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Over 5000 delegates attended the National Elders Gathering in Edmonton from Oct. 30 to Nov. 2. Drum groups welcomed the delegates during the Grand Entries and also performed during the Closing marches. Photos by Terry Lusty

# Elders Gathering attracts over 5000 in Edmonton

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Edmonton, host city for the first National Elders Gathering (NGE) back in 2017, was again the site for its third round at Northlands Expo Centre over four days, from October 30 to November 2. As was the case in 2017, the colossal gathering realized over 5,000 registered attendees.

With this year's theme being *Coming Home, Voices of Elders*, Day One kicked off with a traditional grand entry featuring representations from innumerable communities throughout the provinces and northern territories, in addition to a sprinkling from our American neighbours to the south. Over 4,000 delegates packed the place on that first day to witness and/or participate in the

opening grand entry, pick up their registrations, and settle into some of the offered sessions.

The grand entry proved most colourful as many of the delegates donned Indigenous-designed regalia, ribbon shirts and/or skirts, jackets, and sweaters.

The event was also a *deja vu* for many of the visitors who renewed former acquaintances or made new ones. The smiles, handshakes, backslaps, hugs and acknowledgements were heartwarming - reminiscent of a huge family reunion.

The NGE is meant to "build bridges and foster greater understanding and reconciliation" between all people and to show the world that the Elders' words and teachings are valued, and that their legacy and resilience are honoured.

It is a means of learning one another's history, culture and traditions via storytelling and information sharing. It's a time to build relationships and friendships and to renew past ones, to exchange memories, knowledge, and experiences.

The NGE's specific vision statement is expressed as, "igniting the spirit of sharing and celebration through the guidance and wisdom of the Elders, walking in harmony and in unity." The national event was federally incorporated as a non-profit society in 2017. It requires a lot of planning, discussions, cooperation, teamwork, effort and a belief in what you are doing.

The 2017 initiative spawned the development of NICE (National Indigenous Cultural Expo) in 2018, which drew 7,000-plus attendees to Edmonton and featured cultural workshops, a powwow, an arts and crafts tradeshow, Metis dance and music, handgames, Inuit traditions, a fashion show, and more. NGE is overseen by a vital advisory council represented by Treaty 6, 7,

and 8 regions, as well as the Metis Nation of Alberta, Metis Settlements General Council, Inuit Edmonton and the Assembly of First Nations.

The opening day of the gathering included a "unity" Round Dance just before the supper hour. All four days commenced with a 7 a.m. pipe ceremony (four different pipes) presided over by Elder Fred Campiou. The ceremony was followed by 8 a.m. NGE registrations on each of the first three days.

From 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Days Two and Three included presentations on: reconciliation, culture and language, health and wellness, climate change, children and family, and justice.

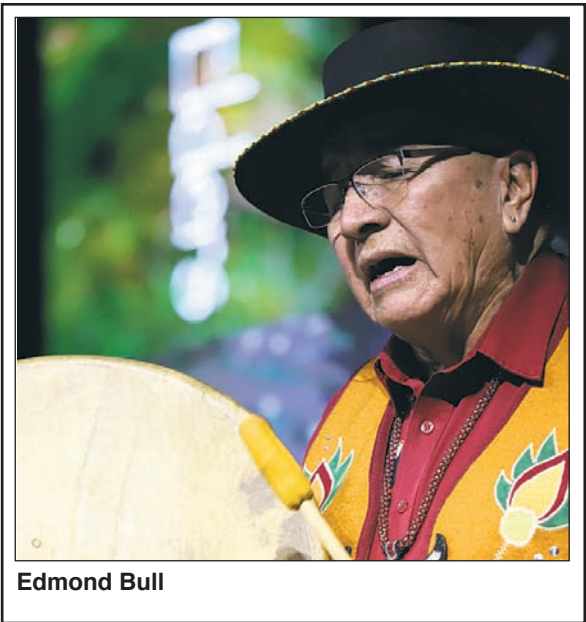
Out of respect for tradition and protocol, organizers wisely incorporated smudging, sweat lodges and Elder resting areas.

Day Two was also really well attended; it featured high-energy handgame demonstrations and a special talent show in the latter portion of the day. One highlight of the afternoon was a performance by the terrific country and bluegrass group from Alberta, the Soggy Bottom Boys. Their presentation was very professional, comparable to the pros in Nashville doing the songs.

Both the handgames and talent show attracted hundreds of viewers and dozens of participants from the NGE delegate ranks. The handgames were comprised of teams from the far northern communities of the Dene Tha and the Deh Cho.

An early presenter on Day Two was Elder Regena Crowchild whose background includes a long-involved period with the former Indian Association of Alberta. The Tsuut'ina First Nation member addressed a lot of the early Canadian

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# Priscilla Whitehead: You are worthy of what you are doing

Priscilla Whitehead has spent most of her life caring for others. She worked as a health care aide for 17 years before deciding to go back to school. Her journey to self-care and empowerment through education, and the challenges she has faced along the way, is a testament to her resilience.

When she originally enrolled as a Northern Lakes College student in 1999, Priscilla’s studies were interrupted upon the birth of her first son. She resumed her schooling again in 2003, but withdrew from her program to provide care after her family suffered two traumatic losses. Following that experience, Priscilla became a health care aide, putting her instinctive drive to nurture and support others to important use within her community.

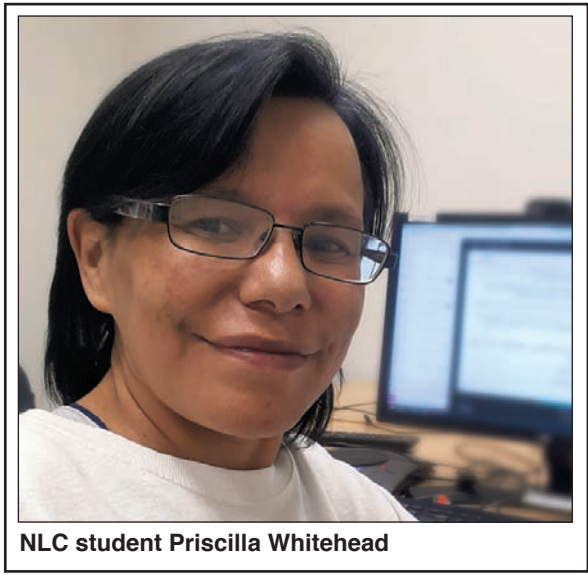
Priscilla was soon handpicked for management positions. Impressed by her dedication, insight, and innovation, Priscilla’s manager encouraged her to enrol in the Business Administration program at Northern Lakes College so that she would have the credentials needed to gain career promotions. Priscilla was moved by the confidence others placed in her abilities and decided to take their advice. She first enrolled in NLC’s Academic Upgrading program to meet the

Business Administration program prerequisites, and then registered in the Business Administration program.

“The Business Administration program teaches all the ins and outs of business management,” Priscilla reports. “There’s a lot to learn, so it’s important to be able to juggle all kinds of things: work, family, education. But the teachers have been patient. They really support their students.”

Despite the best laid plans and Priscilla’s ability to manage life’s challenges, a biking accident in September 2022 added another hurdle for Priscilla to overcome. The accident resulted in a broken hip and a month-long hospital stay following surgery. Despite the pain she suffered as she recovered, Priscilla’s determination to continue her education prevailed, in part because of the Supported Distance Learning model at Northern Lakes College.

“Going to NLC has saved me more times than I can count,” Priscilla reflects. “Having those online classes kept my mind off everything I was going through. I was connecting with people who I shared values with, and I was hearing other people, and, in a way, that made me feel like I wasn’t alone.”



NLC student Priscilla Whitehead

Priscilla came to view her education as a way to give back to herself; something she struggled to do at first. She explains, “A part of me felt like going back to school was selfish, but my friends and family reminded me that it was time. That my kids were grown, and that my education would be a good way to help other people in the future.”

The advice she has for prospective students comes directly from the heart. “Don’t be afraid or scared of anything. Go for it. You are capable. And you are worthy of what you’re doing.”

Northern Lakes College offers many programs through Supported Distance Learning. Visit [northernlakescollege.ca/programs-courses](http://northernlakescollege.ca/programs-courses) for more information.

## Alberta’s pledge to vulnerable youth

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Alberta is embarking on a transformative journey towards ending gender-based violence with a groundbreaking bilateral funding agreement inked with the federal government. In an exclusive interview with Chevi Rabbit of *Alberta Native News*, the Honourable Tanya Fir,

Minister of Arts, Culture, and Status of Women, passionately delved into this agreement’s details and immense significance. *ANNews* also contacted members of the public for their responses on gender-based violence from their perspectives and lived experiences.

The bilateral agreement between the Federal and Provincial governments highlights Alberta’s need for gender-based funding. The landmark funding agreement, amounting to \$54 million over four years, will play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing a unique 10-year strategy designed exclusively for Alberta to address this pressing concern. Minister Fir affirmed her dedication to working collaboratively with her colleagues to ensure a government-wide approach

*Continued on page 9*

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# Catlin Chiasson's journey of inclusivity and resilience

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Edmonton Police Service (EPS) Officer Catlin Chiasson was recently celebrated at a Naming Ceremony at Alexander First Nation; it was a momentous event in his life. A dedicated constable with EPS, Catlin’s story is an inspiring example of inclusivity and resilience that resonates across police services in Canada. His journey is marked by courage, resilience, and authenticity, as he openly embraced his identity as a gay man and rekindled his profound connection with his Indigenous heritage.

Catlin Chiasson, now calling Edmonton home, originally hails from a small town in New Brunswick. His early years were a tumultuous journey, rife with teasing, exclusion, and a battle for self-acceptance. He candidly reflects on those challenging times, saying, “I was in a pretty tough place when I was in grade 7, middle school. I got severely teased, couldn’t change comfortably in the change rooms, and was excluded from groups. I wasn’t very social because I wasn’t accepting myself, and it was a hard, few years.”

In addition to receiving an Indigenous name as a prominent Indigenous EPS Officer, Catlin shared his journey of coming out as an openly gay man, a challenge faced by many LGBTQ members. October 11, National Coming Out Day, is of immense significance for the LGBTQ+ community, symbolizing the importance of breaking the silence and embracing one’s true self. Catlin beautifully articulates its significance, stating, “National Coming Out Day holds immense importance for many of us in the LGBTQ+ community. It’s a day when we acknowledge the power of breaking the silence and embracing our true selves. It’s a celebration of authenticity.” His story is a beacon of hope for LGBTQ Canadians, assuring them they are not alone in their journey.

A pivotal moment in Catlin’s life came when his parents decided to hold him back a year in the 8th grade, a decision he initially resisted. However, this turned out to be a cornerstone in his journey. Reflecting on this period, Catlin shares, “I was held back in grade 8, and at the time, I didn’t like it, but today I am so thankful that they chose to do that. It was the best decision ever.”

Returning to school with a fresh perspective, Catlin underwent a significant transformation. He found his voice, began standing up for himself and others, and, in doing so, helped his peers and himself grow. He explains, “I knew how I felt in that area, so I started stepping up for them. It made me feel very fulfill[ed], and I knew they used to come to me in the cafeteria and talk to me.”

At the age of 21, Catlin made the courageous decision to come out to his parents; it was a pivotal conversation that lifted a heavy burden from his shoulders. He shares, “I have something to tell you. You remember when I was nine years old, right? I was 21, and it was in the living room. My mom and dad both hugged me, we all cried, and we had a moment. It was like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders.”



Catlin Chiasson and Elder Fred Campiou

Catlin Chiasson’s journey of reconnecting with his Indigenous heritage began when he moved to Alberta. He immersed himself in Indigenous traditions, learned Cree and Blackfoot, and underwent a cultural reawakening that deepened his connection to his heritage. As he puts it, “I learned a lot about my culture, and I started understanding my heritage.”

One of the most meaningful experiences in Catlin’s cultural journey was his Indigenous naming ceremony, presided over by an Elder from the Alexander First Nation. The ceremony held profound significance and served as a source of grounding and spiritual connection. During the sacred pipe ceremony, Catlin was given with his Indigenous name, “Flying Eagle Spirit Child.” The name symbolizes his cultural identity and spiritual connection, serving as a source of grounding and meaning in his life.

The Indigenous Naming Ceremony was a profoundly emotional experience for Catlin. It highlighted the importance of understanding and respecting diverse cultural heritages in our society, underscoring the significance of cultural identity and heritage. Reflecting on the moment, he says, “I got chills, and my hair stood on end. There were two Eagles flying outside, a sign of the spiritual significance of the event.”

As an EPS constable, Catlin has played a pivotal role in bridging cultural gaps and building connections within Indigenous communities. His journey of rediscovery and cultural immersion has made him a respected figure in the community. He emphasizes, “It’s important to build those relationships, and it’s essential to listen to the community and their concerns.”

Edmonton Police Service’s recent recruits reflect an inspiring commitment to diversity and inclusion, with over 60% identifying as Indigenous, people of colour, or gender/sexually diverse, totalling 159 new hires in the last three years. This is a remarkable step forward in building a more inclusive force. Catlin is a positive role model for all Indigenous youth out there and a community leader in Edmonton.



# Indigenous veterans honoured with new memorials in Grande Prairie

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A National Indigenous Veterans Day memorial event was held on November 8, 2023, at the Veterans Memorial Garden & Interpretive Centre in Grand Prairie, Alberta, on Treaty 8 territory. The event was held to honour Indigenous veterans and remember the fallen and bless the new Indigenous & Metis War memorials – Invisible and Infinity.

November 8, 2023, is National Indigenous Veterans Day, a memorial day observed in Canada in recognition of Indigenous contributions to military service, particularly in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. The day was first commemorated in 1994 in Manitoba.

The event began with a beautiful Indigenous rendition of O Canada, an opening prayer and two minutes of silence, before a youth, Aiden Goodswimmer, led *The Commitment To Remember* and sang a beautiful Warrior Song. Aiden recited, “They were young, as we are young, They served, giving freely of themselves. To them, we pledge, amid the winds of time, To carry their torch and never forget. We will remember them.” The commitment to remember is a solemn promise to honour and commemorate the sacrifices made by others.

Historically, Indigenous people were exempt from being drafted for mandatory service. However, over four thousand Indigenous men enlisted in the First World War and over three hundred of them died. There were also over twenty thousand volunteers for the Second World War, in which over two hundred died. Many Indigenous people continue to serve today.

Grande Prairie City Councillor, Gladys Blackmore, spoke about the thousands of First

Nations individuals who joined the First World War. She shared that when they joined, they lost their First Nations rights in exchange for the right to vote and become a Canadian citizen. However, at the end of the war when they returned home again, they lost that right to vote and their Canadian citizenship and regained their First Nations status. This treatment of First Nations veterans continued through the first and second world wars. Gladys said that “we need to do better. We are starting today in these kinds of ceremonies thanking First Nations and all Indigenous people for standing up for Canada in a way that we did not stand up for you, for joining us to bring freedom to the world and to ensure that our lifestyle continues.”

Randi Gage, a female Veteran from Manitoba and founder of this memorial day, travelled to Alberta to attend the event. She held an *Every Child Matters* Flag and stated, ‘Every soldier was a child and these kids in my vision are warriors too.’ Randi provided advice to everyone who may know a veteran that is also a mom or dad, grandpa or grandma, with warm hugs to give. She said “make no mistake, beneath those hugs lies a story locked safely behind their mind’s closed doors. Things of pain and horror you need not know. Respect them. Think before you ask a veteran a question that may unlock that closed door. Sometimes, telling those stories rips their heart out.”

President of the Metis Nation of Alberta, Andrea Sandmaier, in her message reminded everyone that “Indigenous Veterans Day commemorates the selflessness of individuals who in many cases willingly relinquished their Indigenous rights to stand in the armed forces.



Randi Gage, Founder of National Indigenous Veterans' Day. Photo by Kinnukana

Many carry the weight of post traumatic stress disorder and faced immense challenges when they returned to their communities. Their sacrifices both on the battlefield and in the aftermath of conflict serve as a testament to their unwavering commitment to the values of duty and honor.”

Len Auger, Grande Prairie Friendship Centre Board Member stated that “Aboriginal Canadians have been a part of our military history for over two hundred years. Some of these veterans are some of the highest decorated soldiers, aviators, and sailors in our military history. Some veterans have been tagged as heroes.” He also shared, “Today, about 3.5% of Canadian Armed Forces is of Indigenous descent representing many distinct cultures and they continue to make Canada proud for their service at home and abroad. We honour their contributions and those before them. In this day and age of reconciliation, acknowledging Aboriginal roles in the protection of Canada will help other citizens understand what true reconciliation means to the country as a whole.”

The event concluded with a blessing of the new

Continued on page 6



The new Invisible Memorial (top) and veterans saluting the Infinity Memorial (bottom) at the Veterans Memorial Garden & Interpretive Centre in Grande Prairie. Screenshot.

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# Court approves \$23B for First Nations child welfare discrimination

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Canada’s Federal Court has approved a \$23-billion settlement agreement to compensate First Nations children and their families for a chronically underfunded child welfare system.

The ruling is a landmark in implementing Jordan’s Principle, which states that funding First Nations services comes first before sorting out any jurisdictional disputes between various orders of government about who is responsible for the funding.

In 2019, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the federal government to pay \$40,000 per person impacted — the largest possible settlement for a human rights violation.

The federal government initially challenged that settlement before backtracking in the face of a class action lawsuit from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and negotiating a deal.

That settlement, which compensates more than 300,000 First Nations people, was approved by the tribunal earlier this year.

Noting that no money will ever be enough to compensate for the harms done to First Nations children, AFN Interim National Chief Joanna Bernard said in an Oct. 23 news release that the settlement nonetheless “represents acknowledgment of those harms and decades of wrongdoing,” which constitutes a “step towards healing for those affected and ensuring this is never repeated through upcoming long-term reform measures to the system.”

AFN Manitoba Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse, who was the AFN’s lead negotiator, called the federal court hearings a “culmination of a years-long process to secure recognition of the harms done by Canada to First Nations children and families.”

One of the lead plaintiffs, Zacheus Trout of Cross Lake First Nation in Manitoba, told *CBC News* that the decision left him feeling “overwhelmed” and “speechless.”

“I hope this brings a change of how we look at Indigenous people and how we can move forward, reconciling all the differences between non-Indigenous and the Indigenous people right across Canada,” said Trout. “It’s history that’s been made here today.”

In 2021, Trout filed a lawsuit against the federal government for failing to provide appropriate health support for his two children, Sanaye and Jacob. Both children died before they turned 10 as a result of Batten disease — a rare neurological condition.

“We do not need to be treated as third class citizens in this country and I hope this makes a big statement for the future generations to come,” he said of the settlement.

Jonavon Meawasige told the CBC about his brother Jeremy, who requires care 24 hours a day, due to cerebral palsy, autism, spinal curvature and hydrocephalus — a debilitating accumulation of spinal fluid in the brain.

Their mother, Maurina Beadle, took the feds to court in 2013, because they would only pay a portion of Jeremy’s health-care costs, and won.

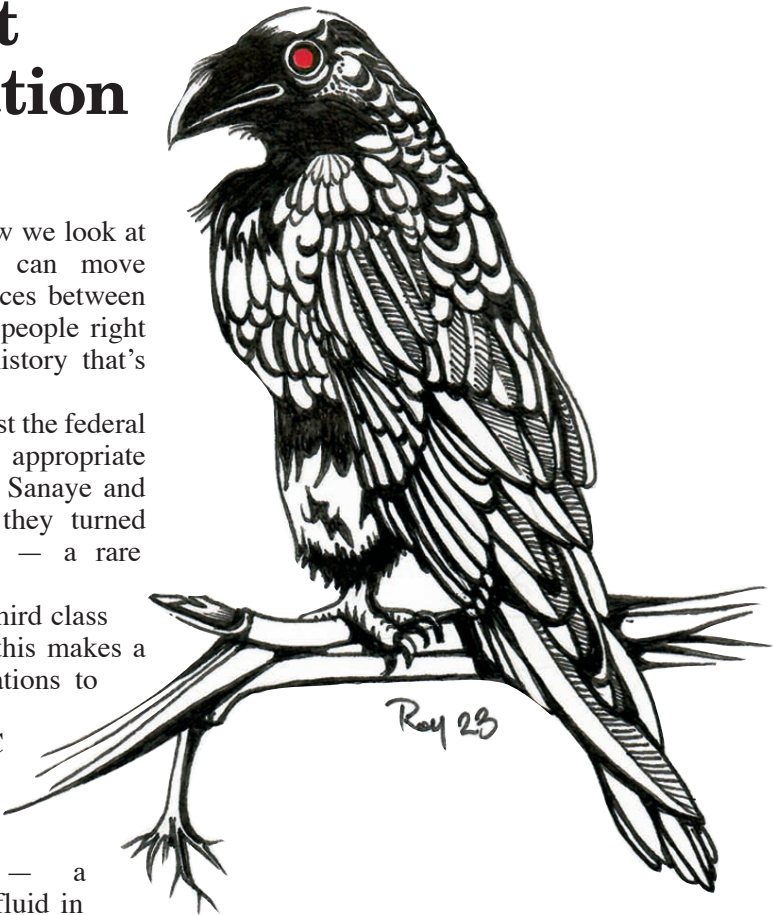
Jonavan Meawasige said Beadle, who died in 2019, “would have been really proud of the decision today.”

“I hope this will keep Jeremy inside his home and keep him loved and keep him with the people that he needs to be with,” said Jonavan.

Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu said the government has recognized the “significant harm that discrimination — I would say systemically racist funding — results in.”

Plaintiff lawyer David Sterns told the CBC that the payments will unlikely be dispersed until the new year, but he added that he is “thrilled” by the fact that they are coming.

“This could make the difference between



having a shelter for some people or being homeless for some people,” he said.

Lawyer Cindy Blackstock, who initiated the fight for federal compensation in 2007, acknowledged that the settlement could serve as “a page turner for the government” in an Oct. 24 interview with the CBC’s *Power and Politics*.

Before the compensation is paid, however, mental health and addictions services in Indigenous communities need to have funding in place for “surge capacity... before, during and after the compensation.”

Blackstock said, ultimately, the government must be held accountable for its commitments.

“We all collectively need to keep our eye on Canada and demand that they stop this discrimination,” she said.

Veterans *cont. from p 5*

memorials at the Veterans Garden and Interpretive Centre. The community started

building the Centre eight years ago. From its inception, the first three gardens were intentionally built to recognize Indigenous people, especially those who attended residential

schools. The residential school garden is an important part of the site because many young men and women who left residential school entered the military, even after they were not treated well.

Renee Charbonneau, emcee of the event said, “They fought, they loved, they died, and they gave us the one thing that no one else can give us, the freedom to believe, to believe in a dream called Kanata (Canada) and we stand here on Treaty 8 territory surrounded by all kinds of people and memories.” Indigenous People are the foundation of this beautiful country, and we need to honour and remember them everyday.




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# New program helps youth create their own businesses

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The *Ohpikiwin: Growing Indigenous Entrepreneurship* event took place on Saturday, November 4th, 2023, at the Alberta Avenue Community League in Edmonton, Alberta. This free event was presented by *Futurpreneur's Indigenous Entrepreneurship Startup Program* (IESP) and aims to foster entrepreneurship, innovation and collaboration as well as empower aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs across the region.

Ohpikiwin is the Cree word for 'growth.' The Ohpikiwin Series: *Journey to Financial Empowerment* focuses on assisting aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs to overcome challenges, develop and grow their business capacity and skills. The national program is delivered in partnership by Futurpreneur, Youth Business International and Accenture.

Indigenous entrepreneurs face unique challenges when launching or growing their businesses. IESP Program Director Holly Atjecoutay said that "Indigenous people face way more challenges than Non-Indigenous entrepreneurs, especially if they live on-reserve. There is stigmatism against Indigenous people, who have to battle stereotypes and racism. Indigenous people are also not the greatest at selling themselves or their business. They are taught by Elders to be kind and humble, also not to be egotistical. Therefore, some Indigenous entrepreneurs don't feel comfortable talking about themselves that much and they face challenges getting into the markets."

Indigenous people often also face barriers to accessing resources, funding and capital. Most small businesses get started using an individual's own resources. A lot of Indigenous people don't have additional resources to rely on. Holly said that Futurpreneur offers these resources to young Indigenous people who want to start and grow a business.

Traditionally at Futurpreneur, there was a credit rating system in order to qualify, but a lot of Indigenous people were scoring outside of the matrix. Holly shared that Futurpreneur made a conscious decision to change the rating and approve low credit clients to receive up to ten thousand dollars for start up capital. People who would not be able to get financing otherwise can now qualify.

The IESP supports Indigenous entrepreneurs aged eighteen to thirty-nine, helping them create or buy their own business. Young Indigenous entrepreneurs can receive up to \$60,000 in collateral-free financing, are matched with an expert mentor for up to two years, and gain access to an array of resources and workshops designed to help them set up their businesses for success.

Every year, Futurpreneur launches about fifty businesses. They also support approximately one thousand people through the various programming they offer, such as workshops, one-on-one advisory supports, mentorship, peer-to-peer networking, and business plan reviews,

including offering information events like Ohpikiwin.

At the event, approximately one hundred attendees listened to a fireside chat with four business leaders, Candace Linklater, Visionary and Founder of Relentless Indigenous Woman Company, Moirae Choquette, CEO and Founder of Tomato Wheels, Ken Letander, Owner and CEO of Strat First Inc., and Crystal Wright, E.E & I Human Resources, Scotiabank, who shared their business journeys and provided expert advice. The panel was moderated by Melissa Gladue, Business Development Manager for the region.

Panel member Ken Letander emphasized the importance of ethical practices as a business owner. He said, "In today's world, there are challenges within the business and corporate sector where there is a lack of resources on many different fronts. People have to report on what they are doing in the business sector. If a business does not have the ethics and integrity, people in the community will start to see that and point it out among your networks. It will spread like wildfire. Ethics is important and you can convey that through transparency as a person and on your website. It is important to not commit to things you cannot do. I've seen that happen too many times and it affects the outcome for individuals and communities who want to access resources in



A fireside chat at the Ohpikiwin: Growing Indigenous Entrepreneurship event. (l-r) Moderator Melissa Gladue, and panel members Candace Linklater, Crystal Wright, Moirae Choquette, and Ken Letander. Photo by Kinnukana

the future."

Participants had an opportunity to network throughout the evening, share business ideas and tips, as several Indigenous service providers and business leaders were in attendance. Aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs also had an opportunity to pitch their business to a panel for a \$500 prize. The pitch competition winner chosen by the judges was Roxanne Auger for her 360 photo booth idea, and the audience favourite was Paula Jefferson, for her Cree Iskwew Design business which has a jewelry line and sells essential oils.

Indigenous Individuals, between the ages of eighteen to thirty-nine, can apply to Futurpreneur for financing, mentorship and resources throughout the year. To be eligible, individuals must be self-identified as Indigenous, a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada, employed full-time by the business within the first year or students in their final year of studies, and must not have claimed bankruptcy in the last five years.

For more information and to sign up with a local Futurpreneur team member and get started on your entrepreneurship journey, go to Indigenous Program – Futurpreneur Canada.



Holly Atjecoutay, IESP Program Director. Photo by Kinnukana.

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# Championing families impacted by gender-based and domestic violence

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In a world where advocates and change-makers leave their indelible mark, one individual is standing out with unwavering strength, grace, and resilience.

Meet Yarrow Currie, who goes by she/they pronouns, a member of Montana First Nation. Her early years were shaped by the tragic circumstances that led her to Alberta Child and Family Services. Yarrow’s journey embodies experiential learning, resilience, and an unshakeable commitment to a brighter future.

In a recent interview, Yarrow shared her inspiring path and her participation in the “Walk a Mile in a Ribbon Skirt (WAMIR)” event on October 28, at Edmonton City Hall. Last year, she spoke at WAMIR alongside Rachelle Venne of Institute for Aboriginal Women, former AFN Regional Chief Marlene Poitras, and Ashley Callingbull-Rabbit.

Currently, Yarrow is embarking on a career in the trades, beginning her first-year welding apprenticeship in Nisku, Alberta. She completed a four-month program called Journey to Trades at Women Building Futures, designed to prepare students for success in entry-level construction trades apprenticeships.

In the realm of 2Spirit advocacy, Yarrow previously held a national youth representative role with 2Spirits in Motion! Society. Recently, she joined CBRC’s Two-Spirit Program, Knowledge ZeekerS (Knowledge Seekers), a research learning program for Two-Spirit individuals working in community-based research.

Yarrow’s journey began with the tragic loss of her mother, underscoring the widespread issue of domestic violence that often plagues Indigenous reserves. Yarrow recounted, “My mother passed away in January 2002, a victim of an abusive relationship as she tried to escape. I grew up hearing this from my late auntie, her sister.” This personal experience highlights the pressing need for support systems to empower vulnerable women who often suffer in silence.

“I want to advocate for my late mom, Cheryl, and her experience with domestic violence, as well as my late brother, Mitchell, who was unarmed and tragically shot by the police in February 2022,” Yarrow passionately conveyed.

Recent developments in the fight against gender-based violence, including a bilateral agreement between the Federal and Provincial governments, underscore Alberta’s need for funding to address gender-based issues. This landmark funding agreement, totaling \$54 million over four years, will play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing a unique 10-year strategy tailored to Alberta’s specific needs. It sheds light on families like Currie’s, who are affected by these tragic situations, emphasizing the urgent need for change.

Yarrow has also contributed to the not-for-profit sector in the Wetaskiwin area, collaborating with organizations like Katimavik and the Wetaskiwin Heritage Museum. These experiences have deepened her commitment to advocating for change and fostering empowerment.

Yarrow’s perspective on education is equally unique. She believes that education transcends the confines of traditional classrooms. Instead, Yarrow promotes experiential learning as the key to empowering Indigenous youth and connecting them with the richness of their histories and cultures, rooted in First Nations traditions, which is a path toward decolonizing education.

But Yarrow’s uniqueness doesn’t end here. She is also a Cree yoga instructor, combining her advocacy with the healing power of yoga. Her Cree Yoga initiative raises awareness about the experiences of Indigenous women and the impact of domestic violence while promoting physical and mental well-being. By blending Indigenous culture with yoga practice, Yarrow creates a space for healing, remembrance, and self-discovery.

Yarrow’s vision for the future is one of action, especially in light of the high rates of violence faced by Indigenous women, as reflected in the



Yarrow Currie

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She is planning a Cree Yoga fundraiser event to honour her late mother on May 5th, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Awareness Day. Yarrow actively seeks the support of not-for-profit organizations to turn this vision into reality.

This event is not just about raising awareness, she says, it also aims to provide a platform for healing and remembrance.

Concluding the interview, Yarrow discussed that, like many other Indigenous children raised in Child and Family Services, she is learning that she qualifies for compensation due to the abuse experienced during her time in foster care. She emphasized the need for support in navigating this compensation process.

For more information on the Caring Society, you can visit their social media accounts (Twitter @CaringSociety, Facebook /CaringSociety, Instagram @spiritbearandfriends). Stay informed about the compensation process, and join Yarrow Currie on her journey to advocate for Indigenous families affected by gender-based violence and domestic violence, all while promoting healing through the power of Cree Yoga.

## Highlights of the 2023 Elders Gathering in Edmonton



Special sessions held at the 2023 NGE included presentations by Regena Crowchild and Eugene Alexis. A summary of the Gathering was delivered by Loretta Bellerose. Photos by Terry Lusty.



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Alberta’s pledge *cont. from p 3*

that aligns seamlessly with existing initiatives, notably the Alberta Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Roadmap.

She underscored the need to engage not just community organizations but to encompass a wide range of groups, especially those underrepresented, including Indigenous people, the LGBTQ2S community, refugees, immigrants, men, and boys, as well as survivors. She spoke of the importance of casting a wide net to ensure no one is left behind in this crucial endeavor.

In response to the question of what message she has for Albertans who are enduring violence and harassment, Minister Fir offered reassurance, “I want Albertans to know that we hear them, we see them. [To] the survivors that have gone through this or that are going through it right now, it’s not okay.” She emphasized the vital importance of this work in ensuring that every individual can live a life free of violence, hate, and discrimination.

Addressing the critical need for open dialogue, she stated, “I think there’s many ways we can do that. One is to create safe places for people to talk about it.” Minister Fir recognized that shame and fear often deter individuals from coming forward and discussing their experiences. To counter this, she stressed, “That’s why this work is so important, from the engagement that we will do to the confidential online or telephone surveys.” Support would be readily available during these engagements to assist survivors, she added.

“We need to create a comfortable environment to be able to talk about it, and that’s a big task.”

She emphasized the necessity for creating safe spaces for women, men, and the LGBTQ community while outlining the engagement plan’s objectives as identifying root causes and protecting and supporting survivors.

Minister Fir’s special message to Alberta’s youth encapsulates her commitment: “I would tell youth out there that our government shares your concerns, and our government is here to support you.” She reiterated the government’s dedication to ending gender-based violence and the available resources to provide support where needed.

Public Voices in Support of Ending Gender-Based Violence

In our quest to understand public sentiment on gender-based violence, we connected with individuals who have dedicated their lives to this cause. Here are their compelling responses:

According to Rachelle Venne, CEO of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW): “Esquao IAAW has been delivering programs such as Mother Bears Embrace to create awareness on how Gender Based Violence (GBV) negatively affects our homes and communities. Participants regain confidence to speak up when confronted with violence. Programs such as this build the individual capacity for Indigenous women and girls and are needed throughout the province.”

Jacqueline Biollo, a former elected official, consultant, and university educator, stresses the importance of empowering communities to unite against gender-based violence. She recognizes that it requires concerted efforts to combat the norms and barriers hindering victims, survivors, and their families and views this as a fundamental human right.

Ester Mackinaw, former Elected Leader of Montana First Nation and Respected Elder, highlights elders’ ongoing challenges, irrespective of their backgrounds, and the urgent need for government awareness and action. She calls for collaboration among local governments to address elder abuse and intimidation, underlining the importance of ensuring peace and security for elders. Statistics Canada reveals that in 2019, 4,518 seniors, primarily women, experienced family violence in Canada, highlighting the need to address this issue comprehensively.

Gender-diverse youth in Alberta face harassment, bullying, and violence based on

gender expression. Jacky Rabbit, a transgender youth, emphasizes the urgent need for awareness and action, saying, “As a transgender Indigenous youth, I’ve faced bullying and name-calling since I was in grade 7. I’ve been surrounded by boys who taunt me until I cry. We urgently need more awareness in rural Alberta and within First Nation communities.” Statistics Canada underlines the need for greater focus on LGBTQ youth and young adults, highlighting the higher rates of physical or sexual assault among transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

Char Shirt, a Human Resources Management Consultant, is advocating for tolerance and compassion. Shirt underscores that violence against the LGBTQ2 community is unjustifiable and emphasizes the power of choice in promoting tolerance and empathy.



These voices emphasize the necessity of collective action, awareness, and compassion to end gender-based violence in Alberta and beyond.

The first step in crafting this visionary 10-year plan is launching a public survey to garner insights from stakeholders, members of the gender-based violence community, advocates, and survivors.

The objective is to ensure that the strategy embodies the diverse perspectives of all Albertans.

Minister Fir extended a heartfelt invitation to all to participate in the survey, marking a collective step towards fostering a violence-free Alberta. The survey can be accessed at [www.alberta.ca/gender-based-violence-engagement](http://www.alberta.ca/gender-based-violence-engagement).

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# First Nations leaders criticize Alberta over lack of consultation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Leaders from Indigenous communities across Alberta are criticizing the Alberta government’s recently announced health-care reforms for being decided without Indigenous input.

On Nov. 8, Premier Danielle Smith and Minister of Health Adriana LaGrange announced that Alberta Health Services, the arms-length organization that delivers health care across the entire province, will be divided into four separate agencies over the next year.

The agencies will focus on primary care, acute care, continuing care, and mental health and addictions, respectively.

In spring-2024, the continuing care and mental health and addictions agencies will be formed, with primary and acute care coming in the fall.

A Nov. 15 statement from the Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations says “these system-wide changes were developed without our participation or knowledge.”

“This lack of consultation is troubling when responsibilities for issues that impact Indigenous Peoples and communities in the highest proportion – like mental health and addictions – are being shifted,” the statement added.

“Immediate action is needed, not reorganization.”

In July, Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations Grand Chief Leonard Standingontheroad officially declared the opioid poisoning crisis a public health emergency.

The confederacy statement notes that the restructuring of AHS poses a “dangerous

disruption” to the health-care system, which it warns will have “fatal outcomes” in the midst of a public health emergency.

The NDP Official Opposition and labour leaders have expressed concern that dismantling AHS represents a step towards increased health-care privatization — a concern shared by the confederacy.

Documents revealed by NDP leader Rachel Notley the day prior to the government’s announcement outlines plans to sell off publicly owned continuing care operators CapitalCare and Carewest.

While Premier Smith said in the Legislature that she is “100 percent committed” to the plans outlined in the documents, Minister LaGrange said the government has “absolutely no plan to privatize health care.”

“Any move toward privatization will endanger First Nations communities already struggling with issues of poverty, chronic underfunding and lack of accessibility of health services,” the Treaty No. 6 confederacy statement said, emphasizing that the “medicine chest clause” of Treaty No. 6 guarantees signatories the right to health care.

Any positive solution to the issues plaguing health care in Alberta, the statement concluded, “must include finding Indigenous-led solutions at the local level.”

Sheila North, a candidate for Assembly of First Nations national chief from Bunibonibee Cree Nation in Manitoba, echoed these concerns on X

(formerly known as Twitter).

“Alberta’s plan to overhaul health care systems should alarm everyone,” North wrote, adding that Smith “should know by now that as First Nations there should be Nothing About Us Without Us!”

The Alberta government has said it will establish an Indigenous health advisory council, alongside the restructuring of 12 regional advisory councils already in existence, but details have been scarce. It’s unclear what will become of the AHS Indigenous Wellness Core.

NDP MLA Brooks Arcand Paul, a lawyer from Alexander First Nation, asked Premier Smith in the Legislature on Nov. 9 which nations she consulted while developing her health-care plans.

In response, Minister LaGrange said that “we have been actively engaging with First Nations across the province.”

She pointed to the province’s 14-member Indigenous health advisory panel established in October 2022. Its final report was released last month, with 22 recommendations, none of which call for AHS to be dismantled.

Arcand Paul noted a similarity between the premier’s lack of consultation with Indigenous Peoples on AHS’s restructuring to her Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act.

“[Smith] has demonstrated in the short time she’s been in this role that she does not understand her legal obligations,” Arcand Paul said in the Legislature on Nov. 9.

LaGrange said the government is providing \$20 million “to fund the Indigenous communities to design and deliver innovative primary health-care services and projects,” in addition to hiring an Indigenous patients complaints investigator and a roster of Elders “to actually help Indigenous people through the delivery of health care.”

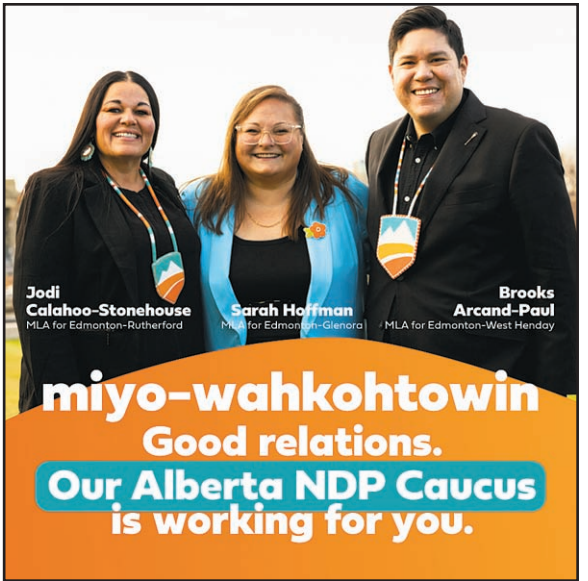
# Celebrating BIPOC youth art and storytelling in Calgary

By Jaiden Koochicum

Calgary, AB - On Sunday, November 19th, "A Youth Explosion" (AYE), returns for its 11th year to amplify the vibrant voices of BIPOC youth (ages 13-30). The public of Moh'kinsstis (Calgary) are invited to join this Indigenous-led storytelling event in celebration of the unique



Art by Shae. Photo courtesy AYE.



narratives and artistic expressions of youth across Treaty 7.

Canada Bridges hosts this event in collaboration with The Grand Theatre and Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society. In addition to a full program of storytelling, poetry, music, and art, the event will feature a captivating youth artist exhibit with displays from young vendors. Attendees can immerse themselves in these artworks during intermissions and post-performance, and cap off the evening with networking opportunities and light refreshments.

Recognizing that youth represent both present and future leaders, Canada Bridges remains committed to nurturing their authenticity, creativity, and fervor for self-expression. Leading up to AYE, youth participate in workshops and mentorship activities to explore their story and culture through the medium of their choice.

AYE presents the opportunity to create connections and foster understanding between BIPOC youth and the diverse communities of Treaty 7. "AYE is more than a showcase of art,"

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Art by Aisha. Photo courtesy AYE.

shared Bridges staff, Rachel Forbes, "for some, the program provides their first opportunity to sit in ceremony, experience mentorship, or have their authentic self acknowledged. It's a chance to be heard and a celebration of our community.

The event unfolds at the GRAND in Calgary, AB, on Sunday, November 19th, 2023 from 5 PM to 8 PM. Tickets are free, but registration is required via [www.thegrandyyc.ca/aye2023](http://www.thegrandyyc.ca/aye2023).

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# National Indigenous Veterans Day recognized in Edmonton

(Edmonton) – The City of Edmonton and the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta hosted a special commemorative event for National Indigenous Veterans Day at Edmonton’s City Hall on November 8.

National Indigenous Veterans Day, held every year on November 8, recognizes and honours the important contributions made by First Nations, Inuit and Métis veterans in service to Canada. The separate day of remembrance for Indigenous veterans was initiated in 1994 to ensure their sacrifices and contributions received proper recognition both across the country and across generations of Canadians. Many Indigenous veterans faced hardships when they returned from service and did not receive the same benefits or recognition as other veterans.

Mayor Amarjeet Sohi brought greetings on behalf of the City of Edmonton and presented a proclamation to the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta. The event’s program also featured speakers from Indigenous partner organizations, including Chuck Isaacs, CD, President, Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta; Grand Chief Desmond Bull, Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 Nations; and Sarah Wolfe, Citizens’ Representative, Fort Edmonton Métis District 9, Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta.

“Today’s event underscores the shared vision of a City where recognition and respect are given for the outstanding contributions Indigenous veterans have made to preserve the freedom of all Canadians,” said City Manager Andre Corbould. “It’s important to recognize and honour the service, courage and sacrifices of all veterans at home, around the world and across generations.”

The commemorative event opened with a prayer from Elder Gladys MacDonald, a lighting of the qulliq (an Inuit lamp that provides light and warmth to the Earth) with a teaching from Inuk Elder Edna Elias, and a cultural celebration and performances from the Treaty Six Singers, Métis fiddler Brianna Lizotte, and Inuit dance and drumming duo Jaynine McCrae and Connie Kanayok McCrae.

“Indigenous Veterans Day was first celebrated in Canada in 1994. Since 1994, the celebrations have expanded across Canada. There has been a renewed push over the past few years to work toward reconciliation. This year, the City of Edmonton has shown great leadership and large gains towards reconciliation. We, the Indigenous Veterans, have warm hearts for our Ancestors who would not have been included in local celebrations. We look forward to continued positive steps towards a final resolution and



Honouring Indigenous veterans in Edmonton.

possibly a fully inclusive Remembrance Day, a day where we stand with our brothers and sisters, united in honouring all those who paid the ultimate sacrifice,” said Chuck Isaacs, CD, President, Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta.

Manitoba was the first province to recognize National Indigenous Veterans Day on November 8, 1994, and it is now recognized in every province and territory across Canada. Approximately 12,000 Indigenous and Métis men and women served in Canada’s war efforts during the First World War, Second World War and the Korean War.

The City of Edmonton’s journey to build and strengthen relationships with Indigenous Peoples is guided and inspired by the Elder-shared concept of wahigicicobi, a lethka Nakoda word meaning “kinship relationships” and is outlined in the City’s Indigenous Framework.

## Elders *cont. from p 2*

history when settlers, government and churches arrived on Turtle Island and attempted to colonize, assimilate and remove Indian culture, lands, language, and lifestyle.

"They tried to get rid of us," she stated. Children were put into foster care, child welfare isolated us, drug and alcohol abuse entered, and now, they want to take away the Indian Act! If they do, "What happens to our rights?" she charged. If they get rid of the Act, next is the reserves, and so on. "They'd be out of the Indian business."

Government, she explained, "talks to the AFN and organizations, but not to us (the people). That's why we attend conferences - to voice our concerns, protect our rights."

"In 1985, they gave us self-government but still make rules and dictate to us," she complained. They also limited the life of our memberships which is our right, not theirs, she added.

As for Indigenous languages, presenter Eugene Alexis implored people and communities to address this issue and implement teachings "through the school curriculum and within the communities too – i.e., on signs and posters." He

also suggested wide usage and repetitive use, and concluded that Native languages are "beautiful and important."

Hall E at the Expo Centre played host to an Indigenous market/trading post where crafters and clothiers promoted and sold their merchandise. One couldn't help but notice a significant abundance of ribbon shirts, skirts, and Native-designed sweaters, vests and jackets. Beaded goods were also plentiful but just one proprietor had a well-stocked supply of beautiful silver and turquoise jewelry.

The evening of Day Three offered up a hot, sit-down meal followed by an Intertribal Showcase, then a social dance with entertainment by country singer Jarrod Lee and fiddling champion Calvin Volrath who certainly treated the crowd to some magnificent music. Lee demonstrated his exceptional vocal qualities that have him nominated for a major country music award. Folks should remember his name and watch for his shows and appearances on APTN and CFWE Radio.

On Day Four, the final day, the

conference synopsis and overview report was provided by Loretta Bellerose. Her excellent presentation was followed by a closing prayer from Elder Alice Kaquitts and Fred Campiou. Champion hand drummer and traditional singer Edmond Bull offered the closing drum song.

All was concluded before noon, at which time many lingered and lounged about in the main foyer to bid farewell to fellow delegates. A group of B.C. Elders banded together to sing some of their own traditional drum songs, while bystanders listened reverently. Off to another side a flute player shared his soothing melodies while wishing and praying for visitors to return to their homefires safely.

It was a memorable experience for the delegates and many will make an effort to attend the next gathering which will be held either in Saskatoon or Edmonton (still to be determined) in 2025.

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