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New therapeutic foster care program looking for caregivers for youth

The Edmonton-based Family Centre is thrilled to announce their newest program, *ohpikihakan*. *ohpikihakan* was developed to meet the holistic needs (mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional) of youth ages 13 - 17 in the care of Children's Services. This program is part of a province-wide initiative called "Therapeutic Foster Care." It is embedded with culturally responsive services and Indigenous worldviews.

"*ohpikihakan* is an incredibly unique and exciting opportunity to make a substantial difference in the lives of our youth. I truly believe that we can offer a nurturing and healing environment for our youth, as caregivers, when we are equipped with the knowledge, culture and therapeutic support to be able to do so; *ohpikihakan* encompasses all of this," says Laurie Escott, a therapeutic supervisor with *ohpikihakan*.

Chantelle Painter, a caregiver recruiter for *ohpikihakan*, continues, "The very first call to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to reduce the number of children in government care. This program seeks to do just that through reunification. We are living our commitment to using our privilege to advance the process of Canadian reconciliation."

The *ohpikihakan* team wanted to begin the work in a 'good way' by listening to the wisdom of Treaty 6 elders. Before working with clients, the program began in a pipe ceremony. The team presented protocol; a grandmother print and tobacco, to seek wisdom from the elders and the ancestors. Elder Dr. Leona Makokis prayed for the program and later provided a name for the program: "*ohpikihakan*." This Cree word translates into *a child that is being raised*. This name was a gift, highlighting the relationship and

connection to a child's culture and family. The grandmother print hangs in their office for continued guidance from the ancestors.

ohpikihakan is founded on the belief that youth need to experience belonging, healing, connection, and reunification. They believe this occurs with regular contact with family members, culture, and community. They specialize in family engagement and therapeutic support to respond to these needs. Caregivers are ambassadors, allies, and advocates for youth wellness and healing.

Their program emphasizes practices like trauma-informed care, cultural connection, wraparound support, and youth reunification. Since youth live in the caregiver's home, caregivers have minimal separation between their professional role and personal life. That is why their team actively supports each caregiver with tailored training, individualized support, and peer engagement.

ohpikihakan caregivers must take training, have a licensed home, and get an approved home study. This may sound daunting, but they will support caregivers at every step of the process.

Some of their caregivers want to "right the wrongs" they have experienced in their own life. Others see it as their responsibility as part of their reconciliation journey. Above all, every one of them has indicated they feel 'called' to this role.

"One of the greatest gifts I get from seeking caregivers are the stories that are exchanged. Every person drawn to this program is giving a piece of themselves and the opportunity for their stories to enable the success of the youth they will guide," Chantelle Painter shares.

"I can't quite explain the energetic pull I feel toward this program and the caregivers I have met



"*ohpikihakan* is an incredibly unique and exciting opportunity to make a substantial difference in the lives of our youth."

- Laurie Escott, Therapeutic Supervisor



so far. Being able to use my experience with relational child and youth care work while incorporating an Indigenous worldview in this brand new program has opened a floodgate of passion, excitement, learning and gratitude. I am beyond excited to be a part of this journey of shaping therapeutic caregiving," says Kaitlyn Shinness, a therapeutic supervisor with *ohpikihakan*.

"The Family Centre would love to hear from you if you are reading this and feel you could be a therapeutic caregiver within our program."

Learn more about the foster care program at familycentre.org/youth-resources/therapeutic-foster-care.

Canada and Nunavut sign long-awaited agreement

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At a Jan. 18 Iqaluit ceremony, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Nunavut Premier P.J. Akeeagok and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. president Aluki Kotierk signed an agreement that constitutes the largest land transfer in Canadian history.

Covering two million square miles of land and water, the agreement gives the territorial government final say over land and resource decisions that were previously the purview of the Canadian government, finalizing a process that began well before Nunavut became a territory 25 years ago.

The devolution agreement, which goes into effect in April, will be implemented over the next three years. Yukon and Northwest Territories have similar agreements with the feds, which went into effect in 2003 and 2014, respectively.

"It's high time. It's a turning point for Nunavummiut," Paul Quassa, a former Nunavut premier and land claims negotiator, told *CBC News*.

He added that this moment, which he's been waiting for since Nunavut became part of confederation, is "like honey ... sweet."

Speaking to reporters before the ceremony, Trudeau called the signing of the agreement an "historic" day for Canada and Nunavut.

"Leaders, negotiators, officials of many stripes have all worked hard for many years for the same goal: for Nunavummiut to have increased control for decisions on their land, waters and resources," said the prime minister.

To provide Nunavut with the resources needed to take on its added jurisdictional responsibilities, the feds will provide the territory with an additional \$85 million in annual funding, as well as one-time funding of \$67 million for transitional activities and \$15 million for training.

One of the final areas to be negotiated was land and water management, which includes resource development, with that process beginning in 2008.

An agreement-in-principle was reached in 2019, with the time since then spent hammering out particular details.

Under devolution, the territorial government will have final say on the development of minerals, oil and gas on Nunavut public lands, and give the territory the ability to collect royalties from resource extraction.

"We'll decide our own future," Premier Akeeagok said. "Before this, it was Ottawa who had the final decision over whether a project would advance."

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OHPIKÎHAKAN

"a child that is being raised"

ohpikihakan is a program designed to meet the holistic needs such as spirituality, family, community, and cultural connection of youth ages 13 - 17 in the care of Children's Services. This program is part of a province-wide initiative called "Therapeutic Foster Care".

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Roxanne Calahasin: Helping children and their families grow

Roxanne Calahasin always wanted to be a teacher and once she had her own children, she truly understood the importance of providing exceptional care and education to young children. Seeing the need for early learning educators, she enrolled in the Early Learning and Child Care Certificate and Diploma programs at Northern Lakes College.

“I realized that little children need us, and that the need for quality care and education starts where all learning begins – in early childhood. Our society tends to overlook this part of a child’s life, but it’s so crucial. It’s great to provide program assistance to all kids, but I believe it’s especially important in our Indigenous communities right now,” explains Roxanne.

As a Cree woman living on the Gift Lake Métis Settlement, Roxanne has always been an advocate for supporting Indigenous families and preserving traditional culture; values she credits her grandparents for instilling. She explains, “They taught us the language and our culture.”

Armed with the wisdom of her grandparents; the support of her family, friends, and co-

workers; and the education received from NLC, Roxanne now supports her own community through her chosen career. She is the director of the Gift Lake Head Start program, an early learning and child care program that fosters family involvement, reflects Cree culture in the mindfully curated materials and décor that Roxanne personally selects from community members, and facilitates activities based on the tenets of early learning and traditional skills, such as sewing cultural clothing, beading, and gardening. “We’re helping children and their families grow. We’re helping children learn. They are learning while they’re playing and having fun, and we are helping our little ones,” Roxanne says.

And no one knows the value of helping students more than Roxanne, as she herself expresses gratitude for the Northern Lakes College instructors who supported her. “The instructors know so much! I just loved the instructors. Every single one made me feel confident working with them. They are so caring, too. They realize that everyone has a home life, and they are very



NLC student Roxanne Calahasin.

understanding. It felt like being part of a big family,” enthuses Roxanne of her experience with Northern Lakes College.

Roxanne continues to attend Northern Lakes College and is currently pursuing her Bachelor of Education.

Northern Lakes College offers many programs through Supported Distance Learning. Visit northernlakescollege.ca/programs-courses.

Media rights advocates call for EPS to drop charges against journalist

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Press freedom advocates joined together on Jan. 29 to call for the dropping of criminal charges against Indigenous journalist Brandi Morin, who was arrested while covering Edmonton police’s raid on an inner city homeless tent encampment.

Morin, a former *Alberta Native News*

contributor, was charged with obstructing a peace officer on Jan. 10 while filming the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and City of Edmonton’s final raid of an eight-encampment sweep on assignment for the online news outlet *Ricochet*. If convicted, Morin could face up to two years in prison.

Ricochet senior editor Ethan Cox, who convened the press conference, said at the outset that “Brandi is by anyone’s definition one of the country’s most celebrated journalists,” citing numerous awards she’s won from various organizations in recent years.

Cox was joined by Morin and her lawyer, as well as representatives from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), Amnesty International, the Indigenous Journalists

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Publication Mail Agreement No. 40050628
Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:
Circulation Department:
#206, 8944 182 Street
Edmonton AB T5T 2E3
natnews@shaw.ca
Tel: (780) 421-7966

Funded by the Government of Canada Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

Canada

Volume 41, Number 02, February 2024
ISSN #08294135
www.albertanativenews.com

EDITOR: Deborah Shatz

ADVERTISING:
Dan Moser 780-421-7966

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

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Help is needed to repatriate remains found at Sacred Heart IRS

By Leah Redcrow

Over the past two years, the Acimowin Opaspiw Society (AOS), in tandem with the Diocese of Saint Paul, has been investigating the deaths and burials of former students of the Sacred Heart (Blue Quills) Indian Residential School. To complete the investigation thoroughly and to facilitate reconciliation, a collaborative partnership with the church has been essential. As a result of this partnership - and the extensive volume of documentation provided by the Diocese of Saint Paul and the oblates of Mary Immaculate - the AOS has been able to reach a number of conclusions. Consequently, some AOS members have discovered that their family members went missing at the Sacred Heart Indian Residential School. We would like to give the Diocese of Saint Paul, AB and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate our greatest thanks for their services and support of our investigation.

The AOS believes that all missing children in unmarked burials investigations (MCUBI) must work in partnership with the churches responsible for the operations at their respective institutions. The truth can be painful, however it must be told in order to begin the process of healing from the dark legacy of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. Therefore, we are grateful to the Blue Quills community for understanding our initial request and to members of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation for not retaliating against the Catholic Church.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada provided survivors with a voice to speak truth to power and has established an official record of the atrocities First Nations children were subjected to in these institutions. The MCUBIs at former residential school sites across the country are a continuation of the Canadian TRC's mandate and are being undertaken to ensure that the children who did not survive and the institutions themselves can have their truths known as well. MCUBIs also alleviate the suffering of families who lost children to the IRS system, as the loss of hundreds of children was never spoken about by our grandparents or great-grandparents.

The 'Bornemouth Protocol on Mass Grave Protection and Investigation' defines a communal burial (mass grave) as: "... a site or defined area containing a multitude (more than one) of buried, submerged or surface scattered human remains (including skeletonized, commingled, and fragmented remains), where the circumstances surrounding the death and/or the body-disposal method warrant an investigation as to their lawfulness."

The communal burial - or mass grave - discovered at the Sacred Heart IRS was subject to accidental excavation in 2004. The witness who

saw the contents stated it contained small skeletal remains wrapped in white cloth, the size of children, with no caskets and piled on top of each other. This mass grave is 100 M north of the Sacred Heart Residential School foundation. Through Dr. Hamilton's ongoing research and historic photos, it was determined to be historically unmarked and not part of the parish cemetery, which was on opposite side of the church. When the AOS did an initial GPR Scan it was determined to be only 8cm below the surface. The children's remains are not protected. While the remains found have not yet been identified or attributed to a specific child, the ICMP concluded through photo analysis that the remains were that of a juvenile estimated to be less than five years old. At this time, we are unable to determine specific numbers or the cause of death until we complete an excavation and that subsequent identification analysis - which the Office of the Medical Examiner of Alberta refuses to do.

A common trait shared in mass burials around the world is a lack of death certificates for the people buried. These mass graves are undocumented and are the most probable location of the children we have classified as *missing*, as in no death certificate or burial record but we know died or disappeared in the early 1920s from the Sacred Heart when it operated in what is now Saddle Lake west (but was Chief Blue Quills Reserve at that time). The AOS posits that the missing children of the Sacred Heart IRS who do not have burial records and/or death records are located in these mass graves.

However, in our attempts to repatriate and identify the remains of those found in the cemetery, both the Alberta Medical Examiner's office and the Alberta RCMP refused to provide any assistance. The AOS denounces both offices for its negligence of their duties. The RCMP are to collect all unidentified human remains found above ground and send them to the medical examiner for analysis. They refuse to do all of this. We believe this is neglect and institutional racism in its defined form. The Medical Examiner assumes the children died of disease yet has not conducted an analysis to make that determination.

We question the competence and capacity of the Chief Medical Examiner of Alberta who uses assumptions when investigating dead bodies without "examining" them like as he's paid and legislated to do. Under international law, it is illegal to allow any individual to be buried and not repatriated from a mass grave and subsequently denied their last rites and the individualization of their final resting place. Across the globe, countries that have experienced

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Lethbridge College launches integration through art program

Lethbridge College will receive \$120,000 per year over the next three years for a new research project that will use art and Blackfoot worldviews to support marginalized populations as they reintegrate into the community.

The grant, from the College and Community Social Innovation Fund, was recently announced by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada. It's the first time Lethbridge College has been a recipient of this federal fund.

The college's Centre for Public Safety Applied Research (CPSAR), through a partnership with the Ninastako Cultural Centre, will design, implement and evaluate the Community Integration Through Art – Pissatsinaskssini (CITAP) program. With support from the grant, this program will host weekly meetings of a social recreational support group that will include creating art, sharing food, building relationships and learning about health and wellbeing in an environment guided by Blackfoot knowledge.

"The program will honour the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot) people through a relationship that is respectful, relevant, reciprocal and responsible by using Indigenous ways of knowing and learning," says Dr. Kirsten Fantazir, project director and president's applied research chair, CPSAR. "We are honoured to be working closely with the

Ninastako Cultural Centre and our local judiciary to develop and implement a program that will facilitate and support reconciliation within our community."

Each CITAP meeting will involve a member of the research team, an artist or craftsperson, participants and at least one of the following: an Elder, a knowledge keeper, a health or wellness professional, or a service organization representative.

"Given our focus is on reviving and developing traditional and contemporary cultural skills, we feel this project and our reciprocal relationship with CPSAR will help us to realize our goals," says Gloria Wells, executive director of the Ninastako Cultural Centre. "We are hopeful that this project will promote reconciliation in our area and strengthen the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples."

The program will be open to anyone, of any race or ethnic background, who can benefit from support and resources as they reintegrate into the Lethbridge community.

"Blackfoot worldviews, language and arts will be infused throughout the program for all participants," says Jami Albright-Tolman, Justice Studies instructor and CPSAR research associate. "We want to normalize the use of Blackfoot



Dr. Kirsten Fantazir, Gloria Wells, Jami Albright-Tolman.

worldviews for everyone, rather than just for Indigenous peoples."

The three-year project coincides with CPSAR's goal of meeting partner needs by developing innovative solutions to current industry challenges.

"Research has shown that increasing community integration improves health and wellness and reduces the risk of criminal activity," says Albright-Tolman. "Through the Community Integration Through Art – Pissatsinaskssini program, we hope to support and encourage the integration of marginalized people who feel they aren't connected to the community in a meaningful way."

Project evaluation will incorporate quantitative, qualitative and Indigenous research methods and analysis, and results will be interpreted by the CPSAR research team, the Ninastako Cultural Centre, collaborators and participants.

Navigating gender identity policies in Alberta: A call for inclusivity

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's recent announcement of gender identity policies has ignited a polarizing debate across the province. While some view these policies as progressive steps towards safeguarding parental rights and ensuring children's well-being, others raise concerns about their potential implications for the transgender community's rights and inclusivity.

Smith's proposed policies include restrictions on gender reassignment surgeries for minors, a measure aimed at ensuring informed decision-making and protecting parental authority. Proponents argue that such safeguards are necessary to prevent irreversible consequences and potential regrets. However, critics fear that these restrictions could limit access to essential medical interventions for transgender youth and perpetuate stigmatization.

Amidst the discourse surrounding parental and children's rights, it's essential to recognize the human faces behind the rhetoric. Behind every policy debate are real people - members of the transgender community - seeking acceptance, respect, and the right to live authentically. Regardless of political agendas, their voices and experiences deserve to be heard and valued in shaping inclusive policies and practices.

Beyond the debate over gender identity policies, the broader focus must be on creating safe and inclusive environments for transgender individuals across all facets of life. Access to comprehensive healthcare, inclusive pharmacy care, non-discriminatory housing, and safe workplaces are essential for the well-being and dignity of transgender adults in Alberta.

Recent statistics highlight the challenges faced by transgender individuals in accessing healthcare services. While progress has been

made, many still encounter discrimination, limited access to gender-affirming treatments, and mental health support. Additionally, safe and inclusive housing options remain a pressing need for transgender adults seeking security and acceptance in their living environments.

As discussions continue around gender identity policies, it's imperative to consider the long-term implications for transgender individuals as they

navigate adulthood in Alberta. Beyond childhood, these individuals need opportunities to contribute to society in safe and inclusive ways, free from discrimination and barriers to healthcare, housing, and employment.

We have numerous dedicated Albertans and Canadians who are actively engaged in this important work. The premier simply needs to engage with the right individuals and organizations. For instance, the RCMP in Alberta has made significant strides in creating inclusive environments for gender diversity and Indigenous communities. The Commanding Officer's Diversity Advisory Council, initiated by the Alberta RCMP, aims to explore and better

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Every Child Matters Hitmen Hockey Game inspires and educates

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On Saturday, February 10th, the fourth annual *Every Child Matters Hitmen Hockey Game* took place at the Scotiabank Saddledome in Calgary, Alberta, between the Calgary Hitmen and the Moose Jaw Warriors. The annual event is hosted by The Calgary Hitmen Hockey Club and Siksika Health Services along with presenting sponsors: Siksika Family Services Corporation, Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, First Nations Health Consortium and the Blackfoot Confederacy.

The Calgary Hitmen Hockey Club and Siksika Health Services have a first of its kind Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that commits to working together to address stereotypes and racism by advancing inclusion in their communities through the promotion of the Blackfoot culture, language and history. A second key component is to promote healthy lifestyles for all youth and to highlight the benefits of participation in sport.

Dr. Tyler White, Chief Executive Officer, Siksika Health Services stated, “It’s more than a business relationship. It’s more than a partnership, it’s a friendship based on respect, love and hope and all those wonderful things we are doing together. The foundation is culture and education. It’s a special relationship and it’s not lost on me the opportunity that we have. We are leaders in the Western Hockey League, and we are front-runners in our work together.”

The event serves as a platform to honour the resilience and strength of Indigenous peoples while also acknowledging the painful legacy of the residential school system. The event is a recognition and commitment to action to ensure that all children know their importance, and to

honour those who attended Residential Schools in Canada, their families, and communities.

In his opening comments, Chief Ouray Crowfoot, Siksika First Nation stated, “When it comes to the residential school system, it did a lot of damage to our people in all of Canada and it shifted the norm. People came out of the schools where molestation and other abuses were norms because of what they saw in those schools. As a result, we perpetuate that in our own communities today.”

Chief Crowfoot continued, “We have a lot of lateral violence in our Nations and bullying. When we talk about *Every Child Matters*, we need to fix home too. If we are going to talk about reconcili-action and *Every Child Matters*, we need to fix the toxic environment from the inside or else there will continue to be orange shirts, red dresses, half masses and games, but you won’t see any differences in statistics of overdoses, deaths, drug abuse, spousal abuse, all these negatives.”

The significance of the *Every Child Matters* event extends beyond the confines of the arena, as it serves as a catalyst for broader community engagement and dialogue. The game inspires fans, players, and stakeholders to take meaningful action in support of reconciliation and Indigenous rights.

Young people from the Nation were featured throughout the event. Skylar Running Rabbit, Siksika Nation member, attended the game and provided opening comments. Skylar is a strong role model and lacrosse player, attending school at Tompkins Cortland Community College in New York.

“The theme of today’s event – inspiring hope, opportunity, pathway and empowerment, I like to think of myself as an embodiment of that symbol. I like to think that I give hope to other First Nations youth and athletes,” said Skylar.

“I like to think that I provided them with an opportunity to see that there is something bigger and something to strive for, because I myself have failed and fallen, and I still have been able to find myself on the right path. I am hoping that with other youth athletes seeing myself and the path that I chose, it empowers them to make better life choices.”

A number of ceremonies and activities took place throughout the game to commemorate the



Children from Chief Old Sun School marched in the opening ceremony.

Blackfoot heritage and promote greater cultural understanding. There was an opportunity for event goers to visit the test kitchen hosted by Chris Eagle Rib for delicious Blackfoot food samplings: berry soup, Indian tacos, frybread hot dogs, and Indian popcorn. The crowd was also wowed by the Dancers and Drummers performing during intermission and they had an opportunity to participate in a round dance circling the entire rink. In the Concourse area there were also informative booths with resources for Indigenous families and the general public.

Thousands of people attended the event and many of them wore orange jerseys along with the Calgary Hitmen Hockey Team. The game uniform reflects both the look and spirit of *Every Child Matters*, and was developed by local Indigenous artists, Jacob Alexis, and Richard Running Rabbit. Mike Moore, Vice President, WHL Calgary Hitmen said a big thank you to Jacob at the event. Mike shared that “the uniforms are world famous, and we are proud to wear them each and every day. You see them at every Hitmen game, but most importantly today where our players wear them on the ice, and we get to represent the Blackfoot culture and the *Every Child Matters* Movement.”

The game was also broadcast over the radio in the Blackfoot language on the Siksika Nations “The Nation’s Station” (104.7FM). This broadcast was hosted by Siksika Nation elders and knowledge keepers: Francis “Butch” Wolf Leg, Eldon Weasel Child and former Siksika Nation Chief Vincent Yellow Old Woman. The deeply instilled cultural approach to this event will be remembered by many and will inspire others to remember that every child does matter.



Skylar Running Rabbit provided inspiring opening remarks.

Sacred Heart IRS *cont. from p 4*

such gross human rights violations have formed their own TRCs, a final phase of which is locating the dead, including the excavation of mass graves due to gross human rights violations perpetrated on the victims.

Due to the lack of domestic legislation regarding mass graves and the appropriate operating procedures, the AOS has invited the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) to undertake a forensic investigation and excavation of the communal burial sites in the Sacred Heart cemetery, which acted as the burial site of the Blue Quills IRS even after it was relocated 7 km West of Saint Paul.

Once final arrangements have been made for the ICMP operation - which is expected to take place in the summer of 2024 - community presentations and information sessions will be organized at Saddle Lake, St. Paul and Goodfish Lake, Lac La Biche, Heart Lake, Fort McMurray, Edmonton and Calgary.

The AOS is requesting that the oldest living family members with relatives detained in the Sacred Heart Residential School between 1898 - 1931 (while it was operating in the Chief Blue Quills Reserve) attend these sessions where possible.

The Sacred Heart cemetery is currently under 24 hour security and is closed to visitors who are

not registered Saddle Lake Cree Nation band members.

Finally, we request the Prime Minister take 5 minutes out of his day to acknowledge this humanitarian crisis at home and arrange to meet with me and my board, who are also the families of the deceased and missing children - if reconciliation and his relationship with us is truly as important as he claims, as he has not yet acknowledged or commented on this crisis, which is unacceptable.

Leah Redcrow is Executive Director of Acimowin Opaspiw Society.

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The art of relationships

Last summer, a mural depicting the deep connection to the land held by the Indigenous peoples of northern Alberta was unveiled at Suncor’s Firebag airport, which sees about 300,000 employees and contractors each year. The mural was commissioned by Suncor to help strengthen its relationships with the Indigenous communities in the Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo region and give the passengers that fly in and out of Firebag something to reflect on.

“Regular maintenance, including new paint, was planned for the airport’s firehall so we took the opportunity to look at the work in a more meaningful way,” explains Genevieve DaCembra, Manager of Aviation for Suncor.

The mural that graces the 60-foot-wide by 40-foot-high wall of the firehall was created by Keegan Starlight, an artist from Tssut’ina First Nation in Treaty 7 near Calgary. It is the largest Indigenous mural on a corrugated metal surface in Canada.

“I wanted to try something that was a challenge for me,” says Keegan. “It was an easy ‘yes’ when I was asked to paint the mural, because I knew it was going to be massive.”

The project was more than a painting to Keegan, whose work can also be seen on the Petro-Canada retail station in Calgary’s Signal Hill. To Keegan, the mural is a chance to tell the story of the Indigenous people of Treaty 8 territory, now known as Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo.

To do that, he had to learn about the people, their culture and the land, and Keegan decided the best way to do that was to make art with them.

Keegan hosted art workshops for all ages in both Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay. He provided communities art lessons and they shared with him stories and knowledge about their way of life, and their values and traditions, which inspired the concept for the Firebag mural.

“That’s just the way Indigenous people are, we don’t take until we give,” says Keegan “I wanted to give something to the community in exchange for them giving me teachings about their community.”

It took Keegan about a month to paint the mural. Working in the dark hours before the sun rose or after it set, he would project his design on the side of the building and sketch it out on the massive blank canvas.

“It was important to me to talk to the communities I would be in arm’s reach of,” explains Keegan. “It didn’t make sense to incorporate things into the mural that were only in my region, which is Treaty 7. We’re all Indigenous, but the different cultures and regions should be reflected in the work.”

The result depicts the relationship the Indigenous People have with the area, including the land, the water and the animals in Keegan’s signature style of teals, corals and reds.

While Keegan’s time in the communities was short, the artwork, the lessons learned, and relationships built by both artist and his muse will last for decades.



Keegan leading a group of students and teachers through art lessons at Elsie Fabian school in Fort McKay.



The Firebag mural painted by Treaty 7 artist Keegan Starlight was unveiled on August 21. Members of the nearby communities joined to help celebrate.



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Commissioned artwork designed by Katie Whilhelm from the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation at Neyaashiiningmiing.

Discover the inspirational art of Gene Boshkaykin

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The cover of the February edition of *Alberta Native News* is a vibrant portrait of a Powwow Dancer. Step into the captivating world of Gene Boshkaykin, an Ojibwa artist from Treaty 3 territory, where talent knows no bounds and inspiration springs from the depths of Indigenous heritage. Guided by the memory of his distant cousin, Sterling Johnson, Gene's artistry pays homage to a legacy that continues to influence his breathtaking creations.

Rooted firmly in his Indigenous roots, Gene's art serves as a tribute to his cultural heritage. Despite not being steeped in traditional practices during his formative years, he masterfully weaves contemporary themes with timeless traditions, breathing life into each stroke of his brush. Gene's narrative reminds our readers of the profound role of art in reconnecting urban Indigenous individuals with their rich cultural heritage.

At the heart of Gene's artistic repertoire are powerful portraits, depicting Indigenous figures adorned in resplendent regalia. With meticulous attention to detail, Gene brings these vibrant characters to life, capturing the essence of Indigenous culture with unmatched authenticity and skill.

"I had a typical city-native childhood," reflects Boshkaykin, "but it wasn't entirely conventional. We didn't partake in traditional practices like sweat lodges, but we did engage in powwows."

Delving into the origins of his artistic journey, Boshkaykin shares a heartfelt anecdote. "Sterling Johnson, my distant cousin, was a burgeoning artist whose talent graced newspaper headlines. His brushstrokes breathed life into eagles,

animals, and more. Though he's no longer with us, his spirit continues to inspire."

For Boshkaykin, art became a vehicle for personal healing and redemption. "My children are my motivation," he affirms. "Their presence propelled me toward sobriety and a brighter future."

Reflecting on his mother's battle with addiction, Boshkaykin shares a poignant chapter of his journey. "My mother's addiction took her to Minnesota, where she underwent intensive rehabilitation akin to a prison. However, this experience paved the path to her recovery, and today, she's a respected elder in our community."

In his artwork, Boshkaykin seamlessly melds pop culture with Indigenous themes, drawing from his upbringing and heritage. "My drawings reflect a blend of pop culture and Indigenous content, influenced by my upbringing and my mother's guidance," he explains.

Despite facing barriers as an Indigenous artist, including representation challenges and fierce competition, Boshkaykin remains undeterred. "I aspire to secure representation in a national gallery," he shares. "Yet, hurdles persist, especially for artists from marginalized



Stunning portrait by Ojibwa artist Gene Boshkaykin.

backgrounds."

Boshkaykin extends an invitation to explore his portfolio and consider commissioning bespoke artwork. "Each piece is crafted with meticulous care, tailored to individual preferences," he emphasizes. "Through my art, I endeavor to foster meaningful connections and share my unique perspective with the world."

For those eager to delve deeper into Gene Boshkaykin's artistic realm or commission custom artwork, he can be reached via Facebook or Messenger. As his artistic odyssey unfolds, Boshkaykin remains hopeful to overcome systemic barriers, surmount obstacles, and inspire others through his craft.

Inclusivity *cont. from p 5*

understand diversity topics in the context of police activities.

Additionally, the Native Women's Association of Canada developed a workplace development policy a few years ago, demonstrating their commitment to inclusivity. The Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing (PCVWH) is a national organization that is actively working on inclusive housing policies for LGBTQ individuals.

Healthcare professionals like Morēnikē Ẽniqlá Qláoṣebikan are also playing a crucial role in

supporting the transgender community. Through their efforts in providing inclusive pharmacy care and advocating for equitable healthcare access, they are addressing critical gaps in healthcare services for transgender individuals.

As someone deeply involved in these initiatives, having served on various committees and acting as a consultant for LGBTQ-inclusive models, I can attest to the progress being made. There are indeed initiatives currently in progress to create more inclusive and supportive environments for all individuals.

Ultimately, it falls upon our premier and policymakers to create structures and policies that

foster inclusivity, respect, and dignity for all individuals, regardless of gender identity. By prioritizing the well-being and rights of transgender adults, Alberta can pave the way towards a more equitable and compassionate future where everyone can thrive and contribute positively to society.

Amidst the debates and discussions, it's crucial that everyday Albertans remain committed to creating safe and inclusive spaces. Regardless of political rhetoric, our collective goal should be to work together towards a future where every individual, regardless of gender identity, feels valued and respected.



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Phyllis Webstad tirelessly raises awareness about IRS atrocities

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Phyllis Webstad, a Residential School Survivor, and the founder of Orange Shirt Day has inspired many people to raise awareness about the horrors of residential schools and their impact on Indigenous children and families throughout Canada. She started the event locally and it blossomed to what it is today through social media, and now, as of 2021, it has become a National public holiday called *The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation* and is celebrated each year on September 30.

Phyllis Webstad is a Northern Secwepemc from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation in British Columbia. She was raised on the Dog Creek Reserve by her granny until the age of ten. As a small child, she spent summers down by the Fraser River catching sockeye salmon at night. In the mornings, they would get up and gut the fish, cut them up and put them on the drying rack. Phyllis' granny didn't have a paying job, but she had three gardens in the valley and a cellar for storing food. They also did a lot of berry picking. Phyllis grew up eating traditional foods and it was happy times for her.

Phyllis' mom and dad were not around, and she always had a feeling of abandonment, but felt safe with her granny. Her aunt took over raising her after she completed her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Victoria. Phyllis credits her aunt for instilling in her to be self-supportive and make changes to stop the intergenerational trauma in her family.

Phyllis has one son and five grandchildren. Her grandchildren are the first in five generations to be raised by both their mother and father. Phyllis is so proud of her eldest grandson who just received his certification to be a paramedic.

Phyllis' great-grandmother was born in 1880, four years after the Indian Act came into force in Canada. Phyllis said that her great-grandmother grew up being bossed around by older white men, the Indian Agents, and she brought her granny to the St. Joseph Mission Residential School so that she could learn to read and write and get out of the oppression. She did not know the true impact the schools would have.

When Phyllis turned six years old on July 13, 1973, her granny also prepared her to attend the same school that she and Phyllis' mother attended for ten years each. Her granny took Phyllis to town to buy something new to wear for her first day of school and Phyllis chose a beautiful shiny orange shirt.

In the Fall, when Phyllis was left at St. Joseph's, her clothes were taken away, including the new orange shirt that her grandmother bought for her, and they were never returned. This made Phyllis sad. She said, "I spent a lot of time crying,

realizing that nobody was going to come for me, and nobody was going to make it better. I felt stuck there." Phyllis said she focused on disassociating her spirit from her physical body and going to her happier place, at the garden with her granny. Those were the memories that held her through at residential school that year.

Phyllis said, "That one year that I was there, I felt that I did not matter. I could be sick, we could be sick, hungry, tired, lonely, sad and there wasn't enough adults to go around and make it better. So, as a result, I learned to disassociate, I learned to leave my body and I could go anywhere I wanted, which was back to the reserve with granny in her garden and by the river."

Phyllis said that every child matters, no matter what colour of the medicine wheel you are. Everyone is encouraged to wear an orange shirt on September 30 to recognize and symbolize how the residential school system attempted to take away the Indigenous identities of children. The phrase "Every Child Matters" holds a deep significance, capturing the collective commitment to truth, reconciliation, and ensuring that the atrocities of the past are never repeated.

Phyllis takes every opportunity to tell her story and the truth about residential schools. She says it is hard for her, but when she shares, it is so important for others to learn and understand the atrocities of the past. Phyllis is committed to doing this work no matter how hard it is but needs to learn how to take better care of herself as it does take a toll on her.

Phyllis has written five books, including a picture book depicting her experience with the residential school system. Her book, *The Orange Shirt Story*, recounts her first day of school when her shirt was taken away. Her other books are *Phyllis' Orange Shirt*, which encourages awareness and understanding of the history of residential schools; *With Our Orange Hearts*, which emphasizes the importance of cultural experiences and the legacy of the St. Joseph Mission Residential School Commemoration Project; *Beyond The Orange Shirt Story*, a six generational story with her family's history that is geared towards adults; and, *Every Child Matters*,



Indigenous advocate Phyllis Webstad

in which Phyllis shares her own orange shirt story, aiming to educate and raise awareness about the historic residential school system.

In September 2021, Phyllis won the *First Nation Communities Read Award* for best Indigenous literature for her book *Beyond The Orange Shirt Story*. Through her books, she wants young learners to recognize the strength of Indigenous Communities and the ongoing journey toward justice and reconciliation.

Phyllis is also involved in The Orange Jersey Project. It is a program of the Orange Shirt Society, headed up by her son. The project focuses on bringing conversations and education on the Indian Residential School System in Canada through sport and is a partnership with the Western Hockey League (WHL).

Phyllis said, "As I think about my grandchildren, I think about all those other children just like them who didn't go home to their families and are buried in dirt somewhere. Today, our Indigenous youth are finally being allowed to be who they were meant to be. We should be supporting them as they can be anything that they want. They should follow their guts and heart. They can do anything."

Thank you,
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Advocates call *cont. from p 3*

Association, Reporters Without Borders, Journalists for Human Rights and the Coalition for Women in Journalism.

Angel Ellis, chair of the Indigenous Journalists Association press freedom committee, described Morin's as an attack on Indigenous rights.

"Storytelling is an inherent right and an integral part of our right to self-determination, which must be recognized by colonial settlers and their entities," Ellis noted.

Morin was arrested while filming the dismantling of the Indigenous-led 95th Street and Rowland Road encampment, which had been cordoned off with police tape.

As camp elder Roy Cardinal was violently arrested and police attempted to disperse a crowd of encampment supporters, EPS Sgt. Amber Maze, a former candidate for the right-wing Wildrose Party, told Morin she had to move outside the police tape. "Too far away to film, or even really see what was happening," Morin recalled in a Jan. 18 *Ricochet* story detailing her arrest.

Morin identified herself as a journalist and noted that there have been two high court rulings in Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia against police-established "exclusion zones" for journalists attempting to report on their conduct.

"I'm then grabbed and manhandled, before being cuffed by another officer and led away, paraded like a criminal in front of the TV news cameras. The cuffs were put on wrong, and I can feel a searing pain in my wrist," Morin wrote.

"All I can think about is my five-year-old daughter, who I'm supposed to pick up from kindergarten in a couple of hours. As I'm loaded into a paddy wagon I beg the officers holding me to adjust the cuffs that are causing shooting pain."

Her charge of obstruction doesn't match these facts, Cox noted.

"At no time did Brandi obstruct any police officer. On the contrary, she was obstructed and then arrested while trying to film the raid. She was not in the way, she was not involved. And she should never have been removed in handcuffs, let alone charged," he said.

Cox said he can only see "two explanations" for why Morin was targeted by Sgt. Maze — "because [Maze] recognized her and wanted to shut down reporting on these arrests by a high-profile journalist, or she didn't recognize Brandi, but saw that she looked Indigenous and assumed that meant she was part of the predominantly Indigenous encampment."

At the press conference, Morin noted that she had relatives call her "to tell me they saw me

being arrested on TV, like a criminal."

She said she's "struggled with feelings of humiliation and fear about the personal and professional consequences of being convicted of a criminal offense," but vowed not to be intimidated.

"I will not allow my arrest to silence or undermine the powerful legacy of work I have built up," Morin said.

Morin's lawyer, Richard Mirasty, said he still hasn't received the Crown's disclosure of what evidence it has to substantiate its charges against Morin and Cardinal, whom he's also representing.

"This is not the crime of the century, so the disclosure would be minimal," Mirasty explained. "It shouldn't take that long."

Reporters Without Borders releases annual international press freedom rankings. Last year, Canada ranked 15th.

Clayton Weimers, the executive director of Reporters Without Borders for Canada and the U.S., noted that this isn't the first time Canadian authorities have criminally charged journalists on the job in recent years, referencing the RCMP's arrest of Edmonton-based photojournalist Amber Bracken in 2021 while she covered opposition to the Coastal GasLink pipeline on Wet'suwet'en territory in B.C.

He said that while Canada has historically been a "global leader" regarding press freedom, criminally charging journalists for doing their jobs "puts that leadership in jeopardy."

CAJ president Brent Jolly called the need for a press conference to call for police to drop charges against a journalist relating to them doing their job "an incredibly sad reflection on the current state of press freedom in Canada."

"Brandi's arrest makes an absolute mockery of the rights of freedom of the press and the ability for journalists to report on the activities of taxpayer-funded law enforcement agencies, such as the [EPS]," he added.

This is another example of a "self-imposed black eye" on Canadian law enforcement, in which they've "ignored, whether through ignorance or indifference, the valuable role journalists play in a free and democratic society," Jolly said.

Katherine Jacobsen, who coordinates the CPJ's

Canada and U.S. program, said the organization's research has found that "that arresting reporters serves as a blunt form of censorship."

"Journalists in handcuffs cannot get their story out and, beyond an initial detention, prosecuting reporters creates a harmful chilling effect and serves as a form of intimidation for their peers. Lengthy and expensive legal processes take time away from reporters and limit their ability to cover their communities," Jacobsen said.

Bill Killorn of Journalists for Human Rights said that journalism is a "challenging job that often puts journalists in uncomfortable or unsafe situations, especially when they are covering issues of conflict with authorities."

Law enforcement must create a "climate of patience, cooperation and space to be given to journalists as they continue to cover this issue and other challenging issues across Canada," Killorn said.

Kiran Nazish, with the Coalition for Women in Journalism, observed a trend of journalists covering "stories that are related to Indigenous issues and climate change" being the main targets

of law enforcement suppression.

Since 2019, the coalition has documented 70 violations of press freedom for female journalists in Canada, with more than half consisting of online targeted harassment campaigns. But 17 examples, or 24 per cent, were of direct interference in reporting from law enforcement agencies.

"We do not think it is healthy for Canadian democracy to have law enforcement institutions get in the way of journalistic work," said Nazish. "Their job is to allow journalists access and to get out of the way of independent news gathering, which is a process necessary for a democracy."

David Matshine, who is the director of policy, advocacy and research at Amnesty International Canada, praised Morin's "courageous, thoughtful and empathetic reporting," calling for Edmonton police to apologize to her, in addition to dropping her charge.

The arrest of an Indigenous journalist covering an Indigenous issue "threatens Canada's fragile progress on the road to reconciliation," he noted.

(Disclosure: This writer is a regular Ricochet contributor.)



Agreement *cont. from p 2*

The agreement establishes the terms for transferring Crown land and resources to the territorial government, outlining conditions for the post-transfer era.

Once the transfer is complete, Government of Canada employees in Nunavut whose jobs are now territorial jurisdiction will be offered jobs with the territorial government.

Under Article 23 of the 1993 Nunavut Agreement, the federal and territorial governments must ensure Inuit people are

employed in federal and territorial government roles in Nunavut proportionate to their share of the territory's population.

The role of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. is to develop a human resources strategy specifically focused on increasing Inuit employment, something the territory has struggled with.

Increasing their share of government jobs will ensure "Inuit shape the policies and future of land and resource development in Nunavut," Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. president Kortiek said in a Jan. 18 statement.

Former Nunavut premier Joe Savikataaq, who

served from 2018 to 2021, told the CBC that the devolution agreement's signing marks the beginning of a "long, drawn out process," representing "another step in Nunavut growing up."

Savikataaq, who still represents Arviat in the Legislative Assembly, cautioned that the new government jobs cannot be concentrated in the capital city.

"Not all the jobs should be going to Iqaluit. We should be seeing jobs in communities," he said.



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After 40 years of publishing the Alberta Native News, the owners wish to retire. We are hoping some enterprising individual(s) with a passion for communicating Indigenous issues will carry on with publishing the newspaper. It is not easy in this day and age to produce a print media with a supporting digital presence but it is something that serves a vital interest for the Indigenous communities across Treaty 6, 7 and 8 territories.

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Sheena Kaine: Rising from pain to power

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Sheena Kaine embodies the struggles of women in our province, especially Indigenous women. Despite battling substance abuse and involvement in crime in her youth, this Metis woman from Edmonton turned her life around after a second chance from the law. Her journey of self-discovery and redemption not only transformed her but also positively impacted those around her. In the August 2022 issue of *Alberta Native News*, we showcased Sheena's progression from boxing and trauma recovery to her current achievements as an international Indigenous model, actress, and fashion designer.

Sheena candidly shared about her childhood, which was marred by missed opportunities, notably her early aspirations for a modeling career that were hindered by financial constraints. Reflecting on her past, she recalled, "I was selected to model as a youth... Chan International was prominent back then. I was going through a lot at that time, and when I was chosen to model, my mother couldn't accompany me due to financial limitations."

Despite these setbacks, Sheena found fulfillment later in life by re-entering the world of modeling as an adult, gracing runways not only in Paris but also across Canada. "When I was asked to model again and had to work on perfecting that straight... flawless walk, it was incredibly rewarding," she reminisces. "It felt even better than it did before."

Being a fashion muse to some of Canada's most respected and influential Indigenous designers, such as Internationally celebrated fashion designer Stephanie Crowchild of Tsuut'ina First Nation, has given her once in a lifetime high fashion experience, she explained. "I've had

opportunities to walk in Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week."

From modeling to acting, Sheena is an up-and-coming actor with aspirations to become an international actress.

She says, "I don't like to consider myself a role model, but I do recognize the profound impact that my journey has had on others, and I will continue to use that as motivation to do better."

Describing herself as an entrepreneur, she has transformed her hardships and experiences into a ready-to-wear apparel clothing company called *Pain Mafia*.

She says, "Pain Mafia represents the transformation of painful experiences into power, personal growth, and the importance of unbreakable family ties."

Sheena's natural beauty has often made her a target for bullying and victimization, particularly by men.

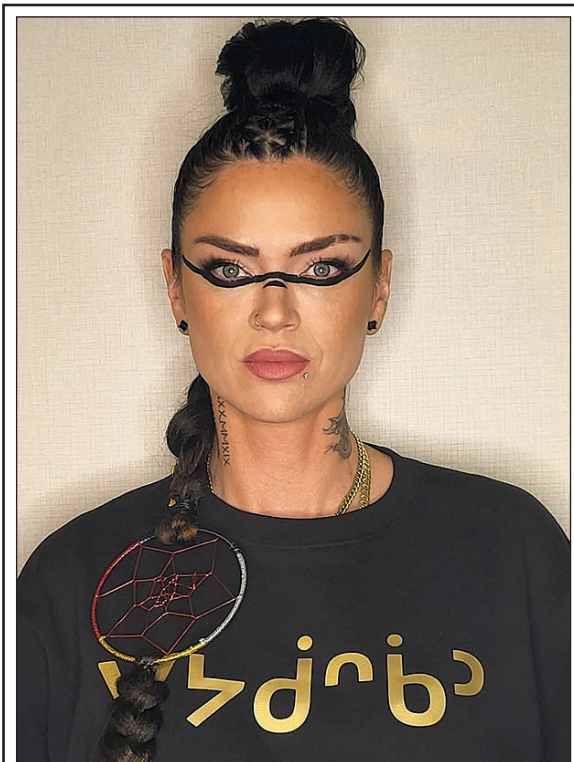
Calls for change continue across Canada and advocates in Edmonton have been urging the city to address the alarming rates of violence against women and LGBTQ+ individuals, emphasizing the need for enhanced safety measures and awareness campaigns.

According to the Government of Canada, women, and the gender-diverse community are disproportionately affected by sexual assault and unwanted behaviors, with rates indicating significant challenges in ensuring safety and security for women and gender minorities.

Despite her traumatic experiences, Sheena declares, "I refuse to be defined by the role of a victim. I am a survivor - a warrior who has confronted darkness and emerged stronger."

She reflects on her life, transitioning from a tumultuous past to the boxing ring. "Got into boxing, my parents, you know, stuff like that helped. Working out has been a freaking lifesaver," she shares. These helped her stay away from substances but also contributed to her overall well-being, both physically and mentally.

"Despite the challenges I've faced, I take natural herbal supplements, I work out," said Sheena, highlighting her focus on holistic healing. "I feel that I have come full circle since my days as a boxer and my struggles with addiction, experiencing a profound personal transformation." Emphasizing the importance of nurturing both body



Sheena Kaine wearing Pain Mafia.

and mind she now shares her journey through workshops and motivational speeches.

Sheena, like many Indigenous people today, is both Métis and First Nation, reflecting the multi-racial and multi-cultural nature of our communities. "I aim to honour and celebrate both my Indigenous heritage and European lineage," she affirmed, highlighting a growing trend among mixed First Nation and Métis individuals embracing their diverse backgrounds.

Many Indigenous people struggle to grasp how Canada was founded on their peoples' destruction, navigating the complexities of both Western and Indigenous worlds alongside settlers whose ancestors sought to eradicate them.

Acknowledging the common adage that pain can either shatter or strengthen an individual, Sheena has unequivocally mastered the art of transcending injustice and painful experiences. Whether it's in the ring, on the stage, or the runway, she has seized control of her narrative and emerged triumphant.

Join her movement dedicated to transforming pain into power by purchasing her ready-to-wear apparel, Pain Mafia.

For more information, follow Sheena Kaine on social media platforms: Facebook: Sheena T Kaine, TikTok: @stkaine, Instagram: @stkaine, Linktree: Stkaine, and by email: Stkaine@icloud.com



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