



2024 Yearly Reflections

Walking Together in Care, Ceremony, and Community



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Biindigen

We are honored to share the 2024 learning journey of Mewinzha Ondaadiziike Wiigaming. This reflection builds upon the foundation of our 2023 evaluation, continuing to tell our story through relational and reflective processes grounded in Anishinaabe values.

From January through December 2024, our team has walked alongside relatives, community, and partners with purpose, spirit, and love. Through co-designed evaluation tools and seasonal reflection and sensemaking we have woven together a story of growth, learning, and care.

This year was marked by continued expansion of our bundle of care, the evolution of our midwifery and wellness offerings, and deepened community connections and partnerships. Together, we have celebrated births and teachings, adapted programs to reflect the needs of the relatives we care for, and held space for each other through ceremony, storytelling, and healing. In the pages that follow, you will find stories, reflections, and learnings that reflect the heart of Mewinzha.

Acknowledgements

Miigwech to the staff, board, Elders, relatives, and partners who have walked with us in 2024. Your trust, contributions, and presence have been foundational to our work.

To our team members—Natalie, Millicent, Pearl, Roxanne, Bernadette, Michelle, and Arnold, thank you for the gifts you carry into every offering, circle, and ceremony. Your dedication to holistic, culturally rooted care makes Mewinzha the community it is.

To the relatives who shared your stories, your babies, your questions, and your hopes—thank you. Your voices shape our work and remind us daily of our responsibilities to each other.

To our funders, thank you for believing in our vision and supporting our community-led approach to maternal and family wellness.

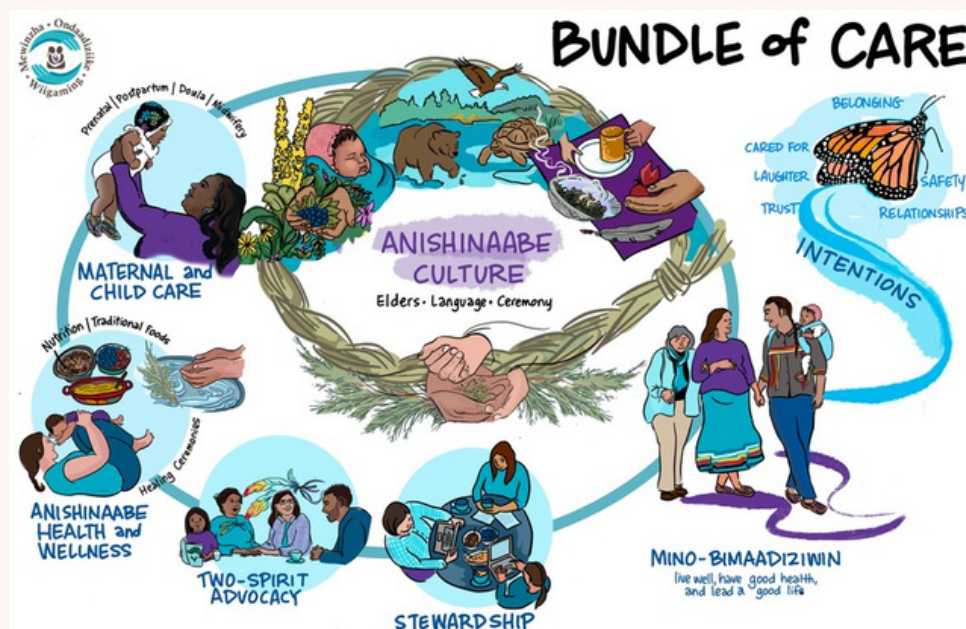
We especially honor the teachings, medicines, and relationships that have guided our path this year. May we continue to walk together in good ways.

About Mewinzha

Mewinzha Ondaadiziike Wiigaming “Long Ago Women Birthing in Lodge, Home or Hospital” is a American Indian non-profit organization located in the heart of Bemidji, Minnesota. Mewinzha is an all-female Anishinaabe led organization committed to providing community-centered holistic care for all women, children, and families. Mewinzha’s staff bring lived experience, clinical knowledge/training and Anishinaabe medicines and traditional healing to encompass maternal, infant, and holistic health care services. Mewinzha works to counteract the systems and institutions that have led to the increased disparities in health by providing upstream health services that are representative and reflective of the journey and stories of its community members and their strength as Anishinaabe.

Mewinzha’s mission is to provide Anishinaabe-led maternal child health and family wellness services to community members in northern Minnesota by enacting the following values:

- **Meaningful Care:** Mewinzha offers health services that are representative and reflective of the journey and stories of its community members and their strength as Anishinaabe.
- **Honor Choice:** While Mewinzha offers both culturally relevant and Western health services, Mewinzha honors all practices and prioritizes a person’s right to choose their own health care.
- **Commitment to Lifelong Learning:** We learn with and from one another, our Elders, our knowledge keepers, and the land. And have fun in the process.



Anishinaabe-Led Evaluation Approach

Evaluation and learning at Mewinzha is not separate from care—it is care. Our Anishinaabe-led evaluation approach grows from ceremony, protocols, language, and teachings. Each cycle begins with asemaa and is guided by spirit, Elder knowledge, and Anishinaabemowin. We prioritize community voice, collective reflection, and learning that is actionable.

Our evaluation is co-designed with our staff, Elders, and relatives to reflect our responsibilities to one another and to the land. Through conversation circles, time for reflection, arts-based practices, storytelling, and seasonal sensemaking sessions, we weave together insights from our everyday work. These tools help us assess what is working, what needs care, and what changes might strengthen our bundle of offerings.

Sensemaking continues to be at the heart of our evaluation. Each season, we gather stories and observations from the past season of our work, make time to reflect and draw connections, and use that learning to adapt our programming and approaches. Evaluation is not about proving—it is about accountability through learning, responding, remembering, and walking forward in a good way. The learnings that are offered in this report are rooted within these processes.





Key Highlights

2024 marked a year of deepening relationships, expanding programming, and grounding care in community, culture, and ceremony. Some of the year's highlights include:

Spaces & Care Expansion: We completed the first full year of Group Postpartum Care, continued to offer Group Prenatal Care, and expanded our traditional medicine and wellness offerings to meet the growing needs of our relatives. New clinic spaces came to life this year, with the renovation and activation of Suites 14, 15, and 16. Suite 14 became home to healing clinics, ceremonies, sewing circles, and care appointments. Suite 15 was readied for expanded clinical services, and Suite 16 was established as the first and only dedicated Two Spirit Advocacy space in Bemidji, offering a welcoming and identity-affirming environment. By the end of the year, based on feedback from relatives, Group Care expanded to include planning for a Postpartum Alumni Group to continue connection and community beyond the first year of care.

Cultural and Programmatic Innovations: Traditional teachings were interwoven across our bundle of offerings—from cedar baths and plant medicine teachings to community feasts and storytelling. Relatives engaged in Healing Touch, Dynamic Body Balancing, and Yoga in the Garden, with offerings tailored to support physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. The meal delivery program was redesigned throughout the year based on feedback, offering high-protein and culturally nourishing meals that relatives could prepare with ease. A grant to support Traditional Midwifery Education allowed us to deepen our planning, welcome a new cohort of students, and envision the future of midwifery rooted in cultural integrity and community leadership.

Community Engagement: Relatives continued to gather in spaces of love, laughter, and creativity. Our open sewing circles brought people together to prepare for the Giveaways—culminating in over 200 handmade items offered at our Fall Giveaway. Seasonal medicine harvesting continued throughout the year, and ceremonies such as cedar baths and smudging helped ground our healing work. Yoga classes were held indoors, outdoors, and virtually, expanding access and presence in community. In summer 2024, our Two Spirit Advocacy partnership hosted a community needs assessment and arts-based engagement session, leading to new offerings like community dinners, Nutcracker painting nights, and identity-affirming ceremonies in Suite 16.



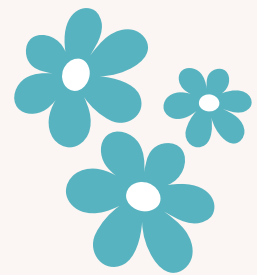
Evaluation and Learning: Our approach to evaluation remained grounded in Anishinaabe values and relational accountability. Through seasonal sensemaking sessions, storytelling, arts-based reflection, and co-created tools, we made time to pause, listen, and adapt. These sessions guided everything from adjusting meal preparation and group care timing to developing new alumni care pathways. Our evaluation team shared these learnings nationally—including a presentation at the 2024 American Evaluation Association conference, where Mewinzha’s approach was featured in a Presidential Strand Plenary. Through these practices, evaluation remained not only a way to learn—but a way to honor our teachings.

Challenges & How We Responded

Over the course of 2024, the team at Mewinzha encountered several challenges as we continued to grow our programs and deepen our relationships with relatives and partners. What stood out across the year was the team’s adaptability and commitment to doing this work in a good way—responding to these challenges with care, perseverance, and collaboration.

One of the more complex areas we navigated was around **billing and credentialing**. Delays with Medicaid and other insurance providers made it hard to bill for some of our services. This included issues with care coordination agreements, billing codes, and the limitations of electronic health record systems. To address this, we worked closely with a billing contractor and began taking steps toward doula certification, which would expand billing options. We also had ongoing meetings with Tribal Nation partners to move care agreements forward and explored ways to share resources.





Our meal delivery program reached many families this year, but not without challenges. **Ordering food in small quantities was difficult, and there were limitations around refrigeration and storage.** We adapted by working with different commercial kitchens in the area, partnering with local providers like Table for 7, and continuing to tweak delivery logistics. Surveys helped us gather feedback from families so we could keep improving.

Space was another ongoing challenge. As the number of services and activities grew, we ran into issues with having enough room for everything, especially for things like traditional wellness clinics, sewing, or private Healing Touch sessions. Renovations in Suite 14 helped relieve some of this pressure, and we also started preparing Suite 15 to better support our work. In the meantime, we shared space and coordinated carefully to make sure everyone had what they needed.

Connecting with community members continued to be a priority, even when attendance at events was smaller than hoped. We continued showing up—at Pride, the toddler health fair, Leech Lake Childhood, and other community spaces—making connections and sharing what we offer. **These relationships, even if they start small, often grow into something deeper over time.**

Across all this, our small but mighty team showed up for each other and for the community. **We balanced direct care, outreach, harvesting, grant writing, and evaluation work—all while making space for rest, ceremony, and professional development.** Whether we were hosting a postpartum group, delivering meals, harvesting medicine, or presenting at a national conference, we carried this work forward with love and purpose.





Walking with Relatives

When we bring families here—we always start with our bundle. Respect, love, and care guide how we work with community and with each other."

Mewinzha's model of care offered to relatives is supportive of community priorities, responsive to what is being learned from relatives, and holistic - addressing mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing. The offerings of the past year include:

- **Group Prenatal and Postpartum Care**
- **Meal Delivery Program**
- **Wellness Offerings including Yoga, Healing Touch, and Dynamic Body Balancing**
- **Traditional Medicine Clinics and Cedar Baths**
- **Community Events such as Sewing Days and Giveaways**
- **Two Spirit Connections & Community**

The following section provides a summary of offerings, feedback, and reflections.



Group Prenatal & Postpartum Care

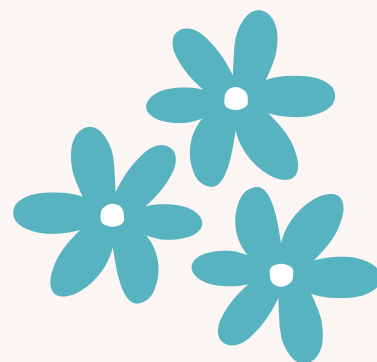
As part of the winter evaluation and learning visit with the Mewinzha team, Gladys spent dedicated time with relatives who had completed the prenatal care group and postpartum care group. This gathering was an opportunity to listen deeply and learn from their experiences receiving care through the program.

Our time together was grounded in relationship-building and storytelling. We shared food, creating a welcoming space for connection before engaging in reflection and discussion. Relatives participated in the What Relatives Experience tool, offering individual insights on their care journey—what it felt like, how it supported them, and what has changed for them as a result.

Following this, we moved into a Conversation Circle, where relatives shared stories about their experiences with the Mewinzha team, the impact of group care, and what they are carrying forward from this journey. These reflections provided meaningful insight into the strengths of the program, the relationships built, and the supports that have been most valued.

“I loved the education in breastfeeding. I was very scared and unsure at first but after today I feel more confident.”

Spotlight: Experiences & Reflections from Postpartum Closing Circle



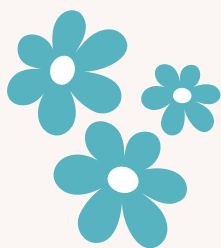
The Circle provided a meaningful space for relatives to share their experiences from their time in Group Prenatal and Postpartum Care. As the first cohort to complete both the prenatal and a full year of postpartum group care, their reflections offered invaluable insights into the impact of the offering and the relationships built along the way.

Many relatives spoke about the deep sense of emotional, spiritual, and physical support they received throughout their care journey. One relative shared that when she first joined Mewinzha's prenatal care group, she was going through many changes and was unsure how to navigate them. Connecting with others in similar situations, as well as with the Mewinzha team, helped her find grounding. She reflected on the teachings she received, particularly the cedar bath ceremony, which taught her to center good intentions, create a positive environment for her baby, and calm her mind. She emphasized that beyond the teachings, it was the sense of trust and comfort within the group that made the experience meaningful. She knew she could talk about anything without judgment and always feel welcomed.

Another relative expressed how the team's continued care extended beyond in-person meetings. She shared how Natalie regularly called to check in when she was in the hospital with her baby for several months, which reassured her that she and her child were in the team's thoughts. Care packages sent from Mewinzha were received with gratitude and offered a reminder of their ongoing support. Although this relative was not able to attend many of the in-person gatherings, the connections she built through the program still made her feel part of a community.

Other relatives reflected on how the teachings and relationships built within the program have stayed with them beyond their time in the group. One relative recalled a powerful story about water teachings shared by Mamanaan, where she learned about the significance of water as a source of life and connection. She had held onto a special necklace from that teaching, keeping it close for months before one day realizing it was gone. She connected this to the teaching about how certain sacred items are meant to be passed on when the individual is done with them. She also remembered learning about plant medicines, recalling how she carefully saved the medicines she had dried, carrying its teachings with her.

Another relative in the circle reflected on the breadth of knowledge shared within the group, from nutrition and money management to pelvic therapy. The latter led her to seek additional therapy to support her postpartum healing. She expressed gratitude for the friendships built and the opportunity to connect with her culture. For her, the program provided both cultural learning and a support network, a space where she felt safe, seen, and encouraged to reach out to others in the group.



A recurring theme in the conversation was how the Mewinzha team embodied continuity of care. Another relative spoke about how every aspect of support, physical, emotional, and spiritual was a part of her experience. She felt so fully supported that she circled every item on the “What Relatives Experience” tool, affirming that she had felt all of them at some point throughout the program. Another relative echoed this sentiment, recounting how, when she struggled with breastfeeding in the hospital, Pearl came to assist her. She emphasized how important it was to have someone she knew and trusted in that vulnerable moment, making a significant difference in her postpartum experience.

The stories and reflections from the relatives reinforce the deep impact of relational, culturally rooted postpartum care. In addition to the clinical support, what stood out to relatives was the ability to build trusting relationships, engage in cultural teachings, and feel held in community care through the group setting nurtured by the Mewinzha team. Whether through humor, shared teachings, or simple acts of kindness like check-ins and care packages, the Mewinzha team fostered a sense of belonging that carried through each family's journey.

In our final discussion, we invited relatives to consider what ongoing group care as alumni could look like. Relatives expressed strong interest in continuing their connection through a bi-monthly alumni group, envisioning a space that extends the support and community built during their prenatal and postpartum care and acting as an advisory for future prenatal and postpartum groups. They shared a desire for gatherings that offer learning, skill-building, and cultural connection, with a variety of topics to keep engagement meaningful and relevant. Relatives indicated that staying connected through an alumni group chat was also a priority.

This feedback highlights a desire for a holistic alumni group that nurtures continued learning, cultural practices, and skill development, while maintaining the sense of community and support fostered through their care journey with Mewinzha.

This evaluation activity honored the relational and storytelling-based approach of Mewinzha’s work, ensuring that the experiences and voices of relatives remain at the heart of learning and program evolution.

Meal Delivery Program

Throughout 2024, Mewinzha's Meal Delivery Program evolved into a thoughtful, community-responsive service that not only addressed food access but also supported nutrition education for relatives. Feedback collected from relatives offered insight into how these meals were received, what was appreciated, and where adjustments could support greater impact.

Positive Impacts and Appreciation

Many relatives shared their gratitude and enthusiasm for the meals, noting that they provided nourishment, convenience, and a sense of being cared for. Pre-prepared dishes, especially those that could be easily baked or reheated, were highlighted as favorites.

“As far as the menus, I have been really loving the pre-made throw-in-the-oven dishes!”

“I love the prepped meals such as the bison lasagna... the smoothies and breakfast sandwiches were my absolute favorite!!”

The meals also introduced families to new ingredients and preparation methods, expanding food and cooking knowledge and encouraging healthier eating.

“I enjoy the foods we get because it helps expand our menus and helps us with trying different things.”



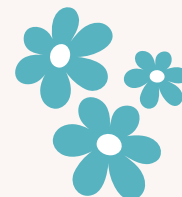
Relatives appreciated high-protein options and fresh items like yogurts, smoothies, and chia pouches. These were viewed as more appealing and convenient compared to reheated meals.

“I liked when we would get yogurts/chia pouches or just grab-and-go type things versus the freeze & reheat method.”

The program’s educational and nurturing spirit was felt—relatives commented on feeling supported and learning new approaches to food and care.

Overall, relatives expressed that the Meal Delivery Program made a meaningful difference in their lives. It provided practical support, encouraged healthier habits, and strengthened the sense of relationship and care embedded in Mewinzha’s work.





Wellness Offerings

Over the past year, Mewinzha has continued to deepen and expand its holistic approaches to wellness through culturally grounded practices that reflect the needs and desires of the community. An area of strength has been the integration of yoga, traditional healing, energy work, and mental health support into the bundle of care offered to relatives.

Yoga

Yoga, led by Pearl, has emerged as a vital offering that supports physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. Community classes, including prenatal and baby-and-me sessions, have generated positive feedback, with participants expressing a desire for more frequent opportunities. While attendance has fluctuated, there is consistent interest, especially in the community yoga sessions. Pearl has introduced a seasonal “Yoga in the Garden” series and is currently reflecting on how to evolve her practice into 2025. This includes a deeper focus on the philosophy of “yoga off the mat” encouraging daily mindfulness, journaling, and values-based practices that support individual and collective well-being. Pearl’s gentle guidance and the opportunity to practice in nature were especially meaningful, with several mentioning how much they loved outdoor sessions like Yoga in the Garden.

Relatives who attend Mewinzha’s community yoga consistently appreciate the nurturing space and share that it helps them relax, move with joy, and feel a sense of calm. There was also strong encouragement to continue and expand the classes, with gratitude for the accessible, community-centered approach. Requests for evening outdoor sessions and more creative formats like Partner Yoga show a desire for variety, connection, and ongoing engagement.



Relatives clearly value both the physical and emotional benefits of the classes and recognize yoga with Pearl at Mewinzha as a powerful contribution to community wellness.

Energy Work

In tandem with the practices above, Mewinzha is increasingly incorporating energy work and mental health support into its care model. Healing Touch, offered by Pearl, Millicent, and Bernadette continued to be a valued component of care, promoting physical and emotional balance among relatives and staff alike. Additionally, Pearl and Millicent completed training in Dynamic Body Balancing, an energy-based modality that aligns with Anishinaabe understandings of wholeness and flow. Staff noted the powerful impact of these practices, both in terms of their own growth and in the expanded bundle of offerings available to support the well-being of relatives. Together, these approaches contributed to a healing ecosystem that centers spirit, body, energy, and culture.



Traditional Medicine Clinics

Mewinzha's commitment to traditional healing clinics has remained strong. Clinics led by Kathy and Carl Bird, as well as ongoing work by Bernadette, have offered community members access to plant medicines and traditional teachings. These clinics are supported by seasonal medicine gathering, ceremony, and preparation. Bernadette also shares this knowledge with the Mewinzha team, building their bundles and participating in teachings about red willow, cedar, chaga, and other traditional medicines. She has also played a vital role in integrating cultural teachings into prenatal and postpartum health sessions—blending stories, medicine, and education in ways that resonate deeply with relatives.

Cedar baths, offered by Millicent and Bernadette are another example of how Mewinzha is creating space for culturally-rooted healing. These baths are supported by medicine bundles and are often accompanied by teachings and reflections. This practice not only nurtures physical healing but also supports spiritual and emotional restoration.

These sessions created spaces for deep learning, reflection, and spiritual grounding, with community members and staff expressing appreciation for the hands-on, culturally rooted knowledge shared.

Community Events

In the past year, the sewing circles at Mewinzha continued to be a powerful expression of community care, creativity, and cultural connection. Led in part by board member Lisa Johnson, these gatherings brought together relatives, staff, and community members to sew giveaway items for seasonal celebrations and ceremonies. The act of sewing, rooted in tradition and reciprocity, is a way to strengthen relationships and prepare meaningful gifts infused with love and intention. These offerings culminated in the spring and fall giveaways hosted by Mewinzha.

Over 200 handmade items were made for the Fall Giveaway, reflecting the generosity and collective effort of many hands.

Open sewing served not only as a space to create tangible items, but also as a place of laughter, sharing stories, and grounding in ancestral practices. It embodied Mewinzha's vision of wellness rooted in love and responsibility to be a good relative.





Two Spirit Advocacy

The partnership between Two Spirit Advocacy and Mewinzha was able to expand, based on a clear gap and priority for 2SLGBTQ+ relatives in the Bemidji area. In August 2024 a community needs assessment survey and arts-based priority-setting session was completed. Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ community members were invited to share their experiences, wellness needs, and visions for affirming spaces. Questions included:

- 1. How do you currently find and create safe spaces for yourself and others in the Two Spirit community?**
- 2. What types of resources and supports do you believe are most needed in our community?**
- 3. How can we ensure that the new space and programs are inclusive and welcoming for everyone in the Two Spirit community?**
- 4. What kinds of activities or events would you like to see in a community space dedicated to holistic wellness?**
- 5. Is there anything else you would like to share about your vision for a supportive and inclusive community space?**

Guided by teachings of inclusion and respect, the assessment surfaced key priorities including access to culturally grounded care, safe spaces for gathering, and opportunities for creative expression and identity affirmation.



Mewinzha was able to offer a dedicated Two Spirit Advocacy space within newly acquired Suite 16 to enable Arnold and Matthew to host inclusive programming. Meaningful and identity-affirming events have already become a vibrant part of the community's offerings. These actions reflect the broader commitment to inclusive, culturally grounded care at Mewinzha that has been embraced by the broader community and affirmed by Elders, highlighting its vital role in expanding the bundle of care.

Across all of these efforts, what emerges is a collective vision grounded in relationship, care, and choice. Mewinzha's model doesn't separate physical health from emotional or spiritual well-being—instead, it weaves them together through practices that are rooted in land, ceremony, tradition, and kinship. These offerings share a common thread: they respond to the needs of relatives with heart and humility, and they hold space for healing in ways that are both culturally resonant and deeply transformative.





Building our Bundles

“The pipe ceremony in the office reminded us of why we’re here—it helps ground all the moving parts.”

Throughout 2024, the Mewinzha team remained deeply committed to nurturing both their cultural and professional bundles, recognizing that the strength of their collective care depends on the continual growth of each member. The bundles we carry—spiritually, culturally, emotionally, and professionally include our individual gifts, teachings, medicines, sacred items, expertise, roles, relationships, and lived experiences. When we carry them with integrity, they become the foundation for the care we offer.

Time was intentionally set aside to learn together—whether through medicine walks led by Bernadette, teachings from Elders, or expanding training in Healing Touch and Dynamic Body Balancing. The team also created spaciousness to debrief, set boundaries, and offer one another encouragement, recognizing that the health of the organization is sustained through relational accountability and mutual support.

This year the team reflected on and strengthened their bundles, receiving teachings and participating in ceremony, professional skill development, taking time to reflect on goals and growth through arts-based reflection and knowledge-sharing activities. A particularly meaningful time was shared learning about the pipe during teachings from an Elder and participating in pipe ceremonies.

During seasonal sensemaking the team took time to reflect on their roles, teachings, and responsibilities. The team explored the teachings we are gathering, how our gifts are expressed, and how we carry our roles with care. Staff shared stories about their spiritual practices, ongoing training, and the support they offer one another as a team. The team described feeling safe, seen, and supported in their growth – allowing them to show up fully for relatives who access support and offerings at Mewinzha.

Through shared practices such as collage-making, reflective prompts, clay work, and storytelling we continued to create a collective space of encouragement, curiosity, and joy. As one reflection shared, "Love guides my work in a way that I used to think was something wrong with me—but now I understand it is my strength." These moments of connection helped to braid together cultural knowledge, clinical expertise, and wellness, forming a foundation from which Mewinzha’s holistic model of care continues to grow.



Walking with Community

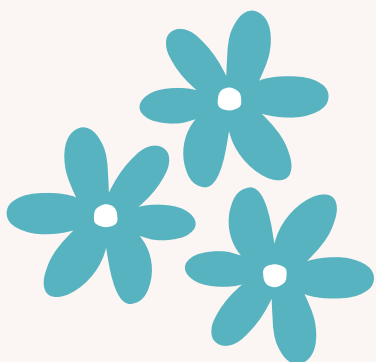
In December 2024, during our Sensemaking visit, the Mewinzha team reflected on what it means to walk with community, not as providers delivering services, but as relatives in relationship. These reflections brought forward the deep care offered that is rooted in respect, love, and reciprocity. Team members emphasized that every act, from preparing meals and organizing ceremonies to holding yoga in the garden, is infused with intention, culture, and connection.

Roxanne highlighted the collaboration with Harmony Coop as one built on mutual respect and shared purpose, noting that Mewinzha is seen as a community leader and partner. Arnold spoke to the importance of cultural inclusivity, especially in Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ advocacy, naming that “there is no word for homophobia in our languages,” and reaffirming that identity-affirming ceremonies must be part of community wellness. Pearl described yoga as a spiritual practice—barefoot on the land, guided by breath, and grounded in relationships with the body and plants. Millicent emphasized the power of listening, language, and compassion through ceremonies like the talking circle. Natalie shared stories of humor, reciprocity, and joy, demonstrated with an example of receiving bear grease from a family after culturally relevant postpartum support – where relationships are formed through mutual care.



In addition to the community events that are hosted by Mewinzha, staff are often invited into a variety of spaces, events, and speaking opportunities to share more about the work of Mewinzha and offer their leadership and expertise across diverse areas. For example, Pearl is invited into community organizations such as Leech Lake Child Program to offer prenatal yoga classes and workshops and lead sessions such as the Movement/Mom & Baby Yoga session for Indigenous Milk Medicine week 2024. She also attended the Lactation Summit in Duluth and the Leech Lake Child Health Fair. Bernadette offers presentations across the region on plant medicines, including for the Head Start program - where she focused on plant medicines and teas during pregnancy. Natalie presented at the Nurse Practitioner Women's Health Conference in Chicago, Illinois, visited a class at Leech Lake Tribal College as a guest speaker, and attended Bemidji State University's Native nursing students. Roxanne attended the Indigenous Breastfeeding Coalition meeting in Minneapolis, MN making important connections with potential statewide partners. Millicent tables for Mewinzha at a wide variety of regional and community health and wellness focused events sharing insights into breastfeeding, Midwifery, and other offerings for local families including at the Birth Summit in Minneapolis.

Across all reflections, it is clear that Mewinzha's work is not just happening in the clinic—it is braided into the lives and stories of the community.





Walking with Partners

In 2024, Mewinzha's work was made possible through a constellation of strong, values-aligned partnerships rooted in reciprocity, cultural care, and shared vision. These relationships supported every layer of our offerings—from traditional healing to postpartum support, community events, and operational infrastructure.

Significant partnerships included funding support from PrimeWest, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), who recognized and invested in our Anishinaabe-led care model. Partnerships with Total Healthcare Billing, Propel Nonprofits, and Medica supported our backend infrastructure and sustainability efforts. Harmony CO-OP offered kitchen space, gift cards, and fundraising support, while Red Lake Native Connection and Leech Lake Early Childhood collaborated on giveaways and meals.

We expanded clinical and wellness partnerships with Choice Therapy, who offered pelvic floor therapy sessions for postpartum relatives, and Leech Lake WIC, who referred clients in need of lactation support. Relatives who attend the Group Prenatal Care and Postpartum Care shared the positive experience when Choice Therapy visited their group sessions and valued this learning opportunity. These reciprocal relationships ensure that relatives are connected to local resources, providing a soft handoff to providers who are able to meet their wellness priorities. In the realm of traditional and land-based healing, relationships with Kathy Bird, Lunar Midwifery, and Indigenous Environmental Network strengthened our spiritual and cultural foundations. We value these ongoing relationships - preparing for and offering the Traditional Medicine Clinics is an important element of Mewinzha's bundle of care.

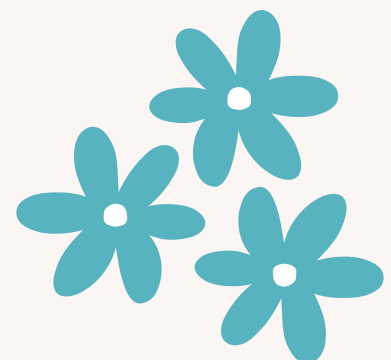
Arts and cultural expression were uplifted through Two Spirit Advocacy's partnership with Region 2 Arts Council and the Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance, enabling Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ artists to share their voices and reduce stigma through creative expression. Art saves lives, and partnering on art shows that center Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ demonstrates the importance of their voices and experiences to the surrounding communities. This is a critical space of visibility.

We also value our partnerships with Indigenous Insights Collective and Child Trends both of which support our evaluation priorities - allowing us to gather data and offer insights in ways that are congruent with Anishinaabe approaches to learning and to demonstrate the effects and impacts of our work with relatives.

Reflections from the Mewinzha team highlighted these partnerships with words like:

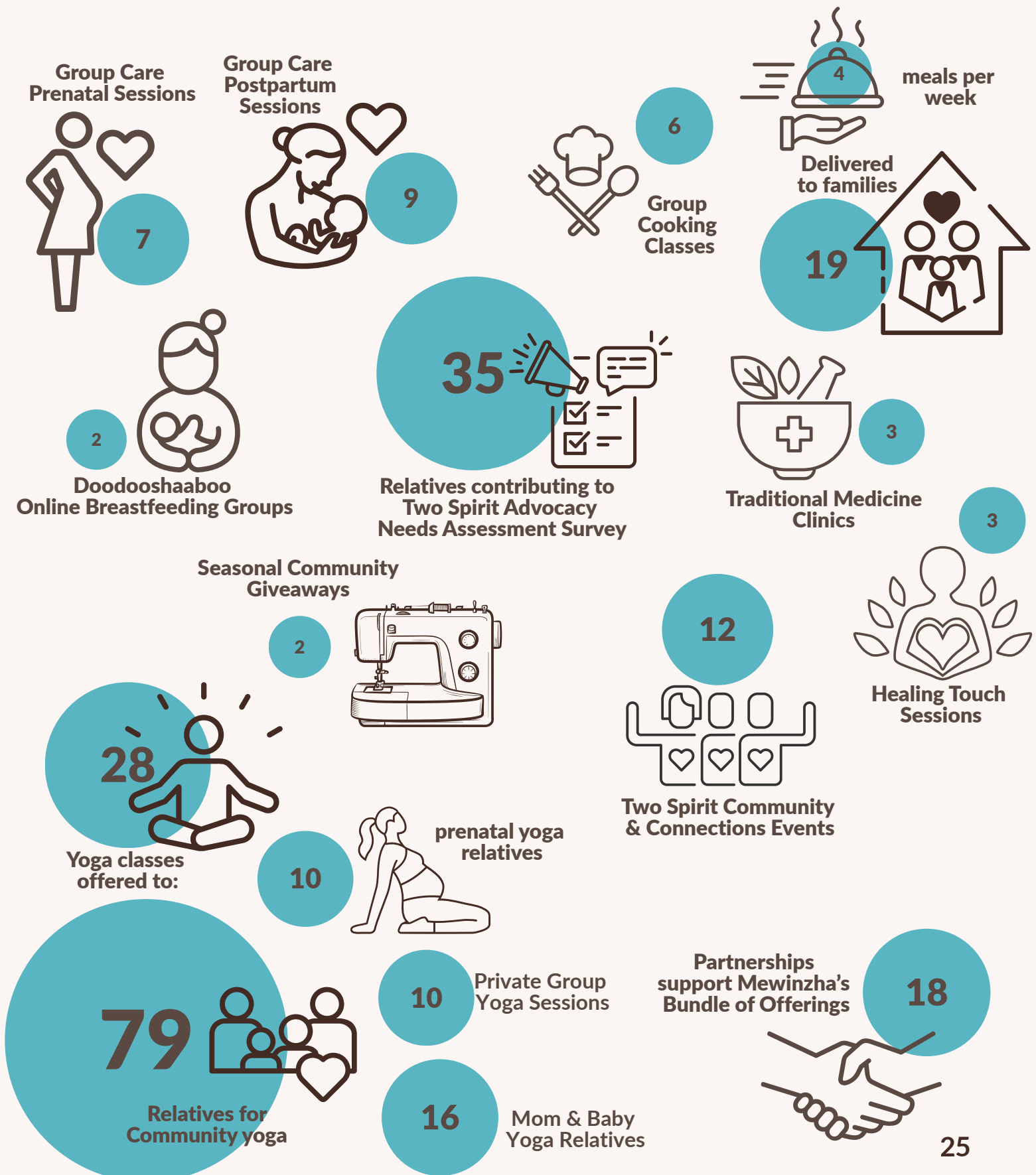
**trust, healing, reciprocal,
supportive &
transformative**

These collaborations are not simply functional—they are relational and restorative - woven into our bundle of care and embody our shared commitment to wellness, justice, and self-determination.



Celebrations

The past year brought many moments of joy, recognition, and community affirmation. Our celebrations reflect love, time, and intention poured into every aspect of care.





Insights we Carry Forward

Each season, we learn. This year's insights included:

Continuity of care builds trust. Relatives consistently described the deep comfort they felt knowing that Mewinzha's care did not stop at the clinic door. Whether through postpartum check-ins, hospital visits, or the thoughtful delivery of care packages, the team ensured that families felt held throughout their journeys. One relative noted that even during a long hospital stay, she received regular calls from staff, which reminded her that she and her baby were not alone. This consistency has built trust and affirmed that Mewinzha walks with families, not just serves them. Continuity built safety, and safety built trust.

Sacred space supports emotional safety. From the layout of the room to the scent of the medicines, the environment at Mewinzha holds intentionality. Care begins with the preparation of the spaces where relatives are hosted. Families described feeling peace, safety, and spiritual connection during sessions. Relatives noted how even brief visits felt special because of how space was prepared. "The sacredness in the environment... just meetings in general," one relative reflected. The physical and spiritual environment at Mewinzha, including new spaces like Suite 15 created calm, welcoming places where relatives felt safe to share and receive. Ceremonies such as smudging and cedar baths, helped establish a sense of grounding and belonging. These spaces are not clinical—they are sites of reconnection, rest, and reflection.

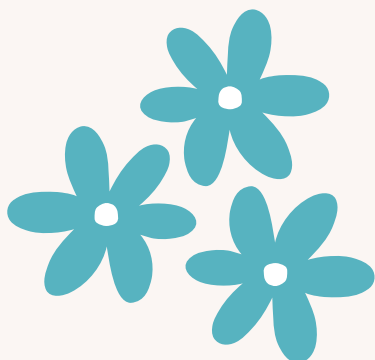
Evaluation is cultural work. Evaluation at Mewinzha is an extension of ceremony, it is a cultural and relational act. Through storytelling, arts-based methods like poetry and clay, and seasonal sensemaking sessions the team reflected on their roles, responsibilities, and teachings. This year, the team also shared their evaluation approach nationally at the American Evaluation Association as a Presidential Strand Plenary. The practice of pausing, sharing, and collectively learning was described by the team as a way of "holding our teachings with care."

Adaptability is a strength. Throughout the year, programs shifted in response to feedback sought and received from relatives. From adjusting meal delivery menus and methods, to changing group session timing and formats, and to revising the evaluation tools to note the next stages of offerings. These shifts helped families feel more supported and allowed staff to lead with responsiveness instead of rigidity. For example, the addition of new food vendors and cooking equipment helped families feel more empowered in meal preparation. This adaptability reflects the commitment to relational accountability at the core of our work, honoring what is heard and making meaningful adjustments in response. The ability to adapt with intention emerged as a core strength.

Team culture shapes program culture. The way staff relate to one another—through humor, ceremony, encouragement, mutual support and boundaries, directly influences how care is offered. This mutual care helps to sustain the emotional labor of Mewinzha's work. In turn, this shapes the warmth and care that is extended to relatives. In 2024, the team invested time in collective learning and reflection and celebrating growth. As a staff member reflected, the way we hold space for one another internally becomes the way we hold space for our community. Another staff member noted how working together felt like “being in ceremony.” That sense of spiritual grounding helped the team carry each other and their work.

The model is working and evolving. Relatives' stories affirmed that Mewinzha's model of care is making a difference—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The integration of cultural teachings into prenatal and postpartum groups, traditional healing practices, and Two Spirit advocacy demonstrated a holistic and evolving approach. At the same time, the team identified clear next steps, such as launching a postpartum alumni group, refining documentation processes, and expanding the midwifery education program. The work continues to grow in a good way, guided by teachings, grounded in spirit, and shaped by community voice.

These insights will guide us in 2025 as we expand our offerings, deepen our training programs, and continue learning from our community.



Closing

As we close our 2024 reflections and offerings, we carry forward teachings, relationships, and a renewed sense of purpose. Our journey this year affirmed the strength of our model and the power of community care. We've grown alongside one another - learning, stretching, laughing, resting, and showing up for our communities. Every meal prepared, medicine harvested, yoga class offered, giveaway item sewn, or visit shared is part of something bigger. These acts of love and responsibility are what make Mewinzha more than a place—they make it a circle of care.

We walk with open hearts, committed to expanding midwifery education, supporting 2SLGBTQ+ leadership and visibility, and continuing to shape our offerings in response to the voices of our community. As we move forward, we do so to take care and responsibility for the full bundle we carry: group prenatal and postpartum care, traditional healing, meal delivery, wellness practices, community connections, and advocacy. Each part of this bundle matters, and each offering is a way we walk alongside our relatives in support of their physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing. We remain rooted in Anishinaabe values, walking gently but firmly, guided by love, accountability, and the relationships that hold us.

Miigwech to everyone who has walked with us, supported us, believed in this work, and shared your stories along the way. We know we are not walking alone, and that makes all the difference.





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