



## Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award



August 2021

Submitted by: We'koqma'q First Nation



# About We'koqma'q

The community of We'koqma'q First Nation is approximately forty-four (44) kilometers north of the Canso Causeway and one-hundred and fifteen (115) kilometers south of Industrial Cape Breton. Its population consists of 1,043 residents. It is bordered by the Bras D'or Lake and a mountainous range known as Skye Mountain. We'koqma'q itself is comprised of 828.5 hectares of land. The Mi'kmaq were the first peoples to populate the shores of the lake. The area is rich in hunting and fishing grounds the landscape is tranquil and picturesque.

We'koqma'q First Nation is a **progressive community on the rise**. For the past decade, Chief and Council, along with the management team, have been focused on building a self-sustaining economy for their community members. A diverse portfolio of enterprises has resulted in significant and strategic investments in community infrastructure and hundreds of sustainable employment opportunities for community members and beyond.

Throughout this last decade of change, We'koqma'q Chief and Council have prioritized the economic, social and health needs of their community but have also invested in building strong relationships outside of the community in terms of business, recreation, and education opportunities to further enhance the quality of life and create optimal opportunities for all their community members.

The health and wellness of We'koqma'q extends far beyond physical health. We'koqma'q have taken a holistic approach to improving the quality of life for their entire community – spiritual, mental and physical – while also investing in essential infrastructure, like housing, water, sewer, the health centre and more. Access to specialized healthcare has also changed the health of We'koqma'q. With some of the best wait times in the province for mental health support, and exceptional day-to-day care, We'koqma'q is truly becoming Provincial leaders of change and development in this field.

One of the most promising and profitable lines of business is We'koqma'q commercial fisheries and aquaculture divisions. In just 10 years, We'koqma'q First Nation have built a fully integrated trout aquaculture business that consists of a hatchery, farm, and processing plant. We'koqma'q seafood products are sold by the largest retailers in our Atlantic region and are chosen for their superior quality.

Aside from creating hundreds of new jobs, We'koqma'q has continued to re-invest these revenues into their community for housing and other necessary infrastructure, such as roads, water, sewer, healthcare and resources for their beloved elders and youth. Furthermore, we have provided training opportunities for community members that allow them to build careers within the community, for the community. A prime example would be 4 members from We'koqma'q contracting who were sent to get training on solar panel installation. This allows our community to become more environmentally efficient as we grow.

The past ten years have been a time of positive and prosperous transformation for We'koqma'q. As a community, they've worked hard to build a self-sustaining economy that has created robust employment opportunities in the community of We'koqma'q, all while staying true to their culture and demonstrating their incredible strength and resilience.



Remembering their history, carrying-on their traditions, celebrating their culture and learning to build your best future, are the pillars in which We'koqma'q has and will continue to grow. Our community has just gone through one of the most challenging moments in our history. The Covid-19 pandemic required our communitymembers to stay diligent, focused, committed, and safe. We requiredeveryone to come together as a community to protect one another and to follow all health and safety protocols. We are proud to say that once again, We'koqma'q Community has been incredible and supportive throughout this Pandemic.

We have helped one another, remained safe and have successfully vaccinated 92% of our community as of July 2021. Most recently, we received a letter of recognition from the Province of Nova Scotia for our hard work and commitment to keeping everyone safe and protected.



August, 2021


Dear Chief Annie Bernard-Daisley,


On behalf of the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, we want to recognize the leadership of the We'ko'kmaq First Nation in providing vaccine to your community.

The COVID-19 vaccination effort was one of the largest and most complex programs in history. Your Health Directors and their teams were deeply committed to delivering successful vaccination clinics. With the support of Tajiheimik, these clinics were developed with care and attention to detail and built the confidence of your community. Their success contributed to the exceptional performance of the overall program.

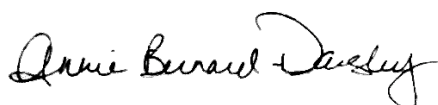
While there was great commitment to access and equity in the vaccine roll-out, that would never have been achieved without you. Please extend our deepest thanks with your team.

Sincerely,

  
Tracey Barbrick Associate  
Deputy Minister COVID-19  
Immunization &  
Vaccination Strategy  
Nova Scotia Department of  
Health and Wellness

  
David Benoit  
Chief of Staff  
COVID19 Immunization &  
Vaccination Strategy  
Nova Scotia Department of  
Health and Wellness

We want to thank you for your consideration of this award, and we truly would love to opportunity to be honoured with this award and to bring this back to our community who have earned it and worked for it.



Chief Annie Bernard-Daisley & Council

**WE'KOQMA'Q**  
**PROUD**

The following few pages will hopefully demonstrate the incredible spirit of We'koqma'q and some of the unprecedented changes and growth that we have experienced and achieved as a community in the last ten years. We truly are *acomunity on the rise*.

We will highlight all the key criteria demonstrations and more that is required for this application. Here are some of the required items:

- ability to build on unique strengths within the community
- a high degree of citizen participation in community projects of a wide variety, range and interest
- includes others and encourages diversity in all its forms
- clear evidence of community pride
- a focus on creating an enduring community

The past ten years have been a time of great transformation. As a community, we've come together to build a self-sustaining economy that has created robust employment opportunities here, in We'koqma'q, while staying true to our culture and demonstrating our strength and resilience.

Through every decision we've made as your Chief and Council, we've asked ourselves a simple but powerful question: ***Will this improve the quality of life and well-being for our community members?*** This mission has been critical to the progress made since 2011 and will continue to guide us as we look forward into to future.

With the economic successes of the past ten years, we've been able to make significant investments into our youth, elders, families, infrastructure, and social services needed to support our community and much more.

We are well-positioned to continue this path of growth and understand theimportance of partnerships to our future.

### Nearly A Decade of Significant Progress

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began partnership with fish farming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out of Co-Management</li> <li>• Two physicians started serving our comunity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched new private-sector partnership strategy</li> <li>• First medical van purchased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theresa Cremo Memorial Health Centre received Accreditation with Commendation from Accreditation Canada</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Took ownership of fish farm</li> <li>• Built new fire hall</li> <li>• Fire department certified as Medical First Responders</li> <li>• Memorandum of Understanding with Municipality of the County of Inverness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchased Big Falls Hatchery in Wolfville, NS</li> <li>• Groundfish vessel purchased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processing plant is started, processing 70,000 trout</li> <li>• Province announced provincial funding for energy efficiency upgrades for First Nations homes and training for community members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding received to export fisheries</li> <li>• Second medical van purchased</li> <li>• Hired full-time Social Worker for our school</li> <li>• Part-time Advanced Care Child and Adolescent Therapist hired in partnership with NSHA</li> <li>• Water treatment plant started</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processed more than 700,000 trout</li> <li>• Partnered with Municipality of the County of Inverness to treat and manage waste water</li> <li>• Water system upgrades approved</li> <li>• Arena purchased to support fisheries and aquaculture</li> <li>• Hosted Mi'kmaw Summer Games</li> <li>• Reservation road was paved</li> <li>• Elder's Centre opened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started building a 50' harvest vessel</li> <li>• Purchased insulated tanker to transport trout</li> <li>• 400 community members employed</li> <li>• New emergency alert system rolled out through First Nations communities</li> <li>• Granted funds to hire full-time mental health therapist</li> <li>• First Band in Atlantic Canada to start Covid testing</li> </ul>

# Our Youth. Our Future.



Remembering our history, carrying-on our traditions, celebrating our culture, and learning to build your best future, are the pillars in how we support the youth in our community. **Our investments in educational and recreational resources have brightened our community.** We are extremely proud of the unique and holistic education system that we have built here in We'koqma'q.

For the newest members of our community, our daycare provides a safe, inclusive environment for our children to have a stimulating learning and childcare experience. Our school is also recognized as a leader in Canada for the unique and specialized support we provide to students with varying needs. Education extends far beyond the classroom.

Community-based programs like the **Eagle Youth Group, Youth Camps** and **Camp Rod** further connect our children to our cultural roots, while teaching them the life skills needed to keep them on the right path. Our mental health services and health centre provides around the clock support for our youth in greatest need.

We are proud to run a Youth Program each summer where the Youth in our community work directly with our Elders. This program is facilitated throughout Band with a goal of having our Youth provide services such as complimentary lawn mowing services, help around their home, etc. to help create the necessary mentorship and learning that is so important for our community.

## Sustainability and Faith

Sustainability is a priority for us as we move into 2021-2022 and respecting the environment has been a core pillar of our foundation and community belief since the beginning. As a band, we are working towards a community-wide solar plan, we have created a commitment to go green as much as we can as a community, and we host community clean-ups with a great turn out. Our new buildings will be built with sustainable application that will exceed requirements. As a community, we have many green spaces and stunning places to nature our environment such as our pristine Skye River Trail. This Trail is an attraction for community members, tourists, neighbouring communities and more. We offer regular community events, tours through our medicine gardens and many locals enjoy fishing and walking these trails.





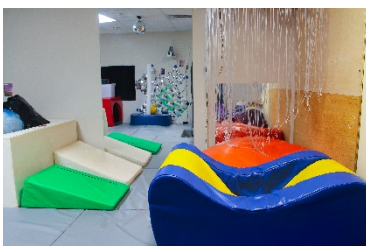
Faith-Based practice and groups remain very strong in our community. Each year we host community sacraments that bring all community members together for baptism celebrations, anniversaries, weddings, funerals and more. Our faith is extremely strong and something that we take very serious as a community. We have mass/church involvement at the school for some special events such as ash Wednesday, remembrance day, etc.

## Investing for the Future

A pillar of our community, our school is a special place for children to learn their history and roots, while gaining the education and support needed to build their future.

### Proudest Highlights:

- 681 students funded for postsecondary education
- Every student from grade primary to 12 receives an iPad for use during school
- Created Snoezelen Room to support youth with autism
- In 2019, we opened a new splash pad as a fun way to cool down in warmer months
- Hired full-time Social Worker for our school
- Hired a part-time Advanced Care Child and Adolescent Therapist in partnership with NSHA
- Accredited as a Member of the Legacy School Program and the TheGord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund
- Eagle Youth Group supports youth 11-18 years of age in learning the pillars to success
- Daycare expanded to care for up to 23 children to meet the growing needs of our community



### Snoezelen Room

At our school, children always feel accepted and supported – no matter the personal challenges they face. Our Snoezelen Room was specially designed to support children with autism and other learning disabilities.



**“We’re strong, we’re resilient, we’re indigenous and we can handle anything that comes our way as a community. Our youth are our future.”**

**- Christina Sylliboy, Vice Principal**

## Improving Our Well Being

Improving the quality of life for our entire community is at the core of every decision we make. Since 2011, we’ve made incredible progress in how we support, care for, and invest in our community as a whole.

The health and wellness of our community extends far beyond physical health. We’ve taken a holistic approach to improving the quality of life for our entire community – spiritual, mental, and physical – while also investing in essential infrastructure, like housing, water, sewer, the health centre and more.

Access to specialized healthcare has changed the health of our community. With some of the best wait times in the province for mental health support, and exceptional day-to-day care, we are true leaders in this field.

### Proudest Highlights:

- Tripled Health Centre employees to include a variety of specialities, including:
  - Two family physicians
  - One full-time and one part-time adult therapist
  - One full-time school based social worker
  - One part time advanced care and adolescent therapist
  - Dietician
  - Nurse Practitioner
  - And much more!
- Purchased of two medical vans to take community members to appointments
- Health Centre received Accreditation with Exemplary Status from Accreditation Canada
- Developed an Elder’s Centre
- Invested in a new water/sewer system
- Created the Skye River Trail



### Medicine Garden

The new Medicine Garden is a garden for all peoples and all living things. It provides a sacred space for healing, celebration, and peace. It will be a place for our medicine to grow and be nourished.



**“Knowing the patient and knowing the culture they live in and being able to calm them down through the Mi’kmaw language is really what drives me”. Tikisha is the first Mi’kmaw woman from We’koqma’q to become a paramedic.”**

**- Tikisha Paul-Gould, Paramedic**

## Strategic Partnerships

Strategic partnerships have allowed our community’s impact and reputation to extend beyond the borders of We’koqma’q. Through partnerships with other businesses and nationally recognized retailers, We’koqma’q has become a trusted partner for quality service, products and employees. Our fisheries products have become synonymous with quality throughout the region, making us the largest supplier of steelhead trout in all of the Atlantic Canada.



“Premium Seafoods has worked with We’koqma’q First Nation and its Chief and Council for many years. I have consistently been impressed by the vision, focus and dedication of We’koqma’q’s leadership in promoting its community, seeking opportunities, building sustainable businesses and relationships. Premium has had an overwhelmingly positive experience working with We’koqma’q and together, we have shared in success and innovation.”

– Edgar Sampson, Premium Seafoods



“We’re happy to be a part of this community and have enjoyed a great working relationship from the time we first met at the band office in 2012. Irving Oil is very pleased with the site’s performance, and we look forward to growing our relationship and partnership with We’koqma’q First Nation. Thank you for welcoming us to this community.”

- Kevin Bouchey, Irving Oil



“The relationship between We’koqma’q First Nation and Cooke Aquaculture has been very productive and important to both parties. It has enabled Cooke the opportunity to support industry knowledge transfer in the areas of aquaculture farming, processing, and sales, all in support of sustainable community economic development. In turn, We’koqma’q has transferred traditional knowledge and First Nations history and experiences to Cooke. The clear two-way communication and exchange of information has made the relationship both exciting and beneficial for Cooke and We’koqma’q.”

- Kris Nicholls, Chief Operating Officer, Cooke Aquaculture Inc.



# Community United

This past year has been incredibly challenging for Mi'kmaq communities across Nova Scotia and Indigenous across Canada. As we mourn and remember the children who have not returned home from residential schools, we're re-living hurtful truths from our pasts, while carving a new path for our future. Despite this pain, we've continued to progress.

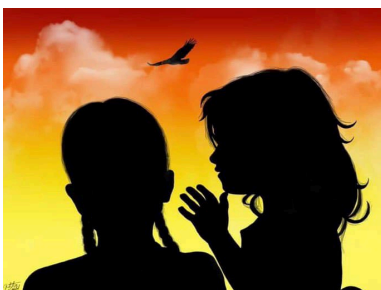
Together, we're showing the world that We'koqma'q is in control of our own future. This is a powerful statement and something that should make everyone in our community very proud.

One of the proudest moments for us as a community was when we came together to honour the children who never returned home. A community vigil was held at our school where we brought 215 children's shoes to honour all children.



During this time in June of 2021, a local We'koqma'q artist and teacher, Whitney Gould felt compelled to share her feelings throughout a piece of art that was released both Nationally and Internationally. The artwork, titled, "They Found Us" depicts the silhouettes of two children, one leaning in to whisper into the ear of the other, with a bald eagle soaring high amid a vivid yellow and orange sunset.

Gould, a substitute teacher from We'koqma'q First Nation, couldn't help thinking about her grandmother, Pauline Gould, a residential school survivor who passed away in 1992, as she saw the news of the children's bodies found in British Columbia. **"I kept thinking to myself, if she didn't come home, I wouldn't be here."**



**This piece of art is powerful, meaningful and a true representation of everything we are as a community and a sense of place. Our spirit is so strong, determined, and united as one community – one We'koqma'q**

By building our own businesses and through effective governance of our Band, we're positioned for significant economic growth, which has already resulted in improved social support for our community – including increased housing, a foodbank and access to education and training.

# Proud Moments of 2020-2021



**We'koqma'qs first Food Bank** opened in July 2021. In our first week opened, we were able to help 28 families and that number has grown ever since.



We are proud to have grown our Housing Department and to have awarded **20 new homes** to members of our community for 2021-2022. We also received an additional 12 new housing units for rapid housing and receive support from Health Canada for 4 new homes that are being used as Covid-19 isolation home for community members to be able to safely return home and have a place to safely stay.

We  
from the  
Plant.



were proud to receive the **2021 Fish Farmer of the Year award** AANS and receive BAP Certification for our Fish Processing



Through this submission, we hope that you will see more a little bit about what we have achieved together. Transparency and community engagement and participation have been at the core of everything we have achieved together. Although we have much work to do, we'll continue to communicate with you every step of the way.

**We want to thank you for your time and consideration.**