



Three First Nations plan new Child Welfare Law

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Three First Nations in Alberta have announced plans to take control of child services for their members.

The Loon River First Nation, the Lubicon Lake Band and the Peerless Trout First Nation — who are all a part of the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council — announced that after a vote consisting of members from each band, the three Nations have decided to begin the creation of the “Awasiwewin,” which is Cree for *Children’s Law*.

When the law comes into legislation, it will provide the Nations the opportunity to decide where child members in the foster system are placed and what supports to provide.

Peerless Trout First Nation Chief Gladys Okemow, said of the possible law, “Under this new system, we will focus on prevention. We will identify those that are at risk and we will provide services to the parents, children, (and) families, and support them to ensure that no child is ever removed from their family except as a last resort.”

Awasiwewin will also create a new legal process that will bypass the court system by introducing a dispute resolution tribunal. This tribunal will consist of nation members that will provide recommendations to the office of the Onikanew if

there are any disagreements.

“We know each other, and we understand each other,” Okemow said, adding that the law will be able to help members across the country.

“Wherever my members may be... we are going to have to help them because they’re still our members.”

While there is no set date for when the new law will be legislated, the Nations gave notice of intention on Aug. 13. This means they have 12 months to complete a coordination agreement with the provincial and federal governments to determine file transfers and funding.

Alberta Children’s Services Minister Rebecca Schulz, said of the possible First Nation legislation, “They have also championed the protection of family and cultural

connections, health and wellness. I look forward to our continued collaboration.”

The announcement to create the new law comes just after a provincial report found that a record number of children died while receiving services from the Alberta child-care system. And due to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the system, it is approximated that 68 percent of those that died were Indigenous.



Federal Legislation

The three Nations have been able to attempt to create a band-run foster care system for their members due to Federal legislation that was passed in January 2020.

Bill C-92 allows for First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities to take authority and transition towards “partial or full jurisdiction over child and family services at a pace that they choose.”

The legislation has already been put to use in the Northwest Territories (NWT), where the Inuvialuit people have passed a similar law for their members. Likewise, the NWT has a disproportionate amount of Indigenous children in the foster care system.

Kainai, Siksika object to coal company's depiction of consultation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Kainai and Siksika Nations have filed letters with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada,

arguing a coal company is misrepresenting their relationship with it, the Canadian Press reports.

Rockies, has been continuous since 2017.

But the Siksika and Kainai nations say in similarly-worded letters they haven’t met with the company since July and “it is no longer accurate to represent the relationship as amounting to meaningful consultation.”

In Montem’s project description submitted to the review agency, it says the company “is confident that any potential impacts to Indigenous peoples’ physical or cultural heritage, current uses of the lands, structures [or] sites will be identified and understood.”

Continued on page 13

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Delegation to Vatican postponed over Omicron concerns

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chief RoseAnne Archibald says a planned Indigenous delegation to the Vatican this month has been postponed as a result of concerns about the omicron variant.

Delegates from the AFN, as well as Inuit and Metis organizations, were scheduled to meet privately with Pope Francis from Dec. 17 to 20 in advance of his as-yet-unscheduled trip to Canada, where he's expected to officially apologize for the Catholic Church's role in operating forced assimilation institutions.

"The health and wellbeing of our delegates, their families and communities is paramount to us, and we will not put anyone in harm's way if we can help it," Archibald said at a Dec. 7 winter meeting of the AFN.

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Regina Donald Bolen said he's personally OK with travel at this time but appreciates the health concerns of the Indigenous delegates.

"Relations are being strengthened, the voices of survivors are being heard, the waves of suffering experienced at residential schools are being acknowledged in a greater way than they ever have before," Bolen told the CBC.

"I profoundly hope that that work of truth and reconciliation continues, and of course it can continue."

The Canadian Bishops, Assembly of First Nations, Metis National Council and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami issued a joint statement that after careful assessment of the uncertainty and potential health risks surrounding international travel amid the recent spread of the Omicron variant, they jointly decided to reschedule their delegation to the Vatican in December 2021 to the earliest opportunity in 2022.

"The decision to postpone was a heartbreaking one, made after careful consultation with delegates, family members, community leaders, public health officials and the leadership of each of the three National Indigenous Organizations. Particularly for many elderly delegates as well as those who live in remote communities, the risk of infection and the fluid nature of the evolving global situation presents too great a threat at this time," read the statement.

"We take comfort in the desire, conveyed to us by the Holy See, that the safety of the delegation should inform any decision to move forward. It is also important to note that the delegation is postponed not cancelled.

"Currently, the world's health experts are still learning about the transmissibility of the Omicron variant. As more information becomes available, we will continue to assess the feasibility of future travel

plans, based on guidance from the Canadian government and relevant international authorities.

"Our shared commitment to walking together towards healing and reconciliation remains strong. We understand that the Holy See is very much committed to rescheduling this visit in the new year and we look forward to the opportunity for Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, residential school survivors, and youth to participate in private meetings with Pope Francis."

Delegation lead AFN Regional Chief for the Northwest Territories Norman Yakeleya said in a news release that the trip to the Vatican will help

fulfill Call to Action #58 of the TRC, which calls for "the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools."

"[W]hile the apology from His Holiness is so important, it's also important to think about what happens in a post-apology world," said Yakeleya.

Representing Alberta is Dr. Wilton Littlechild of Ermineskin Cree Nation, who has served as the grand chief of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, was a commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and from 1988 – 1993 served as the MP for Wetaskiwin.

Littlechild told the CBC that he would use the meeting with the Pope as an opportunity to highlight the importance of a formal apology.

"All I want to hear is three words, 'I am sorry,' and then I can begin my own healing journey," he said.

December is usually a month full of celebrations and family time. This year will be different and challenging for many families.

For almost two years the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary was privileged to support our most vulnerable through our Covid Indigenous Task Force.

Thanks to our friends at Toys R Us we are able to provide Christmas food hampers and toys to bring light and love to families in need in Calgary.

We wish to extend our gratitude to all the essential workers, community outreach teams, stakeholders and funders who selflessly support our Elders and Knowledge Keepers, the most vulnerable community members including Two-Spirited, homeless and other marginalized groups.

On behalf of the AFCC Board and staff we would like to wish everyone a safe and healthy Christmas and New Year!



Season's Greetings

Wishing you and your loved ones a happy and healthy holiday season!

I am looking forward to another year of representing the people of our wonderful communities and hearing about all of your holiday celebrations.

Roger Reid
MLA, Livingstone-Macleod

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Atikameg moves forward on the healing journey

By Dale Ladouceur, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Whitefish Lake First Nation, with its headquarters in Atikameg, has focused much of its intention toward healing. It is this focus that has allowed the residents to become more positively self-reliant; a focus that has radiated outward to neighbouring communities.

That healing has come, in part, from a vision that Atikameg's Chief Albert Thunder shared at the beginning of his tenure. Now, nearing the end of his four years as Chief, he spoke to *Alberta Native News* about how proud and inspired he is by the people in his community, and how excited he is for his community's future. With forward thinking projects like Atikameg's future women's shelter, his optimism has much justification.

Last month, the community had their sod turning for their new women's shelter. "A lady named Karen McCarthy has been spearheading the women's shelter," explained Thunder. "There were only ten [applications] that were going to be built in all of Canada. First Nations had first dibs at it and we submitted the application and got it: \$3.7 million for the project."

Chief Thunder detailed the project is fully funded by Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, (CMHC). The operational funding agreement of \$800,000 a year is coming from Indigenous Services Canada.

Atikameg is largely a Cree First Nations who, like most communities across the country, find the need for family support outweighs actual support and resources. With a sobering tone, Chief Thunder talked about the root cause of that need. "Right now, every First Nation – all 634 First Nations across Canada has a major housing crisis. That overcrowding is probably the biggest driver of poverty and domestic violence [as well as] substance abuse. I told one of my managers, if we don't take care of our people, even with the simple stuff of grading the roads, our people will feel like they are abandoned."

Chief Thunder detailed the current challenges, gradually shifting his tone to one of excitement. "This is a big win for our community, having this women's shelter. And it's not just for our community,

it is also for the surrounding area. In the Whitefish area we don't have a predominant crisis of domestic or gender-based violence but we have it within the surrounding areas."

Like many isolated communities, resources can be scarce. "There are days when we get a call from [neighbouring communities] asking about women's shelters," continued the Chief.

"There's one in Sucker Creek, 45 minutes south of us, so we would be sending our members there. We belong to a tribal council that consists of five Nations and [with that many communities] our Nations need some kind of facility such as this."

As Thunder explained, there are also economic benefits to creating this kind of social infrastructure. "If it is at Atikameg, it will be staffed by Indigenous people. It's not just the win of having a women's shelter, it's the opportunities for long term jobs now. It's not just the healing process for domestic violence and protecting the children but (it will provide opportunities to) train parents on how to be parents. The generational impacts of residential schools; we're still feeling the ripple effects. Now, with the opportunities of full-time jobs, that gives our First Nations members purpose, [which is also] part of the healing."

When Chief Albert Thunder started his term, he knew healing was key to building up his community. "When I started here 3.8 years ago we were always aiming for healing. We have our own Child and Family Services (CFS) now, and we took it on. It is a one-hundred percent Whitefish run CFS and our director and CFS workers are from here. So, we not only are taking care of our own, but we are bringing in full time job opportunities to give people purpose."

The Chief expects the Women's Shelter to be finished by April as a community hall with similar square footage and structure was built within that time frame. The facility will have six units and be able to house

at least 20 people.

All the partners attended the sod turning ceremony last month: Chief and council, Seko Construction, the RCMP and members of the Whitefish Community.

Chief Thunder praised the Council and their working relationship. "We really work hard together on the reserve. We are moving and thinking forward and innovative. We have our headlights in the front, not in the back," he laughed. He also enthused about community members in attendance and the feedback he and the Council received. "A lot [of our community women] were there and shared they were so inspired about how our nation is coming together. It's amazing what's happening here in Whitefish, that's for sure."

Investing in community not only builds vibrant communities but inspires the next generation to take care of themselves and their own. "This is my first time as Chief but right from the beginning I recognized that this community needed healing, all of us – I needed healing. The hurt that was happening [was from] the generational impact of residential schools. We needed to be a neighbourhood community instead of a *crab syndrome*."

Having never heard of *crab syndrome*, Chief Thunder explained, "When you catch a pail of crabs the one crab might be climbing out of the pail, then another crab grabs him and pulls him down to the bottom."

Chief Thunder talked of how focusing on healing has made his community more positive. "Instead of knocking our neighbour down and gossiping, we pray for them, like sowing seeds. It's like [the movie] *Field of Dreams*, we build it and they will come, and the money will come. You do right for your people, good things will happen for the community."



The sod turning for the Atikameg Healing Centre for Women and Children was held last month (L-R): RCMP Const. Brieanna Meters, Councillor James Nahachick, Councillor Richard Laboucan, Councillor Hughie Tallman, Chief Albert Thunder, Kurt Ostermann, Councillor Darren Auger.

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Kristopher Buffalo takes his family’s rodeo legacy to new heights

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Kristopher Buffalo, a professional bullfighter raised in a Cree rodeo family, has reached new heights in the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association. He recently received the 2021 CPRA award for his bullfighting abilities; he's just the second Indigenous bullfighter to be selected by the association.

Kristopher has rodeo in his genes as a fourth-generation Cree cowboy and a first-generation Cree bullfighter from Samson Cree Nation, Treaty 6 territory.

“This year I got voted into the Canadian Final Rodeo. It's one of the main goals you want to achieve as a bullfighter - one of the top levels of being recognized as a bullfighter,” noted Kristopher.

Kristopher explained it was an honour to be voted in by the top twelve men of Canadian bullfighting. He’s put a lot of effort into working toward his current achievements in rodeo.

“My accomplishments include CPRA finals in 2021. I made the Indian National Final Rodeo in 2021 and 2016. I also competed in the Bullfighter only competition in Las Vegas, continuously from 2017 to 2019,” said Kristopher.

“I have been fighting bulls for about fourteen years. I started as a rodeo school attendee. I come from a rodeo family from my father's side of the family, Kirk Buffalo.”

Kristopher’s father is a respected community member of Samson Cree Nation with a family history in Cree tribal politics and Indigenous rodeo. The community of Maskwacis was historically well known for top professional rodeos.

The patriarch of the Cree rodeo dynasty, Kirk Buffalo said he is very proud of his son's achievements. “His cousin Todd Jr. Buffalo is a past CPRA champion (1994) and another cousin Benjy Buffalo was the 50th Ponoka Stampede Bullriding Champion.”

Outside of creating and cultivating a rodeo family, the Cree patriarch works for Correctional Service Canada in Cree restorative justice - a program that utilizes Cree cultural and spiritual teachings to prison inmates.

“The family supported Kris throughout his rodeo career,” noted Kirk. “He was raised on the Buffalo family rodeo ranch. As a youth, he helped build the family rodeo ranch too which is located on six mile. He was even a sheep rider as a kid.”

Kirk explained Cree people have always had a connection with animals. “In a way that shows respect for the four-legged such as moose, dogs, bulls, and horses.”

Kristopher is a hard worker but he also encourages youth to dream. His late aunt, Carolyn Buffalo taught him the acronym for becoming a champion: “Consistency, Hard Work, Attitude, Mental Toughness, and Patience... but youth need to know that patience is the key thing if you want to be a champion,” added Kristopher.

He said he wished his late aunt was here to witness his major achievements in Canadian Rodeo.

“She was very motivating and inspiring. I wish she was here to see me at this big stage in my life,” said Kristopher.

In a world that is dominated by white men. Kristopher holds his own in the rodeo arena and is currently the only 2021 pro-Indigenous bullfighter.

“I broke barriers in the Canadian Rodeo. I was often ‘the’ Indigenous person competing,” said Kristopher.

The family patriarch, Kirk shared a proud memory of when the family traveled to Dallas Texas to support Kristopher. “We came down to watch my son perform for the Dallas cowboys. There were a lot of Native Americans in the stands watching my son perform. We are making our people proud... My son is known internationally.”



Kristopher Buffalo

Both Kirk and Kristopher talked about racism within Canadian Rodeo community but they never allowed that to get in the way of Kristopher’s ambitions and success. His focus was on being the best bullfighter and developing his skills in the arena.

“I want to thank my family for their support and my wife for allowing me to focus on doing my job. I was able to create a job out of a hobby. My wife let me go to rodeos while she took care of the kids and I'm grateful for that.”

This year he is only completing in the Cowboy Protection and this benefits the finals in Rodeo.

The Buffalo family comes from a community with a rich history and legacy in Rodeo. Past leaders of Maskwacis made large investments in the sport and infrastructure to support it.

The Ermineskin First Nation opened the Panee Memorial Agriplex and Montana Reserve opened its multi-million-dollar complex, the Diamond 5 Rodeo Ranch. It too prospered as an internationally recognized rodeo facility from the early 1980s to the early 1990s.

The Buffalo family offers programs and information can be found on their professional facebook page: @buffalobullfighter.

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The true cost of replacing the RCMP in Alberta

By Rob Houle, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On October 29, 2021, the Minister of Justice, Kaycee Madu, unveiled the results of a government commissioned report outlining the process and cost of replacing the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in Alberta. The report proposes that policing much of the rural areas of the province, smaller municipalities and Indigenous communities will carry the cost of between \$735 to \$759 million. These costs are significantly higher than the current costs of \$672 million per year, and more than double what the province currently contributes.

When analyzing the data collected, provincial contributions at present total \$317 million, with the remainder of the budget arriving from municipal and federal governments. There also exist a number of assumptions in the report, which are addressed in a disclaimer at the end of the report, so the actual costs for transitioning out the RCMP remain to be seen. Upon release of the report, Minister Madu was questioned on where the province would attain the over \$200 million shortfall with little reply.

This report and politicking stem from the 2020 Fair Deal Panel report which was promised by the United Conservative Party (UCP) during the 2019 campaign. Fuelled by the misnomer of Western Alienation, the Fair Deal Panel and its members held limited engagements in the Winter months of 2019/20 to craft their 25 recommendations. Many of the recommendations focused on expressing Albertan sentiments in Ottawa and pushing for provincial independence. These discussions and movements have also been reflected in the recent referendum on equalization payments.

Curiously, much like the referendum on equalization, First Nations in the province seem to have been excluded from this analysis on policing.

Although the panel recognizes that 22 Indigenous communities could be impacted by these proposed changes as they currently have tripartite cost sharing agreements, their voices are noticeably absent in the report. Following further reading, it appears as though the writers, Pricewaterhousecoopers (PWC), seem to have only engaged in discussions with the Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations, Metis Nation of Alberta (MNA) and the Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC).

Excluded from these engagements were the majority of First Nations in the province. With Treaty No. 8 territory containing 25 First Nations and spanning the entirety of Northern Alberta, their voice should have been a vital part of this report. Also absent from the acknowledgement section of the report are the Treaty 7 First Nations of Siksika, Piikani and the Stoney Nakoda Nation. Chiefs have been vocal on their exclusions, and have serious concerns with the proposal.

Some leaders have even called for a First Nations police force to patrol the North of the province instead. However, with the role of police being under a microscope since the tragic killing of George Floyd in 2020, one must consider whether creating new police forces is truly a step in the right direction, and perhaps we should be considering abolition. First Nations officers and leaders enforcing colonial laws within our own territories may be viewed as another step towards assimilation.

In any event, it appears as though this push for provincial independence from Ottawa will come at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars to Albertans. Although leaders have stated taxes will not increase, and there may be alternative models available, it should be deeply concerning to First Nations people and Albertans that another project, that no one requested, will result in a lower standard of living in Alberta without improving service to Indigenous people or making the community safer as a whole.



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GERALD SOROKA MP
YELLOWHEAD

AU alum distinguished in service to the Inuit community

Dr. Wayne Clark has made and continues to make great strides toward increasing understanding of Indigenous issues within the Western health-care system.

The 2021 Distinguished Alumni Award winner is a relatively recent grad, having completed his Doctor of Education in Distance Education in 2020, but has done much to distinguish himself before, during, and since completing his degree.

Clark said he is one of the few Inuit to have earned a doctoral degree in Canada. He said while it's not always easy to integrate Traditional Inuit Knowledge with the policies and procedures of academia, that's now changing.

"Some of the experiences we have in Inuit communities, and the knowledge we have as a community, is welcome in universities," Clark said. "If we're able to come and share that, and feel welcome to do so, then we can build that knowledge here."

Clark's thesis, which highlights an appropriate way for health professionals to engage with his Inuit community, reflects this—as does his current work as the executive director of the Indigenous health initiatives program with the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry.

In this role, he is working to enhance cultural safety training for medical students, focusing on educating about the colonial experience, the Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous communities, and the power imbalances that can exist in a physician-patient relationship.

This work, along with his related academic and volunteer work, reflects the Distinguished Alumni Award requirement that the recipient has made outstanding contributions to any field of human endeavour or extraordinary contributions to their community.

Strong ties to Inuit community

Clark lived in Winnipeg while completing his studies at AU and worked as the director of patient services for Indigenous Health for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, where he advocated for care plans that recognized traditional Indigenous practices and met the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit patients. He has also served in volunteer roles with national organizations focused on Inuit and other Indigenous issues.

His personal background has roots in Tikirquag (Whale Cove), Nunavut. He is a member of the Voisey family, and an Inuk enrolled under the Nunavut Agreement.

He earned a bachelor of business administration degree from the University of Winnipeg, and a master of arts in communications from Royal Roads

University. His career has included program management roles in Indigenous health and research, communication, and culture.

It was through his professional and volunteer experiences working with Inuit organizations and in Inuit communities that he developed the idea for his thesis. He has extensive volunteer experience with organizations focusing on the health of Inuit and Indigenous communities, and it was in part through this work that he was inspired to pursue a doctoral degree and focus his thesis work on the idea of Inuit cultural safety.

Inuit cultural safety research

While attending the 2018 World Conference on Circumpolar Health in Copenhagen, Denmark, Clark said he spoke with well-known Inuk Elder Levinia Brown. As part of her keynote address, she said Nunavut needed more Type 2 diabetes education and training to help control the disease, which was becoming more prevalent among the Inuit.

He realized shortly into the process of conducting his research, however, that his focus was on cultural safety rather than on diabetes education, specifically.

Clark's research study used storytelling to inform the development of an online module for the provision of Inuit cultural teaching, using Type 2 diabetes as an exemplar. The result is a document for medical professionals and researchers that highlights what a respectful process for engagement with his Inuit community should look like.

"If somebody was doing Inuit-specific research following an Inuit research methodology, there would be specific guidelines in place, and an understanding around the cultural protocols, and ensuring that research engagement was done respectfully and in a manner in keeping with an Inuit way of life," he said.



Dr. Wayne Clark

Cultural safety in med school

This idea of cultural safety is also a big focus in Clark's current role at the U of A.

One example he spoke of is attending a Sweat Lodge with Cree Elders and medical students, and the impact it can have to simply take part in and be aware of these cultural practices.

"When these med students were learning this, and talking about it afterward, they were saying how enriching it will be when they're seeing Cree or Anishnaabe patients to be aware of some of these traditions and their significance to their overall well-being," he said.

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Country musician Jarrid Lee speaks out against racism

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Jarrid Lee Poitras is a Canadian country musician, launching his newest album and speaking out against hate.

Earlier this year, Poitras made headlines when he spoke out against discriminatory remarks in the Canadian Country Music Association. He shared his experiences and performed at this year’s 11th annual Hate to Hope campaign along with Edmonton’s newest Mayor Amarjeet Sohi.

The inspiration behind his latest album stems from his lived experiences as a Cree man living in a business world. Poitras explained that he paid homage to Indigenous traditions as a Cree man but he also has to walk in the world of business.

“If you look at the cover of my album you will see me dressed in a business suit and the other half of me dressed in traditional regalia. It’s my Cree man grass dance outfit. The purpose was to show that I am able to walk in both worlds at the same time,” said Poitras.

Canadians are quick to judge, categorize, or put him in a box because he is Indigenous, he said. “They just want to put me in the Indigenous category. It doesn’t matter what you do, whether it’s for music or not. The non-Indigenous audience likes to put us in an Indigenous category.”

He explained that he is exactly like other small-town Canadians. “I grew up in a small town,” he said. “I never grew up on a reserve. So, I don’t know what that experience is like.”

However, despite growing up in a small town, Poitras experienced racism from non-Indigenous communities. He also experienced lateral violence from nearby Indigenous communities.

Growing up in rural Alberta Poitras played hockey. He shared an experience of when a First Nation player from a nearby reserve would harass or bully Poitras for not being “native enough” – he said the group never really accepted him as an Indigenous person.

He was always the outsider or underdog.

“I experienced bullying from all sides. I feel that I have always been an underdog, under-appreciated and undervalued,” said Poitras.

“I am human. I sing country music. I am good at what I do, and I’m the same as everyone else.”

He said in Canadian country music the industry is quick to put him in an Indigenous category. They do so right away as opposed to putting him in the same category as the other artists.

When thinking about other Indigenous people with similar stories, his message is: “No matter what other people say, you can’t take things personally. If you take everything personally, you’re just going to get yourself down.”

He said there’s a lot of microaggressions or micro racism in country music. He dislikes it when he is told by non-Indigenous people that he is “one of the good ones.”

“Remarks like that don’t sit very well with me. So, I point them out right away, but I don’t let them get to me. Racist remarks say more about the person [saying them] and who they are, how they have been raised or just how ignorant they are. I try not to focus on these,” said Poitras.

He further explained that he was once told that he was not an Indian but a Native.

Poitras asked what the difference was? And the answer was completely shocking and appalling. (trigger warning).

“I was told that Indians are savages from the rez and a Native is not savage but more colonized and we could get along with them better,” said Poitras.

He said he disagrees with all the categorizing and stereotyping of Indigenous communities and he isn’t afraid to point it out.

Earlier this year Poitras did just that in his role as second vice president of the Saskatchewan Country Music Association.



During a discussion regarding the lack of an Indigenous Artist of the Year award for the Saskatchewan Country Music Association’s awards show a former board member commented that there was no award because the winner would just “pawn it.”

Poitras has a message for youth. He said that there are more Indigenous youth coming out and are just like him. They want a better future for themselves and they are asking tough questions. Canada better be ready for it.

“Our communities are healing from trauma caused by Canada. We are learning about lateral violence, and we are beginning to support one another, and we are learning how to edify each other,” he said.

“For all the youth reading this – be yourself, be bold and support each other.”

On Dec 2, Poitras was nominated Indigenous Artist of The Year through SaskMusic.

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High-profile community court worker offers insights

By Chevi Rabbit

For the past two decades, Maskwacis resident Luci Johnson has been helping Indigenous people navigate through the justice system.

As a reporter for Alberta Native News, I’ve had the unique opportunity to witness Johnson in her element as a community court worker. I’m currently covering the developments of two high-profile cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women - Chantel Firingstone and Billy Johnson.

In both cases, I’ve observed Johnson guide, assist and console the families in their darkest moments. Her work is clearly vital for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

This year Johnson's role as a court worker in Alberta's Justice system was recognized by Jennifer Nepoose - who nominated her for the Alberta Restorative Justice Association’s “George Brereton Award.”

In her award submission, Nepoose’ states, “Over the years, Lucy has been instrumental in developing many justice-based initiatives for her community.

“She has been a valuable resource for bridging the Western judicial system with Cree cultural beliefs, using restorative justice, and involving elders in youth community service activities relating to conditions arising from extrajudicial sanctions.”

“Luci is well regarded and respected by the Crown, lawyers, and judges who call on her to assist individuals to get access to resources and programs in the community,” said Nepoose.

In my interview with Johnson. Her message was simple, “Stop over criminalizing our Indigenous youth and young adults.”

She explained that every Indigenous person who enters the courtroom has a price tag attached to them. “There is a dollar figure to that individual,” she reported. “Over the years, I have seen and heard a lot from our people in the Justice System.”

In her role, Johnson provides culturally appropriate support and helps Indigenous people navigate the court's system and connect to resources.

Often she will attend court with the accused and provide support to the accused and their family.

She also plays an important role in ensuring victims and families are connected to services and other community-based resources, such as those for

families of missing and murdered indigenous women.

She explained that as a frontline court worker she starts from the very beginning of the case when some are charged and follows along as they move through the Justice System.

Her social media is now an extra tool that helps her effectiveness as a front-line worker. “I receive messages on Facebook during a time of crisis,” she explained.

Johnson said many things need to be done collectively and difficult conversations need to happen on topics such as: family violence, the breakdown of families, male violence, poor parenting skills, lack of life skills, single young parents, and poverty issues. “There are many children in the community who are hungry,” she noted.

She said there is a serious lack of housing causing major issues in communities for our young families and our young adults.

At the Nation level, she said that there is a growing number of children in the child welfare system. “1100 kids in care in my Nation alone,” she said. “What happened to my community?”

She shared that her community was brought up and raised in a rich plains Cree culture. There’s a breakdown in the family and a breakdown in the community, noted Johnson.

She said that three main areas need to be addressed. First, the assumption that Maskwacis is wealthy needs to be dispelled. “It’s been a good 20 years since we have had that kind of money...The mega-money we once had is gone, all those funds are gone and now First Nations bands can't keep up with the demand of a growing nation,” explained Johnson.

Secondly, many members have lost or never learned cultural respect as Cree people. She explained that Cree “Warrior men” are not supposed to abuse Cree “Life Carriers.” The “Life Carriers” give Cree people the legacy for the next generation.

“People need to sit down with their kids and talk about these issues. We need sit down and have these difficult conversations with our next generation,” said Johnson.

Thirdly, “Our youth and young adults are idolizing other cultures.” She would like to see a revitalization of Cree culture with our communities.



Community Court Worker Luci Johnson

She explained that every time she goes into a courtroom there is a high probability that the case involves drugs, alcohol, or gang activity.

She shared a story on toxic masculinity and gun violence. “This past year I had to support a young lady who witnessed gun violence in her family. A family member was acting macho. He didn't realize the gun went off and he shot and grazed a two-year-old child.”

“There is a huge disconnect within families,” said Johnson. “We have programs and services available in the community that are tied to culture.” These programs are often underutilized.

Johnson explained that Cree people had a community system that dealt with members who committed crimes in the community. Cree people had restorative justice. “Elders would get together, and they would discipline the member who was acting out,” said Johnson.

“Back then if a male was committing sexual violence against women in the community, one of his braids would be cut off. This way community members would know to stay away from him.”

Johnson's message is for community members to think about the next six generations and remember the important role of women in society.

Over the years, she has received many accolades including the 2018 Alberta Solicitor Community Justice Award for service enhancement, Esquao Award, Girl Guides of Canada award and Alberta Youth Justice Award. She is highly respected and continues to make a positive difference for Indigenous people in the justice system.



Ashley Callingbull encourages Indigenous youth to dream of possibilities

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Alberta’s very own Cree beauty from Enoch Cree Nation is leading the way in representing Cree women in Canadian fashion.

Ashley Callingbull has been snapped up by a top modelling agency and she continues to inspire a new generation of Indigenous youth by sharing her story.

The fashion industry traditionally lacks representation of Indigenous people in fashion shows and magazines but in recent years there has been a push for representation of diversity across turtle island.

Callingbull is leading the way having recently signed a prestigious contract with Next Models. This new endeavor places her amongst the top brass of Canadian female models. The major Canadian agency represents top international models like Crista Cober, Jenna Earle, Kim Cloutier, and Yasmin Warsame.

Referring to signing with NEXT modeling, Callingwood, a former Mrs. Universe said, “I never thought I would see it.”

Callingbull explained it was her 2021 September Cover for *Fashion Magazine* and the success that followed its release that got her the attention of Canada’s top modeling agency.

In *Fashion Magazine*, Callingbull was radiant. She was also able to use her platform to shed light on the trauma caused by Canada’s residential school system on her Cree family and from her grandparents’ perspective.

The overall photoshoot for *Fashion Magazine* showcased Indigenous beauty, from featuring Ashley on the cover, to the outfits by Angela DeMontigny, a top Canadian fashion designer of Cree-Métis heritage, and earrings by Warren Steven Scott, an Indigenous queer male from Nlaka’pamux.

“Because of the success, I ended up being signed by Next Models. It’s such a huge organization to be a part of. I’m excited,” said Callingbull.

“I’ve been modeling for a long time. I started way

back in the day when we first met (*referring to the author of this article*) at Western Canada Fashion Week.”

Callingbull said those early experiences at Western Canada Fashion Week exposed her to the world of fashion.

According to the WFCW website, “they were established in 2003 and have developed into nationally recognized fashion and design events and the second largest fashion week in Canada.”

Callingbull has come a long way and overcome many obstacles and challenges since she began modelling.

She shared a personal story about when she realized her star was rising in Canada. “I did my first billboard which was for the Hillberg & Berk, a major Canadian jewelry company. I was driving in downtown Toronto with my sister, and she pointed out the billboard. My sister told me I looked powerful and strong. Hearing that from my younger sister meant a lot.”

She explained Indigenous women “are looking at my billboard in Toronto and seeing what’s possible. This is why representation matters because it helps Indigenous youth dream of possibilities.”

Callingbull opened up about her battle with shyness and being insecure as an Indigenous youth. “I used to be that insecure girl from the reserve,” she said. “When I was growing up there wasn’t anyone who was chasing the things that I wanted to chase.

“I was this little insecure girl that didn’t have dreams.

“I’ve grown, I’ve evolved; I’ve grown to love and respect myself for the way the Creator made me.”

Her advice to youth is that they should surround themselves with positivity. The people in your life do have an impact on whether you are successful or not.

“Who you surround yourself with really determines where you’re going to go in life,” said Callingbull. “I believe if you surround yourself with positive

people that want to uplift you and who focus on what’s best for you and they bring out the best in you as a person, they are your true friends,” said Callingbull.

She said stay away from toxic people who only want to bring you down; try to use you; take you away from your goals or live for the moment.

“For example, stay away from people that say let’s go party instead of focusing on school.”

“Ask yourself how is that going to amplify my life? How is that going to better me as a person? “Those are things that you need to think about in regards to your future,” she added.

Callingbull can’t stress enough the importance of creating circles of friends who are supportive if you aim to be successful in this life.

She has been able to create a positive support team around her that pushes her to excel at her dreams and aspirations.

“I’ve completely changed, I’ve grown and I’m excited to see who I’m going to become in the future,” said Callingbull.

Callingbull is currently dating former professional hockey centre Wacey Rabbit, a member of the Blood Tribe.



Photo by Soko Fotohaus.

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As the holiday season approaches, my hope is that it will bring with it peace and renewed optimism for the year ahead.

Wishing you prosperity, happiness and especially good health in the coming season.

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Lana Whiskeyjack, miksew pšim-Bald eagle moon (February), oil on canvas, 40x60", 2020. Photo credit: Rebecca Lipiatt.

Season's Greetings

Best wishes to everyone for a Merry Christmas and looking forward to good health, success and happiness throughout 2022.

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Winter solstice art lights up downtown Edmonton

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Edmonton-based Cree artist Jason Carter has a new Winter Solstice sculpture display at Churchill Square as part of the city's Downtown Holiday Light Up program.

The installation consists of three 16-foot sculptures representing Grandfather Sun, Mother Earth and Grandmother Moon, respectively labelled "Rest," "Renewal" and "Dreamed," with each holding an orb of light. Each sculpture uses a different colour palette.

"It's an exploration of that moment of solstice, where the sun is at its lowest, the moon is at its highest, and Mother Earth is right in the middle of that, a beautiful balance between the two," Carter told *Alberta Native News*.

"Traditionally, at the darkest time of the year is when we take that time of rest to assess how the year has gone, reflect on the past six months and dream about the future of the next six months."

He told CBC News, "It's about bringing light to the darkest night of the year, as well."

Carter says public art allows him to "flex those creative muscles and push myself as an artist," while also serving as a means of expressing his culture, exploring Indigenous iconography.

"It's really important to share the culture and my artwork is definitely inspired by it, and me being an Indigenous man, it totally reflects and affects my work," said Carter, who hails from Little River Cree

Nation south of the Caribou Mountains.

Carter said he began his career as a stone sculptor, but branched out by painting pictures of his sculptures on solid colour canvases.

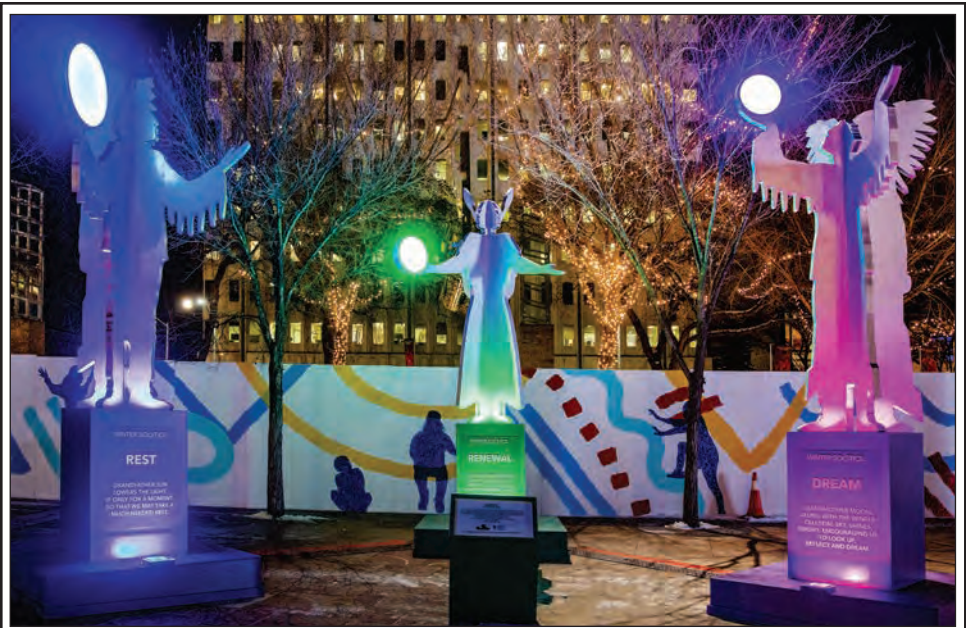
"That's where the whole style evolved and grew from, with that need to fill the space with colour to supplement my carving show," he said.

Carter is in the midst of his latest project, which involves painting 150 hockey sticks for Hockey Canada.

Puneeta McBryan, executive director of the Edmonton Downtown Business Association, told CBC News that art installations like Carter's benefit all the nearby businesses that are re-opening after almost two years of uncertainty.

"When we can add some light, add some moments of joy, it makes it much easier to get people down and supporting small businesses," said McBryan.

Carter's Winter Solstice sculptures will be on display at Churchill Square until Jan. 3.



YEG Winter Solstice Installation by Jason Carter.

The theme at Sir Winston Churchill Square is "the more, the merrier" this holiday season with special activities on Saturday nights including lights, music, art and Christmas cheer. Plan to visit the Square on December 20 for a multitude of fun family activities happening from noon to 8pm. Get tickets on the Holiday Light Up Express Train, listen to live musical performances, enjoy winter activities with the Art Gallery of Alberta, John Janzen Nature Centre, and The Reuse Centre, or enjoy an outdoor video screening of the Citadel Theatre's A Christmas Carol. Check the full schedule online at lightup.edmontondowntown.com.

Stony Nakoda language resources launched

The Stoney Education Authority (SEA), with support from The Language Conservancy, is releasing historic Stoney Nakoda language learning resources this month. This release includes three picture books, a Level 1 textbook, and an alphabet colouring book. The release also includes several digital resources: a 9,000-word web and mobile dictionary, a textbook-accompanying media player app, and a vocabulary-building app.

Producing learning materials in the Stoney Nakoda language is no small task, especially amid a global pandemic, but the work is essential for future generations of speakers. Stoney Elders, linguists, and an entire support team spent the last two years creating a lexical database through revolutionary processes known as Rapid Word Collection (RWC)

and Rapid Rerecord (RRC). These meticulous word collection and definition verification methods typically require in-person gatherings; however, due to COVID restrictions, those committed to the mission pivoted and completed the project through a series of virtual events.

Language is a cornerstone of human identity, and it is a critical element in the continuation of Indigenous culture, customs, and global linguistic diversity. For Cherith Mark, Cultural and Language Coordinator for the Stoney Education Authority, these new learning materials are a bridge between tradition and modernity.

"The new Stoney language resources will provide new learners with the opportunity to acquire language

learning in a unique way. In particular, the Stoney language apps and online dictionary provide the recorded voices of Stoney elders and speakers for the purpose of preserving the traditional oral ways while integrating with new modern technologies," Mark says.

Efforts to preserve the Stoney Nakoda language won't stop with the December learning materials release. "These new resources are just the first step in a multi-year project, and the next step of resources are already being developed," Mark says. A student dictionary, a Level 2 textbook, a podcast series, and continued dictionary updates are currently in the works.

For more information visit stoneyeducation.ca.

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Maskwacis Cree Honour Indigenous War Veterans

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

November 8 is National Indigenous Remembrance Day – a day when Canadians recognize and remember the military service by First Nation, Metis, and Inuit communities.

Maskwacis held their annual Maskwacis Cree Indigenous Remembrance Day in front of the Maskwacis cenotaph, which pays tribute to Indigenous war veterans from each of the four nations that make up Maskwacis Cree.

“Montana First Nation is proud to be hosting this year’s Indigenous Remembrance Day to honour the sacrifices of our members,” said Carol Rabbit, Councillor of Montana Cree Nation.

After a short procession that consisted of local dignitaries, RCMP officials, prominent Maskwacis members, and Indigenous war veterans, speeches were made about the importance of Indigenous contributions to previous wars and sacrifices made by Indigenous war veterans and their families.

“Maskwacis Cree Remembrance Day is held annually, with responsibility for hosting rotating among each of the Four Nations. This year it was Montana First Nation,” said Shane Strongman, Master of Ceremonies and member of Montana First Nation.

Strongman said he is proud to be part of an event that honours Indigenous war veterans who paid the ultimate sacrifice. “We are thankful to the Ponoka Legion for stepping up this year, attending, and being involved,” said Strongman.

“The majority of Canadians do not know about Indigenous veterans. Having an Indigenous Veterans Day is very important, so Canadians become aware of the contributions made by Indigenous veterans who made this country what it is today,” said Stan

Orlesky, a member of the Royal Canadian Legion in Ponoka.

Orlesky said it was his first time coming to the Maskwacis Cree Indigenous Remembrance Day ceremony and it was fantastic.

“Today is important, Nov 8. recognizes that our people have done their part in all the great wars. For many of the war veterans, they gave up their rights as Indigenous people to serve,” said Samson Cree Nation Chief Vernon Saddleback.

Alberta Indigenous Relations Minister Rick Wilson attended Maskwacis to pay tribute to Indigenous war veterans and honour the memory of Indigenous people who served in the Canadian military.

“Many thanks to the Montana Chief and Council for hosting this year’s somber and powerful ceremony. Heartfelt thanks to all of the other participants, especially those who took the time to share their personal stories with us – we will remember them,” said Wilson.

“Our Indigenous veterans went to war and fought for rights, freedoms, and privileges they themselves were denied in Canada,” said Samson Cree Nation Councillor Katherine Swampy.

“Maskwacis Cree members have been represented in every foreign conflict that Canada has been involved in. Yet, they have never been recognized in return,” said MLA Richard Feehan Indigenous Relations Critic and former Minister of Indigenous Relations of Alberta.

He said we as Canadians need to do more celebrating of Indigenous war veterans who were neglected for years. “They fought in World War I and 2; when they came home they didn’t get any of



Chief Vern Saddleback and Leo Bruno, holding a photo of his Mosom who died in WWI.

the extra services that non-Indigenous veterans got and they weren’t even allowed to join the Legion.”

He said ceremonies such as today’s help Canadians remember that Indigenous people dedicated themselves to Canada and fought for all Canadians.

“My Mosom (grandfather) private Daniel Joshua died in World War I; he paid the ultimate sacrifice for our peace and freedoms,” said Leo Bruno.

Bruno said Indigenous war veterans never got the acknowledgment when they returned from the wars and they dealt with systemic racism within the Canadian army. “Many of the Indigenous war veterans came back to Canada hoping things would have changed but they continued to be treated with disrespect and hate by Canadians.”

The Canadian Veterans Compensation Act annexed the outskirts of Maskwacis lands to non-Indigenous soldiers for payment without the prior consent of the four bands, explained Bruno. There has been no compensation given to Indigenous families for their sacrifices in the Canadian war.

Lest we forget.

AU alum *cont. from p 7*

Clark said there is also much to learn about practising medicine in First Nation communities just from the administrative side, because health care on First Nations falls under the purview of the federal rather than the provincial government, so specific knowledge is needed to effectively work within those two systems.

“And mental health is probably one of the next domains that’s going to end up having specific Indigenous criteria for developing education and

interventions,” he said.

While Clark has seen success throughout his career, earning many awards and accolades along the way, there are several accomplishments in Indigenous cultural safety that to him are the most significant.

He worked to establish a research partnership with the University of Manitoba for Inuit in Manitoba to engage and have a protocol for research partnership agreements. He also helped establish a framework that incorporates partnership principles as part of the Manitoba health system transformation process.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Clark was part of a team that quickly developed an identifier that allowed Manitoba Health to track Inuit in Manitoba, either as residents or Inuit coming south for patient care, in diagnostic tests—like identifiers used to report

the total number of tests conducted and positive results to First Nations within the province.

“It’s phenomenal, because with that method in place, it’s possible to consider how Inuit identifiers can be leveraged in other parts of the health-care system, and for Inuit organizations to access data for what they need to know,” he said.

The message Clark said he hopes to carry to others through both his professional academic work and in earning this award from AU, is that it is becoming easier to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into academic work. He hopes other Inuit will be inspired to pursue their own education in a way that respects and reflects their culture.

“I want to carry the message of post-secondary opportunities to Inuit who live in northern communities,” he said. “It is possible to get a degree through distance education when you’re living in these locations.”

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for healthy, happy holidays.



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Art Gallery of St. Albert presents nêhiyaw teachings of the Thirteen Sacred Moons

The Art Gallery of St. Albert is presenting a special ongoing series entitled *We Are the Medicine* by Lana Whiskeyjack in its main exhibition space until January 29, 2022. The stunning image on the cover of this month's *Alberta Native News* entitled Sâkipakâwîpîsim - Leaf budding moon by Lana Whiskeyjack is part of this exhibit.

The series *We Are the Medicine* presents a deeply personal rendering of the nêhiyaw teachings of the Thirteen Sacred Moons. Within the nêhiyaw (Cree) annual calendar, the year is divided into thirteen moons, each with their own teachings and spiritual significance. Passed on in ceremony and from community knowledge keepers, the teachings remind iskwêwak (women) and diverse genders of their sacred relationship to nurture and safeguard the cultural lifestyle of the community.

Lana Whiskeyjack is a multidisciplinary artist and scholar from Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Treaty Six, Alberta. Based in amiskwaciy waskahikan (Edmonton), Whiskeyjack creates deeply thoughtful works steeped in emotional and spiritual significance. As the title of the exhibition suggests, her work is an act of recognition and gratitude to ancestral medicine, restoring balance and nêhiyaw perspective.

"A traditional concept that has been shared with me throughout my life is that we are born with the medicine that we need to restore balance within ourselves," said Whiskeyjack in 2020. "I am reminded by each creation that I am born with

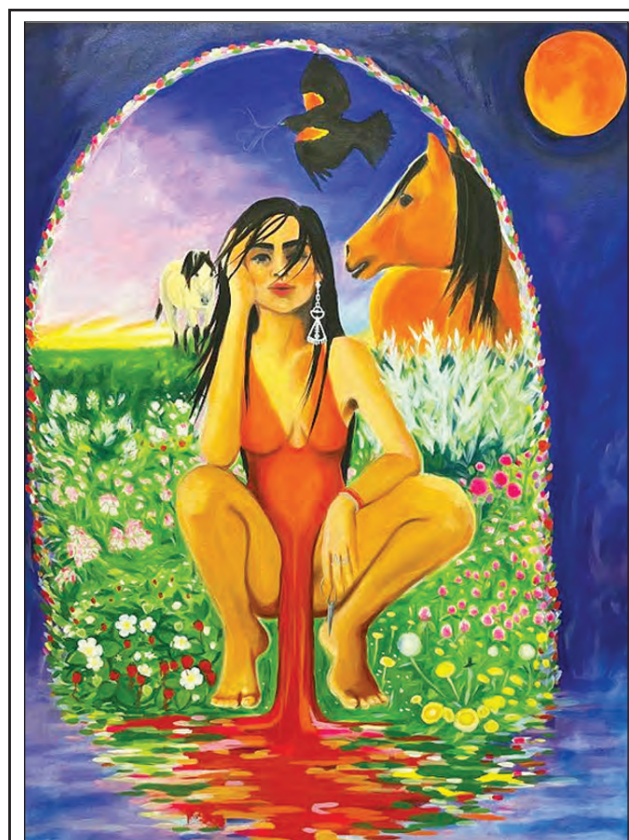
the medicine to help myself."

Luscious, vibrant colours permeate each portrait-like study. Whiskeyjack captures relationships and interconnections, incorporates relatives (human and more-than-human, past and present), tools, seasonal changes and natural phenomena into a wider conversation. Her intention is to convey the beauty and vitality of nêhiyaw culture, promoting curiosity, un/learning and to soulfully (re)connect to the spirit of being a human of this land.

"This is the first time we're showing Lana Whiskeyjack's work," said curator Emily Baker, "and it's the first time that this series has been seen all together so it's brand new." Baker will be leading a virtual tour of the exhibit on December 14 at noon and an in-person tour on December 17 at noon. Registrations can be made via Eventbrite at artgalleryofstalbert.ca.

As part of the Restriction Exemption Program, proof of vaccination, medical exemption or a negative PCR or rapid test within 72 hours of visiting is required to access the Gallery. Visit the Gallery's COVID website page for more information. The Gallery's COVID-19 protocols compliment government regulations to provide a safe space for families to visit.

The Art Gallery of St. Albert is located at 19 Perron Street in St. Albert. For details about tours and operating hours visit artgalleryofstalbert.ca



On exhibit at AGSA: by Lana Whiskeyjack, pâskowihowîpîsim - Egg hatching moon (June), 2021. Oil on canvas, 48x60.

Kainai, Siksika *cont. from p 2*

The nations say Montem offered them \$275,000 to fund impact studies in exchange for withdrawing their request for a federal review.

"Montem and Kainai have not developed a positive working relationship," says the letter from that nation.

"This is primarily because Montem's approach to consultation has been transactional, informal and not reflective of an adequate respect for Kainai's treaty rights and our deep cultural connection to the Crowsnest Pass."

Siksika Chief Ouray Crowfoot wrote that Montem isn't making efforts to have "meaningful consultation with Siksika."

Montem CEO Peter Doyle told CP that he appreciates the two bands' concerns.

"The Kanai and Siksika Nations have expressed their dissatisfaction with Montem's current efforts at engagement," wrote Doyle. "We take that to heart and will work with these First Nations to rectify the situation."

"Montem fully recognizes its need and obligation for meaningful consultation."

The two nations also criticized the company for leaving out of its submission the fact that there is already a proposal to build an adjacent coal mine right across the border in British Columbia.

The letter from Kainai says the nation learned about a proposal from Montem to potentially

replace the coal mine with a renewable energy project through the media.

The Tent Mountain project is one of the proposals that came about after the UCP government rescinded the 1976 coal policy, which prohibited open-pit mining in the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

That policy has since been reinstated after public outcry from First Nations, ranchers, environmentalists and country singers, who were concerned about its impact on the region's water supply.

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AGA exhibit honours IRS victims

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

George Littlechild, an award-winning Indigenous artist, currently has an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA) entitled: *Here I am - can you see me?*

It is a series of 22 drawings that depict First Nations children who perished while attending residential school in Maskwacis, Alberta.

Here I am — can you see me?, curated by MJ Belcourt, marks the first inaugural exhibition of Littlechild’s work, not only to members of the public, but as a complete series.

“This is the first time I have seen this work displayed together,” he said.

The collection began as a personal mission of Littlechild’s to identify previously unknown children in archived Residential school photos.

Littlechild asked multiple elders— all of whom have passed away since the initial questioning — about the photographs he had collected and found that a small percentage of children were unable to be identified.

“In these photographs there were always certain children no one knew. Why didn’t they know? [The elders] seemed very clear. They would identify about 88 per cent of the photograph — they knew all the kids’ names,” he said.

He then took it upon himself to draw the unknown children. “I really felt like it was my responsibility to tell their story,” he said. “What happened to them?

Did they die at the school?... Why does no one know who they are?”

“I wanted to give each and every one of those children in those photographs a voice.”

Littlechild also shares a personal connection to the residential school issue as he mentioned many family members who experienced them first-hand. He is also a 60s scoop survivor who was taken from his family and experienced traumatic abuse by his foster-parents.

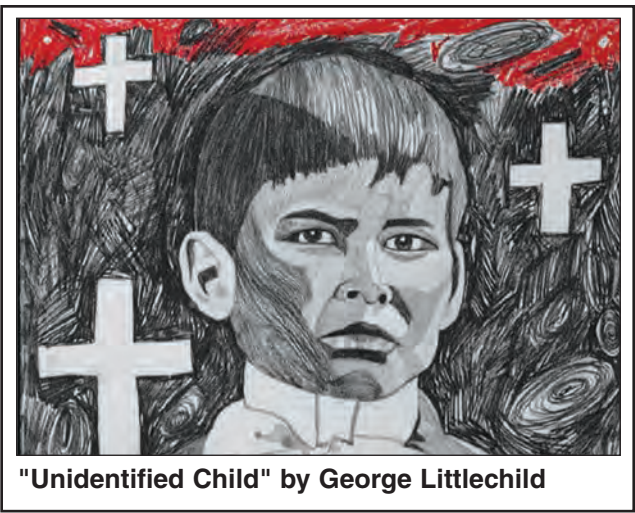
Residential schools were government-sponsored, church-run educational institutions that were made to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into Western culture.

“Can you imagine someone coming to your home and taking your children away? And you never saw them, perhaps ever again. Cause that’s what happened,” Littlechild said.

In total, an estimated 150,000 First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children attended residential schools.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada conservatively estimates that between 4,000 and 6,000 children died while in attendance.

“I want to give remembrance, recognition, honour and validation to the thousands of innocent children that nobody is able to recognize as they stand amongst their fellow residential school students in the photographs, all but forgotten in the museum archival



collections,” said Littlechild.

“In this manner I seek to legitimize their lives and restore a modicum of dignity and importance to their short existence in the world.”

Littlechild received a diploma in art and design from Red Deer College in 1984, and later obtained a B.F.A. from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax in 1988. He also received an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of the Fraser Valley.

The exhibition runs at the AGA to March 14, 2022.

The Art Gallery of Alberta is located at #2 Sir Winston Churchill Square in downtown Edmonton. For information call 780-422-6223. Pre-register for in person and online tickets at youraga.ca. COVID health and safety protocols will be strictly enforced.

Record-breaking number of deaths in Alberta’s Child Services

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

According to figures released by Alberta Children’s Services, the province is on track for a record-

breaking number of fatalities in youth or young adults receiving intervention or services from the

government this year.

Thirty youth and young adults died between April 1, 2021 and October 31, 2021 — with four additional deaths being recorded in November.

Twenty-three of them were Indigenous.

First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children are disproportionately represented in Alberta’s child welfare system, making up 64 per cent of the overall provincial caseload.

Children’s Services Minister Rebecca Schulz has said that the province is currently working towards implementing Bill C-92, a 2019 federal legislation that created national standards on how Indigenous children are to be treated and prioritized placing children with extended family and/or in home communities.

However, Schulz has said that despite the figures, it is too early to draw conclusions as 22 cases are still being investigated for the cause of death.

“I am absolutely committed to looking at this data and making changes where they’re needed in the best

Continued on page 15

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George Littlechild, *Unidentified Child* From The *Ermineskin Indian Residential School* #3, 2019. Mixed media on paper. Courtesy of the Artist. This work was supported by the British Columbia Arts Council.

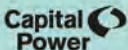
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Christmas past

By Xavier Kataquapit, Under the Northern Sky

Christmas was always a season of chaos and confusion for me as a child. It was a strange mix of excitement and joy mixed also with feelings of anxiety and worry.

On one hand, our parents did everything they could to follow the strange modern commercial Christmas that we saw happening everywhere else in the country and on TV. On the other hand we had to take part in the religious history of the birth of a saviour named Jesus and the ceremonies of ancient Middle Eastern, European traditions.

My mom Susan was born and raised in the northern remote wilderness and my dad Marius had lived his whole life in our home community of Attawapiskat. Both of them had been raised in a traditional life of hunting, trapping, fishing and living off the land like our ancestors had for thousands of years. Their lives revolved around the land and the movements of the animals throughout the year.

The ideas of Christmas must have been very foreign to them but they followed in its tradition because it was part of the Christian faith. In more modern times, it was very confusing for all of us to understand the commercial images of Santa Claus, snowmen, elves, Christmas trees, bright colourful decorations and lights everywhere. We all just fell in line with the rest of the country and we were mesmerized by the chaotic excitement of the year without really understanding what it was all about.

I never really understood it all but the best part of the celebrations for me was mom’s Christmas feast. It was a mix of modern foods with turkey, ham, salads and sugary desserts combined with traditional foods like roasted wild goose, and stews of moose meat or caribou mixed with dumplings. As children we watched mom making magic in the kitchen with

excitement and later as teenagers, we joined in the work to help her in preparing food.

One of mom’s specialties was Christmas fruit cake. In Cree this cake is called Kas-kah-pah-chee-kan. She made hers in a large round donut pan that provided enough cake for all of us. When we were all much younger, mom only ever made one cake at time during Christmas. It wasn’t until we grew older and could help in the kitchen that she started mass producing six, seven or eight cakes a year to share with family and friends in town. As a child, I was never fond of these cakes because I preferred the store bought chocolates and candies. It wasn’t until later in the life that I grew to appreciate this seasonal cake and now I enjoy it because it reminds me of those special times with my family and my mom Susan.

The most memorable moments from my family’s Christmas get togethers were those times when there was no alcohol or drugs in the community. These were special times when we as children could feel safe, secure and happy. When adults in town were partying all that changed. Of course we all realize now that the prevalent use of alcohol and drugs had to do with a history of colonization, residential schools and oppression. Many of us drank or used drugs to forget and to numb the pain.

No matter what the root cause the fact is that when we as adults turn to using alcohol or drugs and in particular at times of the year that are supposed to be happy, our young ones are terrorized. Most adults don’t realize the terror and trauma they cause to younger people when the holiday drinking takes over everything. The culture and traditions of our ancestors long ago did not include these substances and of



course life then was very different as people were connected in a very direct way to Mother Earth.

Our healing journey from the effects of colonization is a long one. It is my hope that you will give yourself, your family and your friends the gift of sobriety this Christmas and start the new year with a life of healing and recovery. Don’t forget your children are watching your every move and they learn from you. If they accept that alcohol or drugs should be part of their lives then you are responsible for letting that happen.

If you are having problems with addictions, pick up the phone and reach out for help. Many of us have ghosts of Christmas past in memories that have to do with drinking or drugs and tragic circumstances. If we make positive changes for ourselves and those we love in Christmas present, then we can look forward to better times in Christmases yet to come.

Number of deaths *cont. from p 14*

interests of children,” said Schulz.

Schulz has said the child intervention budget has been increased by \$14 million this year.

This report comes as the Government confirmed it will reduce the age of eligibility for the Support and Financial Assistance Agreement (SFAA) from 24 to 22.

“We’ve been very clear that for any young adults who cannot transition off this program, they will continue to receive services,” said Schulz.

NDP children’s services critic Rakhi Pancholi said, “This is heartbreaking. It is the highest number of deaths of children and young people receiving child intervention services at this point in the year as far back as reporting goes.”

“This has been a devastating time for many young people in Alberta but particularly the most vulnerable

who are in care predominantly most of them are Indigenous,” said Pancholi.

According to the provincial report, the majority of children who died did so during the “initial assessment” or while the child was transitioning from care and “receiving support and financial assistance” from the province.

“There’s clearly a lot of questions that need to be answered,” she said.

“But more importantly, we need to take this very seriously and get to work right now; this has been a devastating time for many young people in Alberta.”

The NDP opposition has called on the government to reconvene a multi-party panel on children intervention, “to improve and strengthen the child

intervention system and ensure that we are doing everything we can do help children and vulnerable young Albertans transitioning to adulthood survive and thrive.”

In 2018, a Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention delivered 26 recommendations to the province — Schulz says that all but one of the recommendations have been instated or are currently being worked on.

“A lot of the information we don’t yet have, and so we are committed to being transparent and to making changes where necessary,” said Schulz.

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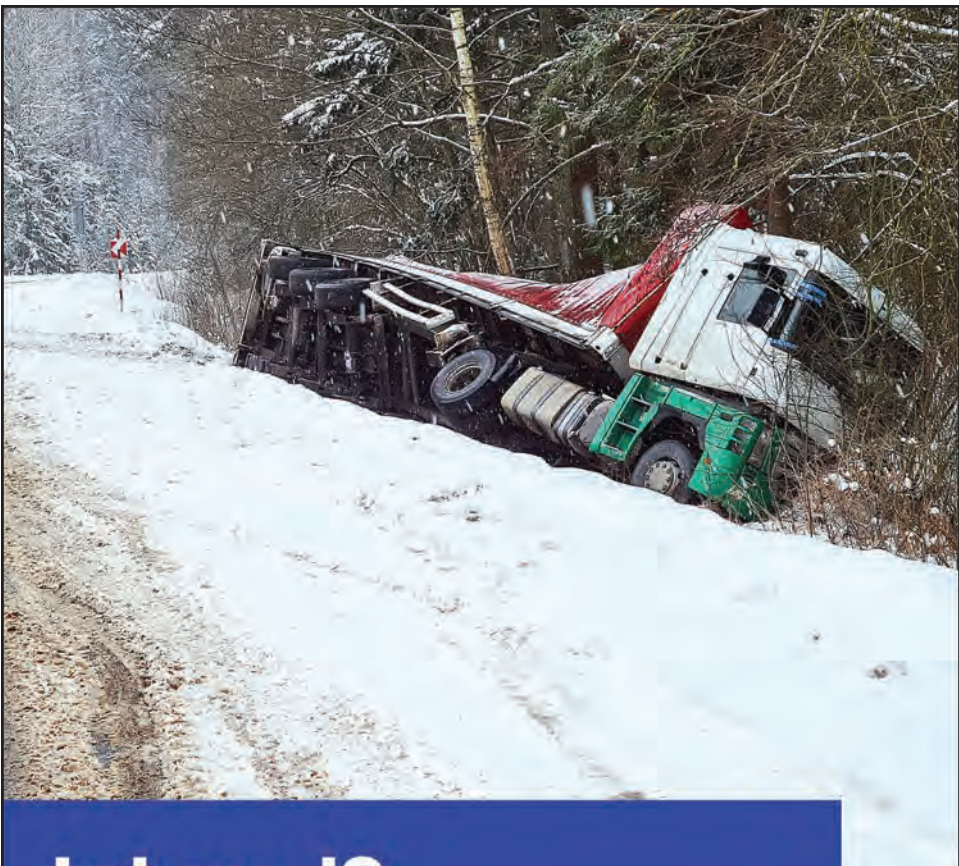
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