

Walking Together: Eskasoni Hosts 3rd Annual Walking Out Ceremony

by Alexa Sylliboy

On May 25, the Msit Mijua'ji'jk program in Eskasoni welcomed families, Elders, community members, and supporters together for its 3rd Annual Walking Out Ceremony—a beautiful celebration of culture, connection, and one of life's earliest milestones.

For many Mi'kmaw families, the Walking Out Ceremony is much more than a child's first steps. It marks a child's first sacred connection to Mother Earth. It's the first time their feet touch the earth outdoors, surrounded by family, culture, teachings, ancestors, and community.

As Mi'kmaw people, this ceremony reminds us that our children are sacred gifts. They are raised not only by parents, but also alongside grandparents, godparents, Elders, language, land, and community. The Walking Out Ceremony honours these relationships while celebrating each



3rd Annual Walking Out Ceremony in Eskasoni

child's journey and connection to who they are as L'nu people.

This year, eight families came together to participate in ceremony. In the weeks leading up to the gathering, parents and caregivers took part in a Ribbon Skirt and Ribbon Shirt/Vest Gathering where they lovingly created traditional regalia for their little ones to wear on this special day. Watching the children arrive dressed in their handmade regalia, surrounded by proud family members and supporters, was a powerful reminder of the love and care that goes into raising our children.

The ceremony was especially meaningful for Kalolin Johnson, Msit Mijua'ji'jk Home Visitor in Eskasoni,

who not only coordinated the gathering but also participated with her own family as her son took part in the ceremony.

Kalolin says being able to support families through milestones like these is one of the most rewarding parts of her role.

"It is an honour to be able to provide opportunities like the Walking Out Ceremony to families and community," says Kalolin. "As a Home Visitor, I support families through many milestones, but being able to connect those milestones to culture and ceremony makes my job that much more meaningful and enjoyable."

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Kalolin Johnson and family

After helping families prepare for months, Kalolin was then able to experience the ceremony herself as a parent.

“Watching my child take their first ceremonial steps was emotional and empowering. Seeing them surrounded by family, community, culture, and ceremony filled me with pride and gratitude.”

The ceremony was led by Pipe Carriers Jane Meader and Lottie Johnson, who guided families through sacred teachings, prayer, and ceremony. Families first gathered for smudging before entering the teepee, creating space for reflection, gratitude, and connection.

Throughout the ceremony, traditional Mi'kmaw songs filled the teepee through drumming by the Land-Based Healing Team as participants received sacred teachings. Parents, grandparents, godparents, and other loved ones surrounded each little one with affirmations and words of encouragement before taking their first sacred steps.

One by one, families emerged from the teepee as each child's spirit name, gifted through ceremony, was shared and introduced to the Four Directions. Barefoot, the little ones made their way toward the sacred fire, where offerings of tobacco, baskets, and bows were presented. Loved ones looked on with smiles, pride, and happy tears as they marked this important milestone surrounded by culture, ceremony, and community.

Watching families celebrate this special moment is something that continues to inspire Pipe Carrier Jane Meader.

“It brings a lot of joy because for so long our people were discouraged from doing ceremony,” says Jane. “Now we see parents making the decision for

their babies to grow up in ceremony—not when they're older, but from childhood. They grow up with that identity and feeling of belonging. It's a family celebration.”

For Jane, ceremonies like the Walking Out Ceremony naturally bring generations together, with parents, grandparents, godparents, siblings, and extended family all playing an important role in welcoming children into the next stage of their journey.

For many parents, witnessing those first ceremonial steps was an emotional and unforgettable experience.

For Taneesha Stevens, watching her son Jaxon take part in the ceremony was a moment filled with pride.

“Seeing Jaxon take his first ceremonial steps made me feel so proud and grateful,” shared Taneesha. “It was such a special moment to celebrate this milestone with our little family. I feel like it brought both him and I closer to our culture and traditions, and it's a memory I won't forget.”

Watching her son's first ceremonial steps, Faith Gould echoed those emotions.

“I felt an abundance of joy and a deep sense of connection to my culture and the land while witnessing my youngest son, Sutton, partake in his Walking Out Ceremony,” she shared.



Kalolin Johnson assists Pipe Carrier Jane Meader (seated at front) and Pipe Carrier Lottie Johnson (seated behind)

Each child offered strawberries to those gathered, as a reminder of generosity, kindness, sharing, and caring



A special teaching shared during the ceremony was the giving of berries. Each child offered strawberries to those gathered as a reminder of generosity, kindness, sharing, and caring for community. It was a simple but powerful lesson about the importance of looking after one another and carrying those values forward.

For Pipe Carrier Lottie Johnson, seeing more young families choosing ceremony is a hopeful reminder that Mi'kmaw teachings continue to be carried forward.

“It fills me with pride to see our families and children taking part in these ceremonies,” says Lottie. “The Walking Out Ceremony is a milestone in a child's life, a time when the whole community comes together to celebrate them. These ceremonies remind us who we are as Mi'kmaq people and connect children to their families, their ancestors, and their community. Seeing young families participate tells me that our teachings are continuing and that our people are reclaiming traditions that were once discouraged and taken from us.”

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Lottie believes continuing to share language, culture, and ceremony with children is one of the greatest responsibilities we have as Mi'kmaq.

"Without our language, without our culture, without all these things, we cease to be who we are as Native people. The main thing is that we keep these teachings up for our children, so they'll have something to hold onto in the future."

Jane shares that ceremony is one of the greatest gifts families can give their children, helping to strengthen their spirit and connection from the very beginning of life.

"Our culture is spirituality, and it keeps us connected to the spirit world," says Jane. "It strengthens our spirit, and we need to nourish the spirits of our children too. This is just the beginning."

To me, ceremony is such a powerful way to connect with people and spirit—from before the womb to long after the tomb. We start with ceremony."

After the ceremony, families, supporters, Pipe Carriers, drummers, and guests gathered to share a meal, reflect on the day's teachings, and celebrate the children who had completed this important milestone.

Children received eagle feathers, their own traditional Mi'kmaq medicines, and a pair of Manitobah Mukluks. The mukluks serve as a reminder of their first sacred steps and symbolize the journey they are beginning as they continue to grow and walk through life. Grandparents, godparents, and support people were also honoured with gifts in recognition of the important role they play in guiding and supporting our children.

Now in its third year, the Walking Out Ceremony continues to grow, bringing more families together through culture, ceremony, and community. Each year, more families are choosing to begin their

children's journey in ceremony, creating opportunities to reconnect with traditional teachings while celebrating these important milestones together.

As laughter, stories, and reflections were shared throughout



Charles Francis, Faith Gould and Sutton



Seated: Pipe Carrier Lottie Johnson, Pipe Carrier Jane Meader.
Standing: Adrianna Bonnell, Msit Mijua'ji'jk Mi'kmaq Cultural Outreach Coordinator, MaryI Joe-Francis, Msit Mijua'ji'jk Program Development Coordinator, Kalolin Johnson, Tara Burke

the day, one thing was clear—these ceremonies are about far more than a child's first steps. They are a celebration of identity, belonging, family, and the strength of a community walking together as it carries its teachings forward.

Msit Mijua'ji'jk is offered in partnership with communities in Membertou, Eskasoni, Potlotek, Paqtnkek, Sipekne'katik, and the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre in Kijipuktuk (Halifax).



Taneisha Stevens, Jaxon and Kevin Blundon

About Us

Tajikeimik is the new and developing health and wellness organization that is leading health transformation on behalf of Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia. In collaboration with Chiefs, Grand Council, and Health Directors, Tajikeimik will build on and evolve the health and wellness services and programs used by Mi'kmaq people in Nova Scotia; improve health service delivery; and strengthen coordination with Federal and Provincial health system partners - with the goal of improving overall health for Mi'kmaq and communities.

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