



Coping with Coronavirus mental health impacts

By Brandi Morin

A Calgary based Cree/Metis Registered Provisional Psychologist says it is essential for Indigenous People to decolonize the way they process anxiety and trauma in order to be healthy.

Given the Coronavirus pandemic is adding stress, depression and feelings of uncertainty to many communities, it is an opportunity to reconnect with Indigenous ways of processing traumatic experiences.

Dr. Karlee Fellner specializes in developing Indigenous based therapies at the University of Calgary.

She believes the Coronavirus pandemic contains a lesson connected to Indigenous world views.

“From an Indigenous worldview, we recognize everything is interconnected,” said Fellner. “Something like this pandemic (now, I got this from my Elders) is not just a random event. There’s some kind of purpose and meaning to it.”

While mainstream society deals with increased mental health awareness due to Coronavirus, Indigenous Peoples have been battling a mental health epidemic of their own for decades.

Canada’s Indigenous population represents just 4.3 per cent of the overall population, yet suicide rates among Indigenous youth are 5 to 6 times the rate of mainstream Canada.

According to *Mental Health and Suicides in Indigenous Communities in Canada* published by the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (2017), the “cultural heritage of colonialism” and “the now-defunct federal Indian Residential school system (created under direction of the Indian Act) left a legacy of physical and psychological trauma which has contributed to the disproportionately high suicide rate seen in some Indigenous communities.”

However, the same study noted that suicide is not universally pervasive within Indigenous communities, “A strong sense of culture and ownership of community has been shown to be protective against suicide and self-harm behaviours in some communities.”

Connecting back to traditions, cultural and

Indigenous spirituality is key to restoring the overall health and healing of Indigenous Peoples, says Fellner.

The symptoms of the Coronavirus, according to Fellner and her Elders, are similar to the symptoms that the earth is experiencing through pollution and global warming. When the earth hurts, so does humanity, she explained.

“Like the COVID-19, when a person is having trouble breathing and having a fever, this is what we’re seeing on the earth from the unsustainable way we’ve been living. So, the Indigenous worldview here is very different than a colonial viewpoint – and a virus is a teacher.”

Returning to Indigenous ways of being will help heal anxiety, stress, and trauma experienced from ancestors and up until today, she explained.

The high levels of stress many people are feeling is part of a collective struggle. “Each one of us is part of the universe and we have been for generations through our family lines. This pandemic – our ancestors survived major pandemics, so this is what’s called trauma knowledge. We are feeling what our ancestors felt when they had to survive.”

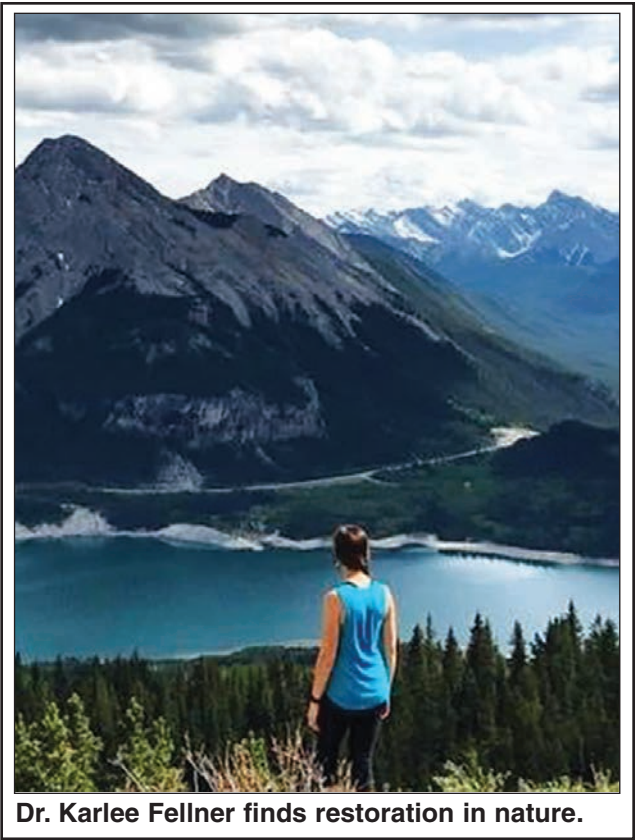
There are simple ways to reclaim Indigenous ways of coping, creating balance and connection, she said.

An Indigenous approach of dealing with a tough situation looks at “changing our relationship with our experiences.”

“For example, we want to run from different stuff, and I still try to run away from uncomfy feelings – but if we actually want to listen, to stop and be in a good relationship with it, usually an answer for healing will appear.”

Being isolated for long periods can be overwhelming and some people may be susceptible to depression, she went on to say. The best form of Indigenous therapy she recommends is to reconnect with the land.

“I always go to the land. It’s restoration for me; healing, medicine. For thousands of years we’ve always had traditions of being alone with the land.



Dr. Karlee Fellner finds restoration in nature.

The land renews itself; the plants are always purifying the air and it’s big, strong and ancient enough to hold anything.”

Fellner is referring to exchanging unpleasant feelings or thoughts with the land and taking in its strength in return.

If people are unable to be on the land or are isolated in an urban area Fellner encourages them to find a “grounding” object and keep it in the house. Sage, smudge, mint, teas, dirt, plants or stones are all examples of utilizing land medicine.

She also encourages people to focus on each day as it comes.

“Don’t resist what is right now. You may be thinking, ‘I want to be out doing this with my friends or going to ceremony’ – those feelings are OK. But understand it’s temporary; this is the way things are and I’ll be OK with it for the time being.”

For more information on Dr. Karlee Fellner’s work head to www.maskihkiy.com.

Brandi Morin is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter at Alberta Native News.

COVID-19 INFORMATION

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FNHMA launches InfoPoint

The First Nations Health Managers Association (FNHMA) has launched its newest initiative – InfoPoint, an information sharing initiative developed for First Nations health managers.

COVID-19 has created challenges for First Nations health managers in communities across the country. These challenges have given rise to questions without a clear place to ask them. InfoPoint is a help line where First Nations Health Managers may call if they have questions or are searching for resources around COVID-19.

“We’ve heard from First Nations health managers and our membership that there is a pressing need for this kind of information sharing,” remarked Marion Crowe, CEO, First Nations health managers Association.

“We want health managers to know that we are here to help. COVID-19 has drastically changed the way we live and FNHMA is adapting to these changing times. We are pleased to provide this service to not only our members, but all First Nations health managers across turtle island.”

InfoPoint is designed for First Nations health managers across Canada, explained Crowe. It is catered to those who have too much on their plate and want to access credible sources of information now.

“Our team will work with you to find the most relevant and reliable information from our database of resources for First Nations health managers.”

The dedicated InfoPoint team will provide callers with the information they request as quickly as possible. They can be contacted by phone at 1-855-446-2719 or by email at: InfoPoint@fnhma.ca.

FNHMA is continuing to convene weekly Virtual Town Hall Information Sessions & Q+A every Thursday at 1pm (EST) to discuss the effects of the pandemic on affecting health managers, front line health workers, and First Nations communities.

These Town Halls are free and open to all health managers, front line health workers, First Nation Community members and the general public who are looking for transparent, clear information and advice related to COVID-19 – whether or not your Community is affected.

“These meetings are an opportunity for us all to check in regularly, exchange reliable information, and identify the collective needs of our Peoples and Communities,” added Crowe. “Each meeting will feature updates from FNHMA, health experts from across the country, and other invited guests. At the same time, you’ll be able to connect with these health officials through email and take part in the Live Q+A



FNHMA CEO Marion Crowe

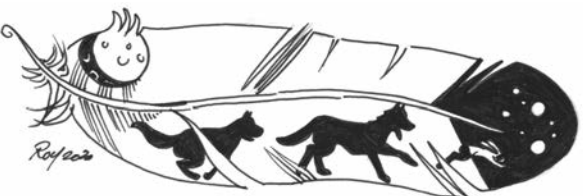
session every week.” Questions can be sent to FNHMA@ihtoday.ca and, time permitted, will be answered that week during the Virtual Town Hall on Thursdays.

Tune in to hear from an expert panel of speakers from the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada, Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association, and the First Nations Information Governance Centre.

The live stream is available on the FNHMA, APTN and Alberta Native News Facebook pages.

It is streamed live on www.ihtoday.ca.

NWAC says Covid-19 is increasing violence against Indigenous women




(May 2020) – The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) says the COVID-19 pandemic puts First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women at increased risk of violence as they wait for the government to respond to the nearly year-old report of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse People.

NWAC President Lorraine Whitman told a virtual roundtable held on May 7 with Foreign Affairs Minister François-Philippe Champagne and International Development Minister Karina Gould there is an urgent need to implement a national plan for meeting the 231 Calls For Justice issued by the Inquiry’s commissioners – and that the urgency has

been heightened by the global pandemic crisis.

“Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the situation of violence has significantly increased for Indigenous women,” Ms. Whitman told the roundtable. “Recently, NWAC undertook a grassroots-level needs

Continued on page 6



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Publication Mail Agreement No. 40050628
Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: Circulation Department:
102, 10155 114 Street NW
Edmonton AB T5K 1R8
E-mail: natnews@shaw.ca
Tel: (780) 421-7966

Funded by the
Government
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Financé par le
gouvernement
du Canada



Volume 37, Number 5, May 2020
ISSN #08294135
www.albertanativenews.com

EDITOR: Deborah Shatz

ADVERTISING:
Dan Moser 780-421-7966

Alberta Native News is published monthly for distribution to Native Bands and Metis Settlements across Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Northwest Territories.

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The true Covid-19 data

by Jake Cardinal

(ANNews) – Researchers at the First-Nation led research centre, the Yellowhead Institute, released a report Tuesday May 12, 2020 outlining the true scale of the data gap in Indigenous COVID-19 data.

On May 11, 2020, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) revealed that the cumulative number of Infected Indigenous peoples was 183 positive cases in First Nations within Canada and two deaths. However, a day later, the research team at the Yellowhead Institute found the true numbers of Indigenous COVID-19 infections.

The Yellowhead report revealed: “At the time of writing, the Yellowhead team has found as many as 465 cases in 42 communities and likely seven deaths.”

The research team compiled the information through publically available data such as “media reports, band council updates to members, local reports and obituaries.”

Why is there such a discrepancy in the data?

“First, there is no agency or organization in Canada reliably recording and releasing COVID-19 data that indicates whether or not a person is Indigenous,” the report explains, and since there aren’t many First Nations who control the delivery of their own healthcare, many Indigenous people rely on the provincial healthcare system and institutions.

Furthermore, “many public services that Indigenous peoples access do not collect disaggregated data that includes racial or ethnic identity of clients.” Despite this non-racist approach of not collecting the racial data of patients, it is currently impossible to view Indigenous-specific information and is extremely difficult to seek accountability for racial discrimination in the healthcare system.

“These data issues are not limited to the healthcare sector,” the report goes on to explain. “The same gaps

in data collection exist in child welfare and were a primary reason why the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was unable to definitively identify the number of Indigenous women who have been murdered or are missing.”

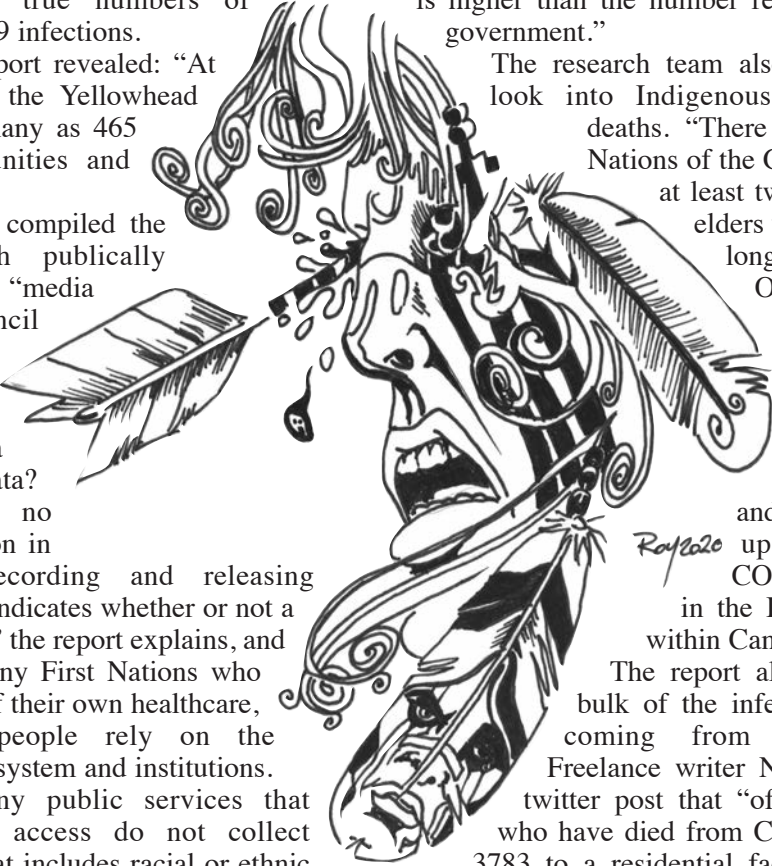
“The most difficult part of collecting and reporting on data discrepancy is the realization that the number of Indigenous people who have died from COVID-19 is higher than the number reported by the federal government.”

The research team also shared an in-depth look into Indigenous COVID-19 related deaths. “There is one death at Six Nations of the Grand River. There are at least two more First Nations elders who have died in rural long-term care homes in Ontario,” claims the report. “These three, along with reported deaths of Cindy Mountain, Agnes Macdonald, Joseph “Bannock” Sylvestre, and Emma Trapper” add up to at least seven COVID-19 related deaths within Canada.

The report also mentions that the bulk of the infections in Canada are coming from essential workers. Freelance writer Nora Loreto said in a twitter post that “of the 4693 Canadians who have died from COVID-19, I’ve linked 3783 to a residential facility. That’s 80.6%.” She also attached a Google Spreadsheet regarding this data.

ISC announced on May 9, 2020, that there would be \$250,000 in funding put towards data collection for First Nations affected by the virus.

Jake Cardinal is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for Alberta Native News.



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Artist Spotlight: Jaimee Hele-Cardinal

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The beautiful cover image on the May edition of *Alberta Native News* is by Saddle Lake visual artist and activist, Jaimee Hele-Cardinal. She recently joined us for an interview where she discussed her art, her past, and Mother Earth.

Jaimee explained that lot of her cultural paintings help her connect with the Cree culture. When she was growing up, her family didn't really expose her to a traditional way of life.

"I wasn't brought to many powwows, ceremonies, or taught the roles and values on being Indigenous," said Jaimee. "But I've come a long way on that journey and learned so much. My art is just a tool that I use to bring these connections closer and I'm ever so thankful of it."

When asked about her past and her path to visual artistry, Jaimee said as a child she was always drawing or colouring, even doing so in places she wasn't supposed to.

Drawing as a hobby wasn't satisfying her though, so at around 11 years old she bought herself a drawing tablet. "I learned most of my drawing skills from creating animal characters and practicing different kinds of backgrounds on my laptop and digital art programs," she noted.

However, tragedy struck when her tablet disappeared (because it was either stolen or misplaced). Without her tablet, Jaimee wasn't sure if her art was going to continue until she found a new way to create.

"I attempted acrylic art on canvas by myself. It was different, but I quickly learned and adapted to the new skill, understanding the paint and how to use it. These acrylic creations would take me on a different path of as an artist, but I was willing to accept and embrace change. That's how I transitioned into the art

I am doing today; I'm still experimenting with colours, shapes and different canvases," Jaimee said.

Her art usually takes about 3-5 days, depending on the specific piece and schedule. Due to the sheer amount of paintings and crafts she creates, Jaimee is able to create quality work incredibly quickly. When asked her about what drives her creation, Jaimee had this to say:

"One of my main reasons for creating art is just to express myself. It can be hard to express one's self when a voice is so quiet. To really make a statement is to create things and images that speak more than a thousand words."

She also added, "I have a love for helping causes that benefit and give back to something I value the most, which is mother earth. I have a lot of bird art because I love birds."

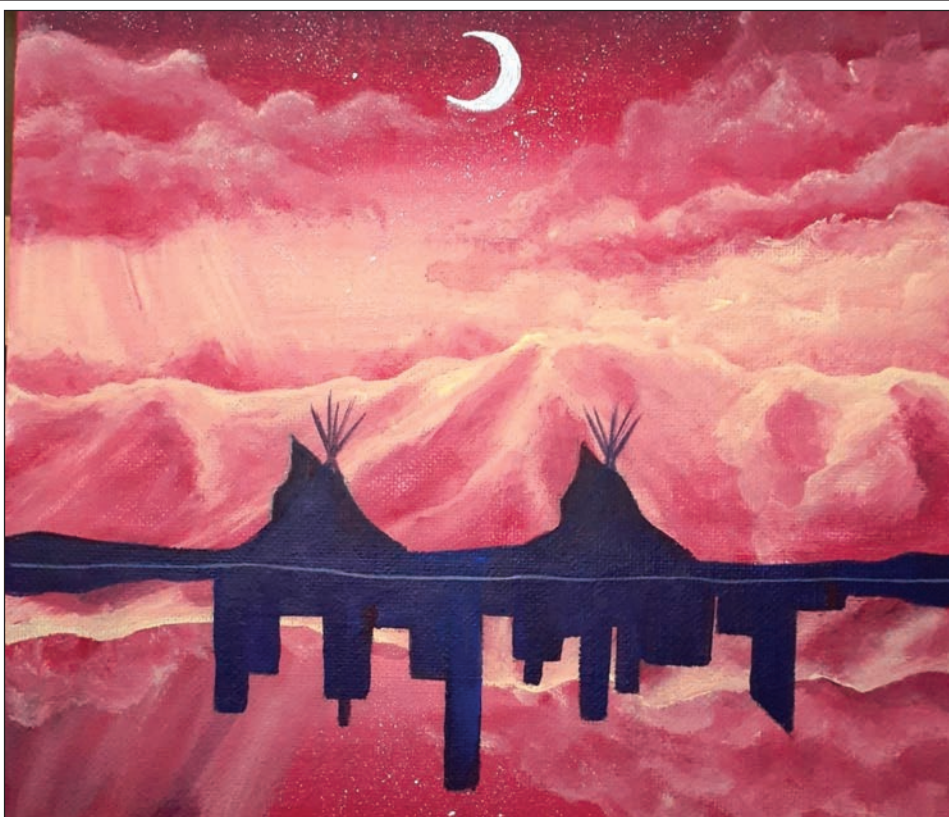
Jaimee donates a portion of her art to animal conservations and foundations supporting endangered wildlife. "It is important to restore and protect other living creatures that share our planet with us. It wouldn't be the same without them."

Jaimee's activism also translates to creating custom Dream Catchers. "I started to make my own at around age 15. I'd been looking to purchase a dream catcher for myself, but none of the dream catchers I saw interested me. I got the idea to make my own the way I needed to."

Despite starting her journey in the digital arts, Jaimee mentioned, "A lot of my creations are nature-based. You'll see a lot of elements from nature in my work. Whoever sees or purchases one of my creations will be a little bit closer to the natural world and have a little bit more magic in their life."

Regarding helping and supporting endangered wildlife, Jaimee emphasized that "it isn't very hard to do. We are in the time of the sixth mass extinction on earth. Wildlife is dying out due to habitat destruction, overhunting, toxic pollution, and climate change."

As to how to combat these issues, Jaimee clarified, "There is a lot we can do to help and support the people and the animals being affected by this problem. And by people, I mean the biologists, the care takers in the sanctuaries, the ones doing all the hard work and all we need to do is support their ongoing dedication."



Art by Jaimee Hele-Cardinal.

For more information about Jaimee Hele-Cardinal, you can contact her on: Facebook @ Jaimee Hele Cardinal, email Jaimeecardinal355@gmail.com, Instagram @ Pine.Whistler / Jaimeewhimsical creations and YouTube @ Jaimee Hele.



Portrait by Jaimee Hele-Cardinal.



Dream Catcher by Jaimee Hele-Cardinal.



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COVID-19 increasing violence *cont. from p 3*

assessment and a national survey, which highlighted a striking escalation of violence.”

The report of the National Inquiry was released on June 3, 2019. Carolyn Bennett, the federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, promised late last year that a national action plan drafted by her government would be made public this June.

NWAC is concerned that the pandemic will delay the government’s response to the critical and violent situation that has been made worse by the arrival of the virus in Canada.

“NWAC has been made aware of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on our sisters, their families and their economic security. Violence has escalated – many have lost their jobs or their businesses, or on the verge of losing them,” Ms. Whitman told the Ministers.

The roundtable with the Ministers was convened to assess Canada’s global response to the pandemic through the lens of feminism and human rights. It was moderated by Jacqueline O’Neill, the Ambassador For

Women, Peace and Security.

Ms. Whitman told the Ministers that, while implementing its feminist agenda for peace and security abroad, it must also address all forms of discrimination, violence and genocide at home.

“If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it’s how much change is possible when we act together. I urge us all to continue to do so,” said Ms. Whitman. “Acknowledging and tackling the impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous women and girls would go a long way to advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.”

NWAC is the national voice of First Nations, Inuit



Native Women's Association of Canada President Lorraine Whitman. Photo YouTube.

and Métis women in Canada and has, for more than a decade, been drawing attention to the issue of the missing and murdered women.

MNA launches COVID-19 Support Plan Phase 2

On May 11, 2020, Metis Nation of Alberta announced a second phase of their Covid-19 Support Plan.

“We know that Métis Albertans continue to need support during this unprecedented challenge, so we are announcing additional funding for our COVID-19 Support Plan,” noted an MNA press release.

“Phase two support includes a \$1.8-million funding top up to the Citizens, Families, and Seniors Direct Support Program, which translates to an additional \$300,000 for each of the MNA’s six regions. This funding top-up (of the Phase One \$200,000 per region) is the result of federal funding being received by the MNA.”

This program will allow each MNA Region the flexibility to allocate funds where Métis citizens, families, and Seniors identify they need support, including direct financial and other supports. Métis citizens should contact their MNA Region directly with respect to this program.

To get money and support to Métis Nation citizens as quickly as possible, MNA's plan is being delivered through its province-wide self-government structure that includes the Provincial Head Office, the MNA's six Regional Offices and MNA Locals. The MNA's affiliates Métis Crossing, Métis Urban Housing Corporation, Métis Capital Housing Corporation, Apeetogosan and Rupertsland Institute are part of the MNA plan.

The additional supports will also include hiring a liaison within each region, on a six-month contract, to help citizens navigate funding applications.

Phase 2 also includes \$500,000 allocated to Métis Crossing to ensure job security for their staff, overhead costs are met and progress continues on the grand opening strategic plan.

Steps have also been taken to protect Métis-owned businesses with the MNA and Ruperts-land Learning Institute providing their affiliated lending institution Apeetogosan \$500,000 and \$750,000 respectively.

Apeetogosan will match this funding for a total injection of \$2.5 million allowing hundreds of Métis business owners to keep their doors open. Thanks to this additional funding, Apeetogosan is offering the Métis



A student from Northland School Division No. 61 receives a donated Chromebook.

Business Emergency Loan and Subsidy Program.

In addition to these new financial supports, the MNA has procured 150,000 masks and gloves for the protection of Métis citizens and MNA staff across the province.

In early April, the MNA announced the first phase of its COVID-19 support plan, which included providing funding to three programs: a family and senior support program, a Child Wellness Benefit program, and an Emergency Rent Supplement program.

Since the initial supports were announced, officials said the programs have helped thousands of Métis citizens weather the pandemic.

According to media reports, the Child Wellness Benefit program has seen more than 3,400 applications and more than \$2.8 million in payments approved, while the Emergency Rent Supplement program has approved \$867,000 in payments to assist citizens.

Since the first phase of funding was announced, Rupertsland Institute (RLI) has also provided several community supports, including 2,176 Chromebooks to Métis students with limited access to online learning tools.

"During this time of crisis, we want to ensure no Métis Nation citizen or family in Alberta is left behind," said MNA Vice-President Dan Cardinal. "Our plan is about directly investing in and supporting Métis people and families. It is responsive, preliminary and adaptable based on what we hear from Métis Nation citizens over the weeks to come and how this pandemic evolves."



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IAAW empowers women through financial healing

By Laura Mushumanski

(ANNews) – When a new group of Indigenous women gather to enjoy tea and bannock during an IAAW financial literacy session, they are met with an anxiety induced question that is affiliated with trauma, “What is your first memory of money?”

The question, asked by EMPOWER U’s senior facilitator, Bernadette Swanson, is loaded and is meant to dig deep inside ourselves. The connection between trauma and financial burdens is a hot topic during the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women’s (IAAW) *EMPOWER U financial literacy program* – and is not as easy to swallow as a piece of fry bread.

For the past seven-years Bernedette (Bunny aka waposis, in Plains Cree) has been supporting Indigenous women with EMPOWER U’s financial literacy program through IAAW, located in Edmonton, Alberta. And within those 7 years, Bunny has been providing humor and unconditional confidence as a means of healing and getting to the root cause of financial hardships for Indigenous women.

For anyone asking about IAAW, it is a non-for-profit organization that was founded 26-years ago by Muriel Stanley Venne and Marggo Pariseau. The organization was created specifically for Indigenous women to advocate for other Indigenous women going through tough times. IAAW acknowledges and promotes the rights of Indigenous women, recognizes their role, value and achievement in society, respects their privacy and dignity, and offers an array of supporting services and programs.

EMPOWER U’s financial literacy program offered by IAAW, addresses mental health related issues and money spending in a cultural context, with a focal point on understanding the relationship between money and Indigenous people. The financial literacy program explores relationships with money, and its link to the burdens that Indigenous people carry from experiencing addiction, abuse, and trauma.

Words like ‘rank,’ ‘I’m broke,’ and ‘hustling’ are all too common amongst the many conversations that take place during EMPOWER U’s financial literacy program.

With the prevalent exchanges about hustling to make ends meet, the two hours per week, 20-week

program offers participants a special ‘matched savings’ opportunity. IAAW partners with United Way and ATB where tools for saving money are matched to the funds participants save (\$360) during the 20-week program.

Since the first time Bunny stepped foot into IAAW, from her own experience she stated, “they didn’t give up on me, and didn’t judge me.” IAAW staff are known for their advocacy work, compassion, and listening and believing in the women that walk through their doors. When Bunny facilitates the financial literacy program, the hard truths and struggles that come with being an Indigenous person becomes as real as asking your cousin to lend you money during tough times. Even though the program explores uncomfortable avenues where some women have put up barricades from their experienced trauma, the environment IAAW has to offer is a place to feel safe, supported and heard.

The role that Bunny plays, and her own experiences with addictions and trauma have helped her to relate and understand the women that participate in EMPOWER U. A way that Bunny gives back to IAAW for the support and kindness that they gifted her, is by role modeling the same principles and values towards Indigenous women that are searching for a way to heal from obstacles and challenging times in their lives.

Bunny’s approach to empowering Indigenous women is by providing tools and tips to keep a person’s spirit happy. One of many gifts that Bunny has to offer is through her words of encouragement, “financial literacy is not about money, it is about all our life experiences for who we are today. People need to share their story, it is healing.”

By planting seeds of encouragement, Bunny elicits Indigenous women to discover who they are outside a life of adversity, pain and suffering.

The stories being shared within the group of women that are participating in the program are the core of how Bunny approaches healing from trauma that creates financial issues.



EMPOWER U Facilitator Bernadette Swanson.

Bunny shares stories of resiliency and how becoming a proud Cree woman altered her perception of how she views Indigenous women’s relationship with money as empowering and healing, instead of a means of survival. Ultimately, the goal that Bunny has in mind is to, “help empower a generation of Indigenous women, and the generations to come.”

For anyone seeking financial literacy support, Bunny is available at bswanson@iaaw.ca or (780) 479-8195.

IAAW also offers additional support in leadership development, justice initiatives for women coming out of corrections, violence prevention and healthy relationships, and spiritual support for women struggling with addictions. All programs and services can be found at www.iaaw.ca.

IAAW staff is available to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous women during the COVID-19 pandemic; for all inquiries contact iaaw@iaaw.ca or call (780) 479-8195.

Laura Mushumanski is a Local Initiative Journalism Reporter.



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