and Devon Scott. The project is also supported by Dr. Even Haque and doctoral candidate HaEun Kim from York University, who are supporting student researcher honoraria through Dr. Haque's project, *Language Loss, Community Vitality and Canadian Non-official Language Education Policies*.

# Expanding Social Enterprise Development Training Opportunities

The on-going partnership between NORDIK Institute and Keepers of the Circle delivers online social entrepreneurship training to Indigenous Women, 2Spirit and non-binary persons from across Canada. Introductory and intermediate level programs provide a full spectrum of support from both organizations. Each session is designed to be a safe and brave space, building nurturing bonds, and developing support networks for people historically excluded from the Canadian economy. Workshops explore concepts of success and inclusion in entrepreneurship from a decolonized lens, bringing together participants who range from those with a dream to start a business to serial entrepreneurs to long-time business owners. The program concludes with participants completing a written business plan. The demand to participate in the program is high. Priority enrolment in the Intermediate program is given to people who complete the Introductory level. In 2024-2025, a total of 21 participants completed both the virtual Introduction to Entrepreneurship and Intermediate Entrepreneurship programs.

The project team includes:

Elizabeth MacMillan and Amy Boyer, alongside Keepers of the Circle staff, who co-facilitate the program.



# Activating Untapped Potential:

## Leveraging Newcomers' Skill Sets to Tackle Labour Shortages in Northern Ontario

Similar to many communities across Northern Ontario, Sault Ste. Marie is experiencing a growing shortage of skilled workers across key sectors. An aging population and continued out-migration of youth are compounding the issue leading to reduced productivity, slower business expansion and limiting the region's economic growth. Is there a quick fix in sight?

One of the most effective and forward-looking responses lies in the talent that immigrants and newcomers bring to the region. Although many arrive with strong skills and valuable experience, they often face significant barriers integrating into the local workforce. The main hurdle? A persistent gap between the skills they offer and the needs of the local job market.

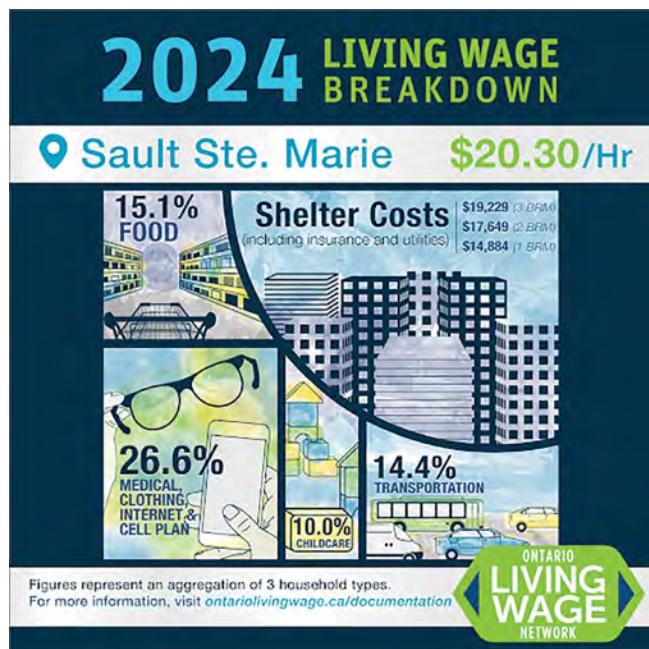
To address this, our project aims to identify the skill gaps. We plan to analyze the current labour market demands, by industry and occupation, and compare them with the skills that newcomers possess. This evidence-based approach will help to understand the nature of the skill mismatch and how to effectively leverage newcomer talent.

We have completed an environmental scan of best practices and a literature review. Currently, we are developing a survey questionnaire for data collection from newcomers, while also analyzing secondary data to identify sector-specific skill requirements.

By clearly identifying and addressing these gaps, the newcomers can be better prepared to meet the actual needs of the local job market. In other words, they can take up meaningful roles, fully apply their abilities, and help solve the region's labour shortages. In the long run, this leads to higher workforce participation, enhanced productivity, and faster economic growth.

The research team includes: Dr. Tamanna Rimi (Director of Research), Dr. Ahmed Aziz (NORDIK Research Associate), Dr. Zamilur Rahman (NORDIK Research Associate), and Quazi Nazmus Sakib (NORDIK Researcher) in collaboration with the City of Sault Ste. Marie Local Immigration Partnership, the Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation (AWIC), and the Sault Community Career Centre.

# Living Wage in Northern Ontario – 2024 Update



NORDIK Institute, in partnership with the Ontario Living Wage Network (OLWN) and regional collaborators, contributes to the annual calculation of the living wage in Northern Ontario. Dr. Tamanna Rimi, Director of Research at NORDIK, first calculated the living wage for Sault Ste. Marie in 2019 as part of the city's Poverty Reduction Roundtable initiatives.

A living wage reflects the hourly rate a worker needs to earn to cover basic expenses and participate in community life. The living wage calculation considers major expenses that workers face such as shelter costs, transportation, childcare, and food. Other expenses such as internet access, a modest annual vacation, clothing, medical costs are also included in the calculation. Any applicable government taxes, transfers, and benefits are factored in as well.

A living wage supports community resilience, sustainability, and improved quality of life by addressing affordability and promoting equity. The primary goal of living wage research is to inform policy and encourage action among local employers and all levels of government, while highlighting the financial challenges faced by families.

Until 2022, the living wage was separately calculated for each city/community. However, it is now calculated based on Statistics Canada's economic regions—making it easier for employers, including those with multiple locations, to identify their area's rate and join the OLWN certification program. In 2024, the living wage for Northern Ontario is \$20.30, a 2.5% increase from 2023. This year's rates across Ontario saw an average rise of 3.3%, largely driven by continued increases in rental housing costs despite overall inflation beginning to stabilize.

Living Wage Economic Region	2023 Living Wage Rate	2024 Living Wage Rate	% Increase
North	\$19.80	\$20.30	2.5%
East	\$20.60	\$21.65	5.1%
Dufferin, Guelph, Wellington, Waterloo	\$20.90	\$21.30	1.9%
Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk, Niagara	\$20.35	\$20.90	2.7%
London, Elgin, Oxford	\$18.85	\$19.50	3.4%
Southwest	\$18.65	\$19.85	6.4%
Grey, Bruce, Perth, Huron, Simcoe	\$22.75	\$23.05	1.3%
Ottawa	\$21.95	\$22.80	3.9%
Greater Toronto Area	\$25.05	\$26.00	3.8%
Hamilton	\$20.80	\$21.30	2.4%

# Northern Ontario Labour Force Retention and Attraction

Northern Ontario faces persistent skilled labour shortages, compounded by demographic decline, outmigration, and the impacts of COVID-19 and the digital economy. Building on a pilot study by Dr. Nusrat Aziz, this project expands research on graduate retention and attraction across Northern Ontario's post-secondary institutions. It examines push and pull factors, migration networks, community attitudes toward newcomers, and provincial and federal (im)migrant attraction and retention policies, with particular attention to leveraging temporary work permits to retain skilled graduates. To date, we have collected approximately 1,500 survey responses from graduates and final-year students at eight post-secondary institutions—Algoma University, Laurentian University, Lakehead University, Nipissing University, Confederation College, Sault College, Cambrian College, and Northern College—covering all five major cities in Northern Ontario: Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, North Bay, and Timmins.

This SSHRC Insight Development Grant–funded project brings together academic researchers from all Northern Ontario universities, including Dr. Nusrat Aziz and Dr. Sean Meades (NORDIK Institute and Algoma University), Dr. Livio Di Matteo (Lakehead University), Dr. Natalya Brown (Nipissing University), and Dr. Sadequl Islam (Laurentian University). The project has supervised four students: two current graduate students—Alexander Mirault (Laurentian University) and Kashfia Ashraf (Lakehead University)—one graduate from Algoma University (Zeel Patel),

and one post-doctoral researcher (Dr. Nazim Uddin). Zeel, Alex, and Kashfia also served as affiliated research assistants with the NORDIK Institute. A paper from this project was presented at the 59th Annual Meetings of the Canadian Economics Association, hosted by the Department of Economics at the Université du Québec à Montréal, from May 29 to May 31, 2025.

## Sault Community Theatre Centre Project

The Sault Community Theatre Centre (SCTC) received a Resilience, Sustainability and Capacity Building grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to address the uncertainty of the post-COVID-19 climate and develop pathways to recovery in fulfilling its mandate of supporting Sault Ste. Marie and area's cultural development. As part of the strategic planning process, NORDIK Institute was contracted to provide two reports. The survey report provided an initial assessment of SCTC's operational competitive advantage, areas for growth and perceived value within the City of Sault Ste. Marie's increasingly competitive cultural ecosystem from the perspective of the venue's users, i.e. those who rent the space. The second report constituted a resource document, an overview of the arts and culture sector's contribution to resilience and sustainability, highlighting the significance of cultural infrastructure in such.

# Community Support Team:

## The Unmarked Burial Project

The Community Support Team is a partnership between the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA) and the NORDIK Institute. The CSAA have marked many achievements, even in the midst of financial uncertainty across Canada for those leading the search for our children that did not return home. Following are five events that demonstrate commitment to their vision.

The CSAA has and continues to complete projects that create spaces of reflection, public education and remembrance for those that attended residential school through events such as the public unveiling of the Wawanosh Memorial on September 30th, 2024.



The CSAA hosted an event with the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation, January 7th and 8th which provided an opportunity for the Project Leads within Northern Ontario, Survivors, the Shingwauk Residential School Center (SRSC) and the Coroner's office to host an information session. This session allowed for honest and difficult dialogue pertaining to the barriers in accessing records by and for Survivors, families and communities and how to address these issues locally and nationally.

The CSAA and the CST publicly released their 2021-2024 Site Search Progress Report on January 20th, 2025 to the 85 communities impacted by the Shingwauk site and was shared with Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).

The Makwa Waakaa'igan Earth Turning Ceremony hosted Elders, Survivors, and partners at an emotional and meaningful ceremony marking the beginning of construction for the Survivor-led National Centre of Cultural Excellence.



The CSAA is hosting the "Life After Residential School" 2025 Gathering which will honor and celebrate the achievements of alumni and families of those that attended the Shingwauk Residential School at the Quattro Hotel and Conference Center, August 1st-3rd.





## Community Support Team: Ongoing support for Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association

Funded by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs Ontario (IAO), the Mino Bimaadiziwin is a three-phase project with the intention of developing a network with health authorities, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders on and off reserve within the Algoma District in Northern Ontario, that have been successful in providing Indigenous led, and culturally centered programs that support the journey to recovery from mental health and addictions for those impacted by Indian Residential Schools. Phase One determined what services were needed by conducting an environmental scan of existing programs, services, and workshops. Phase Two hosted a variety of community outreach and engagement activities to identify gaps in service provision and resources needed.

In Phase Three, the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA), Community Support Team (CST), and the NORDIK Institute hosted a 3-day Health and Wellness Summit from October 15th to 17th, with the intention of developing the network. In addition to the summit, the CST hosted a lunch and learn event with guest facilitator Dr. Kathy Absolon, who shared about the importance of building and maintaining our wellness bundles. We were also gifted to have Phil Jones, a Knowledge Keeper from Garden River, facilitate a woodland painting workshop with our Survivors, Indigenous students, faculty and staff from both Shingwauk Kinoomege Gamig (SKG) and Algoma University, as well as NORDIK staff. The CSAA and CST attended the St. John's Residential School Spring gathering which allowed for Leads from various communities to share updates, network and share insight on various technologies and best practices from each initiative.

# Bridging culture, science, and technology

## Collecting water quality data in the St. Marys River and Lake Huron's North Channel

Decisions about our waters are informed by experiences and data related to interactions with local waters and water quality. Prior to NORDIK's first community-led water monitoring project in 2021, consistent and ongoing water quality data was non-existent in our region over at least the previous 20 years, aside from compliance requirements by industry (not public). Our water team has developed and evaluated a practical approach to community-based science for northern Great Lakes communities. Over the last year, we have put our region's waters back on the map (literally) and have initiated pathways for the unique experiences of local communities to be recognized by decision-makers. This year, NORDIK Institute became the first non-government member of the Government of Ontario's Provincial (Surface) Water Quality Monitoring and Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Programs, which have operated for 61 years and 25 years, respectively. Our team also drafted a new framework for consideration by the Canada Water Agency: Community-based Water Quality Monitoring in the Northern Great Lakes: Towards a framework for cold-climate monitoring and data use in support of community-based monitoring in Northern Ontario communities.

Over the 2024-2025 year, we engaged with over 1,000 community members at dozens of events in Sault Ste. Marie, our most active community. Volunteer teams are also growing in Missanabie Cree First Nation, Batchewana First Nation, and the Townships of Huron Shores and Thessalon. This year, NORDIK trained more than 100 volunteers who collected more than 5,700 data records at 26 locations. Our staff team



also contributed to national and binational governance frameworks via the Canada Water Agency's National Data Strategy and two International Joint Commission workshops. We had a strong [social media presence](#) (more than 42,000 impressions, 1,300 engagements, and 76 followers) and we shared our impact via university guest lectures, a regional conference, a [CBC Morning North interview](#), and a Science Fest kick-off event captured by a [Soo Today video report](#).

This year's project involved 26 organizations to support the health of local waters and the meaningful engagement of community members in the science, management, and stewardship of those waters. Organizational partners include five First Nation and municipal communities, Sault Ste. Marie Region Conservation Authority, Science North, Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre, Algoma University, Sault College, Natural Resources Canada, IndigenousTech. ai, and many others, including our funders: the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks, the Canada Water Agency, the City of Sault Ste. Marie, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, and NSERC PromoScience. NORDIK staff who implemented this project during the 2024-2025 year were Kiki Vetrie and Ajaz Shaikh, with contributions from 10 biology interns and an MSc student of Algoma University. The Project Lead is Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone (NORDIK Research Associate and NORDIK's Director of Operations).



## Measuring What Matters: Putting a Dollar Value on Public Libraries' Impact

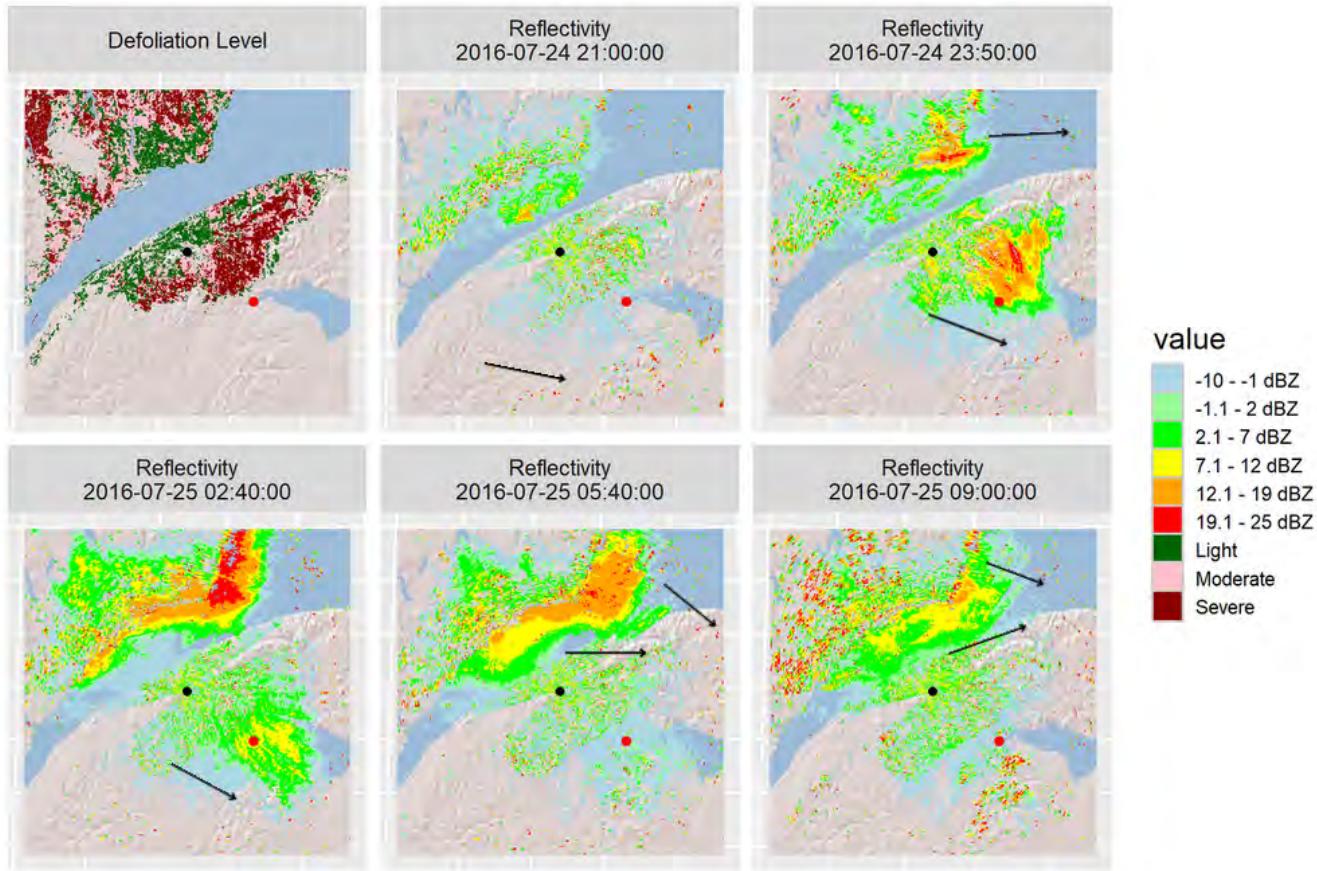
Public libraries have long struggled to quantify the intangible social and economic value they bring to communities. To help address this challenge, NORDIK, in partnership with the Ontario Library Service (OLS), launched the Valuing Ontario Libraries Toolkit (V.O.L.T.) in December 2023. Building on the success of the 2016/17 project, *Valuing Northern Libraries Toolkit*, the engagements were held with public libraries across Ontario to shape a new resource to provide a standardized Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework for public libraries across Ontario to measure and communicate their impact across seven domains: Education, Culture, Inclusion and well-being, Entertainment and leisure, Economic development, Civic engagement, and Space.

The toolkit calculates a library's annual social return on investment by assigning comparative market dollar values to its catalogue and services—essentially estimating what it would cost to access similar resources in the private sector.

Following its launch, many Ontario libraries have adopted V.O.L.T. to create Library Value Reports to share with stakeholders, such as their governing boards, municipal or First Nation councils. Over the year, NORDIK continued working with OLS to update the toolkit based on user feedback. Training sessions are planned for Fall 2025 to further support its implementation. Visit the link <https://resources.olservice.ca/volt> for more information.

The project team included:

Dr. Sean Meades (NORDIK Research Associate),  
Dr. Tamanna Rimi (Director of Research),  
Dr. Jude Ortiz (Research Coordinator),  
Dr. Gayle Broad (NORDIK Research Associate),  
Zeel Patel (Research Assistant) and Harsh Morye (Research Assistant) with support from OLS provided by Director of Training and Consulting Steven Kraus, Consultant Jesse Roberts, and CEO Melissa D'Onofrio-Jones. Technical support was provided by Frank Coccimiglio and Glenn Driver of Algoma University. French-language engagement support was provided by Isabelle Michaud.



## Weather radar stations support early detection and prediction of Spruce Budworm moth outbreaks in Eastern Canada

Spruce Budworm is a native moth species whose preferential host plants are balsam fir and spruce (white, black, red). During periods of high population levels, defoliation leads to considerable mortality of its host species over large areas, leading to significant impacts on timber supply. Spruce Budworm spreads through long-distance dispersal flights that establish new epicenters of defoliation. These mass flights can be seen on weather radar.

Dr Jennie Pearce (Pearce & Associates Ecological Research) and Dr Elaine Ho-Tassone (NORDIK Research Associate) in collaboration with Natural Resources Canada and Environment Canada, have developed a tool to monitor Spruce Budworm mass dispersal flights, as captured by Environment Canada's weather radar network. This tool is now being used to map and describe historical (2013-present) movements by Spruce Budworm, to improve understanding of the frequency, duration and weather conditions during which these flights take place. This information will improve predictive models being developed by project partners, and will assist in the early detection of new Spruce Budworm outbreaks.

# Thank you to NORDIK Institute partners and funders:



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