

# MAMAWE OTA ASKIHK

*Sharing Life Together Here on Earth*





*Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre is a place of spirit where both Indigenous and Christian spiritual beliefs are respected, shared and understood.*

*We will foster teachings of respect, healing, and connectedness to be shared: for the benefit of individuals; for restoring balance and wholeness among peoples and with all of creation; and for nurturing a prophetic voice.*

*- SSSC Vision Statement*

[sandysaulteaux.ca](http://sandysaulteaux.ca)





# WHAT IS MAMAWE OTA ASKIHK?

Mamawe Ota Askihk is Cree for "Sharing life together here on Earth". What started out as an annual festival at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to reclaim the homegrown, the homespoken and the homemade, has become a series of gatherings that are closely connected to the land and the seasons here, which make space for relationship and for skill-building.

Mamawe Ota Askihk events are hosted by Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre and organized with community partners who share our vision.

# VISION

The Mamawe Ota Askihk Circle envisions economies and food systems based on Indigenous food sovereignty, relationships of reciprocity between all peoples and the understanding that we belong to the land.



# PURPOSE

We will pursue our vision through the offering of learning events that equip participants and their communities to “share life together here on Earth”, by reclaiming the homegrown, the home-spoken and the homemade.

Mamawe Ota Askihk events will:

- centre Indigenous ways of being and knowing
- be cross-cultural and encourage friendship between participants
- be land-based and promote skills for procuring food, medicine and other everyday needs, sharing the gifts of the Earth in a good way
- honour the Earth as our faculty
- draw on the wisdom of our Indigenous educational model where everyone can be a learner and a teacher
- be relationship- and community-based, giving opportunity for event participants to participate in decision-making
- have a variety of formats and timeframes (from weeklong in-person residencies, to brief virtual gatherings) to meet the needs of different audiences, with a focus on programming that is intergenerational and inclusive
- offer opportunities for students, graduates and friends of the Centre to practice and share their leadership gifts





# HISTORY

From the time our elder Stan McKay first stepped on to the land here, the Earth has been guiding us. Beginning in 1992 the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre (DJSRC) began a very popular outdoor annual feast and pow wow on a Saturday in September. In 1996/97 this idea morphed into the start of a cross cultural conversation that eventually became the Feast for Friends event after DJSRC and the Francis Sandy Theological Centre amalgamated into the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (SSSC) in 2011.

SSSC partnered with All Native Circle Conference, Conference of Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario, Winnipeg and Selkirk Presbytery, Centre for Christian Studies, Northend Stella Community Ministry, and various churches from Winnipeg and the Beausejour area to offer an annual Feast for Friends event. This gathering was a day for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come to the Centre for sharing food, forming and nurturing friendships through activities like art projects or Indian baseball, learn about Indigenous cultures, and experience ceremonies like the sweat lodge together.



# HISTORY

In 2016, our neighbours at Ploughshares Community Farm pitched a joint event to us that would draw on their experience of hosting a homesteaders' retreat. The gathering was conceived as a festival where the small farms/DIY movement meets up with the Indigenous Food Sovereignty movement. Other partners were invited to collaborate on this, including the Student Christian Movement of Canada (whose Cahoots festival also helped inspire our vision) and Canadian Mennonite University. The gathering was named "Mamawe Ota Askihk – Sharing Life Together Here on Earth" and in the first year welcomed a group of 30 or so participants to the Centre for a 6-day gathering. Participants included students in our Ministry Training Program who earned a Learning Circle credit for their involvement. The gathering culminated with a new Feast for Friends that drew around 100 participants, thanks to the help of the Feast for Friends partners.





“When we were kids, my mom would give us a little piece of hide for ourselves, cut off from the legs, to make our own little frame.” Elenor Thompson reminisced about growing up in Oxford House, as she gave guidance to our hide-tanning process during the festival.

It is hard to put into words what happened at Mamawe Ota Askihk. We know that we danced on wild rice, that we smoked fish, that we toured some local homesteads, that we made compost and apple sauce and sausage. and Three Sisters stew. We know that we ate well! But like smoke from the sacred morning fire, spreading through the camp long after it can be seen, a blessing hung in the air all week. What was it? Why did it feel so right to engage our food with our own hands, to work together side by side, close to the earth? There are many ways to do things faster, cheaper, more independently now. Why go back to old ways?

Elenor used to ask the same question of her own mother. Why did she insist her daughters learn to tan a moose hide when it was so much work, when they were getting good jobs as teachers and nurses? Elenor said that her mother gave them the image of a bow and arrow. “To fly far ahead, first you have to pull back.”



# HISTORY

The healing that was evident in the first Mamawe Ota Askihk gathering fed into our Indigenous Family Wellbeing Initiative. In 2017, we repeated the weeklong gathering, this time including parents who were part of a Family Wellbeing retreat at the Centre.

The spirit and the work of learning together from and on the land that infused the gathering led to conversations about nurturing this energy in other ways and places. Other manifestations have included expanding the garden at the Centre, with the help of summer students, to produce more homegrown food for the Centre's kitchen, inviting Action Therapy to bring youth out to work in the garden and share some of the harvest with their families, a winter "Stew & Stories: Indigenous Farming on the Prairies" event, partnering with Eastman Seed Savers to organize a spring seed exchange and blessing, and a hoped for visit from a Palestinian farmer to build solidarity and share stories of food production under occupation.







One of the activities that created the most buzz at Mamawe Ota Askihk in 2019 was a pemmican-making workshop led by inner-city food sovereignty activist Audrey Logan. A field trip from Siloam Mission joined us for the afternoon. For these housing-insecure participants, the preparation of these healthy, high-energy, nutrient-dense food packets that they could take with them in their pockets and would keep indefinitely without refrigeration was a powerful reconnection to their culture and to their food security.



