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Research to reinvigorate Traditional Healing Systems a 'professional and personal' responsibility

Dr. Lana Ray is working with Indigenous communities to revitalize Traditional Indigenous Health Systems to reduce non-communicable diseases.

As the newly appointed Canada Research Chair in Resurgent Methodologies for Indigenous Health, part of Dr. Lana Ray's research explores how to revitalize Traditional Healing Systems to address the high rates of non-communicable disease that are a result of system inequities.

"Traditional Healing Systems have been disrupted by colonialism—often to the detriment of the health of Indigenous Peoples, who before invasion experienced low rates of cancer and other non-communicable diseases," explained Ray, an associate professor in Athabasca University's Faculty of Health Disciplines.

Today, the overall population in Canada is experiencing declines in rates of some types of cancer. "In First Nations communities, we're seeing the opposite trend," said Ray, who is based in Thunder Bay, Ont.

Dr. Lana Ray is working with Indigenous communities to revitalize Traditional Indigenous Health Systems.

Ray combines Indigenous research methods and implementation science approaches in her research. What attracted her to implementation science is that its main focus is on how to effectively implement health interventions that are proven to work.

"Traditional Healing Systems have sustained us from time immemorial. We know they work," she said. "The research I do begins with the premise that Traditional Healing is a wise practice and looks at how communities and institutions can support and implement those systems."

Revitalizing Indigenous systems

Ray's work involves collaboration with First Nations communities. One collaboration, the Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'iyewigamig Mino-Bimaadiziwin project, is being conducted in partnership with Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'iyewigamig, an Indigenous-governed health centre that serves local First Nations and the urban Indigenous community in the Kenora and Dryden regions of Ontario and Traditional Healers from northwestern Ontario and Manitoba.

The five-year project is funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research and Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases and focuses on cancer prevention and, to some degree, cancer treatment involving Traditional Healers, Indigenous Knowledge Holders, and traditional medicines.

One of the ways the project aims to revive traditional practices is by teaching community members about plant medicines. Participants learn the knowledge, skills, and protocols to harvest plant medicines in respectful and sustainable ways as well as how to utilize the plants to improve the health and well-being of their families and communities.

Ray said that doesn't mean participants will come away from the camp as healers, but it is an opportunity to learn about systems that have been long disrupted by colonialism.

"It's very different going to medicine camp and going to medical school," she explained. "We learn in different ways, so understanding about Anishinaabe learning systems within the context of health is part of it. It's very much wholistic learning."

Indigenous data sovereignty

Indigenous data sovereignty is another major focus of Ray's work. This includes working with communities on the ownership, control, access, and possession of data.

Indigenous Peoples have always had their own ways to manage, store, and transmit data. Stories, she said, are an example of a traditional way to share knowledge and history.

"There were stories that may be owned by particular families, owned by particular people in the community, and it was their responsibility to know those stories. Those are all forms of data management."

One of Ray's aims is to understand the processes and protocols used to manage that data and work with Elders and other community members to determine what's appropriate to merge with Western methods of data storage.

"How can we support creating tools to support communities and making decisions about their data?"

'Our responsibility' to carry on from prior generations

While there has been some progress in recognizing the negative effects of colonialism on the health of Indigenous Peoples and addressing systemic problems such as racism in health care, Ray said even the best anti-racism programs are limited in impact because, ultimately, they're outside the control of the community. That's why revitalizing Traditional Knowledge and Healing Systems is so important—to her research and as a personal calling.

"It's our responsibility to retake up that work, carry on what our prior generations have been able to sustain, and really build on that towards the resurgence of our knowledge systems. So to me, that work, it's my professional work, but it's also very personal."

Edmonton will host International Tourism Conference: Feb 17 - 19

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Edmonton will host the International Indigenous Tourism Conference from February 17 to 19, bringing together Indigenous tourism leaders, entrepreneurs, cultural knowledge keepers, and industry partners from across Canada and around the world. First Nation activist and actress Ashley Callingbull and artist, designer Lance Cardinal will emcee the event.

The conference is being organized in partnership with Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Travel Alberta, and Explore Edmonton, and will highlight Indigenous cultural offerings from communities throughout the region.

"We are partnering with Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Travel Alberta, and Explore Edmonton, and featuring some of the cultural offerings in the area," said Keith Henry, President of Indigenous Tourism Canada and a respected Métis leader in Indigenous cultural tourism. "We expect over 1,100 delegates from probably around 11 countries to attend this conference in Edmonton from February 17 to 19, to continue learning how to build Indigenous tourism and share best practices. It's very exciting, and we're really looking forward to that."

Henry said the conference is part of a long-term strategy to strengthen Indigenous tourism across Canada by focusing on four key areas.

"We're looking to build Indigenous tourism in four major areas," he said. "From a marketing perspective, we're focused on what's working now, what is truly economically sustainable, and what domestic and international visitors are buying and interested in. Understanding the market is critical."

From a development standpoint, Henry said programs are designed to meet communities where they are.

"We have a series of initiatives and programs to help build Indigenous tourism from both a community and an entrepreneurial perspective, because some Nations are very involved in tourism while others are just starting that journey," he said. "We offer programs such as the Indigenous accreditation process and investment programs, while supporting entrepreneurs as they grow."

Leadership and advocacy are also central to the work.

"There's leadership work we're doing, including policy and advocacy with Canada, provinces, and territories, as well as directly with communities," Henry said. "We want communities to understand what information and tools they need to be successful in building Indigenous tourism."

Partnerships complete the four-pillar approach.

"We showcase how effective partnerships are working for communities and across the broader Indigenous tourism industry," he said.

The conference's international reach reflects growing global interest in Indigenous tourism in Canada.

"We have delegates coming from New Zealand, the United States, Central and South America, including Chile and Mexico, as well as Australia," Henry said. "We also have many non-Indigenous partners who want to help build Indigenous tourism, so there are investment discussions and many other conversations taking place."

Henry said one of the central goals of the event is global positioning.

"One of the main objectives of our conference is to truly showcase Canada as the best Indigenous destination in the world," he said.

He added that the scale of the conference reflects years of sustained work.

"We've been building Indigenous tourism in Canada for years and years, and we've been building this conference over that same time," Henry said. "It's now the largest Indigenous tourism conference in the world by far. No one else comes close to the number of delegates we have, and we're very proud of that."

Henry has earned international recognition for his leadership in Indigenous cultural tourism. He serves as Chief Executive Officer of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, CEO of KCD Consulting Incorporated, and President and CEO of the BC Métis Federation. His career began in education in 1995 before expanding into strategic administration, negotiation, and consulting with provincial and federal governments.

Keith Henry is President of Indigenous Tourism Canada.

Throughout his career, Henry has helped establish national standards for authenticity and market readiness in Indigenous tourism, led research on the economic value of Indigenous cultural tourism, and supported workforce development through his role as a Director with Tourism HR Canada.

Organizers say the Edmonton conference will play a key role in building capacity, strengthening partnerships, and supporting Indigenous communities as they continue to grow a sustainable, Indigenous-led tourism industry in Canada.

Visit indigenoustourismconference.ca for more information.

April Eve Wiberg advocates for the Missing, Murdered and Forgotten

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

April Eve Wiberg is an Indigenous movement builder, survivor, and advocate who transforms lived experience into action for justice and community care. Her journey, marked by trauma and resilience, has shaped her mission to protect Indigenous women, girls, men, boys and Two-Spirit people from exploitation, violence, and systemic neglect.

During January, Human Trafficking Awareness Month, Wiberg's story highlights the realities of exploitation, the importance of early intervention, and the power of survivor leadership. Her advocacy work, grounded in lived experience, is helping communities across Canada and internationally better understand the complex dynamics of trafficking and the urgent need for systemic change.

Early Life and Homelessness

Wiberg grew up in rural southern Saskatchewan, where she experienced racism, family violence, sexual abuse, and multiple forms of harm.

"By the time I was 17, I was homeless in Edmonton for the second time. Being homeless as a young Indigenous girl in the city was terrifying," she said.

While living near 118th Avenue and 82nd Street, Wiberg witnessed the sexual exploitation of young people firsthand. After moving to lower-income suburban areas in west Edmonton, her mother left the city for Vancouver with her three younger siblings, leaving Wiberg behind.

A friend urged her to seek help at an emergency youth shelter, but she was turned away.

"They told me there were no beds and turned me away without offering any other resources," Wiberg recalled.

A subsequent visit to Catholic Social Services ended in blame rather than support.

"The social worker asked me, 'What did you do?' I was a scared, vulnerable Indigenous teenager in a big city, reaching out for help. Instead of support, I was handed what I believe was a $200 food voucher and sent away. I never entered the system as a vulnerable youth in need of care – I ended up in the sex trade."

Exploitation and Survival

Wiberg says her exploitation involved grooming, coercion, and manipulation.

"To unravel my story, there are so many layers. In a nutshell, I was targeted. I was coerced. I was manipulated. I was love-bombed – all of it."

At age 19, Wiberg was "turned out" in the sex trade, a term used to describe being put up for sale. She was moved between cities, including New York, Vancouver, Fort McMurray, Saskatoon, Las Vegas, and Edmonton, and remained in exploitation for eight years.

"I went from being groomed to being fully exploited," she said.

Her eventual escape did not come through law enforcement. In New York, the person who helped her leave was involved in the illicit drug trade – not a predator toward her, but someone who had the means to get her out of a life-threatening situation.

Years later, Wiberg chose to share her story publicly. Through journalist Brandi Morin, who was freelancing for *Al Jazeera*, Wiberg recounted her experiences of exploitation in Fort McMurray.

"I was tired of living in shame and hiding parts of my story. Exploitation and human trafficking are part of why Indigenous women, girls, men, and boys go missing and are murdered," she said.

Her lived experience informs her leadership of the Stolen Sisters & Brothers Action Movement, a grassroots organization advocating for Missing, Murdered, and Exploited Indigenous People.

"During my exploitation, I could have gone missing or been murdered many times, in Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Las Vegas, and New York. That's why our movement works to protect our communities and shine a light on systemic failures."

Understanding Grooming and Exploitation

Wiberg warns that exploitation often begins subtly and psychologically, especially online.

"They offer things that look like stability – friends, attention, money, and a sense that there's more to life. It can feel like being welcomed into a new group, a new world," she said.

She notes that traffickers increasingly use gaming platforms to groom youth, including Minecraft, Roblox, and Fortnite.

April Eve Wiberg. (Visions of Heaphen Photography).

"They don't just show up and say, 'Come meet me.' It's very meticulous. They slowly surround someone with attention and flattery. They listen when you're upset with your parents. They position themselves as the one person who understands you."

Wiberg says traffickers often use distinct patterns of control, commonly referred to as different "types" of pimps.

Boyfriend pimps: "He gives you flowers, attention, affection. He makes you feel special and loved. Eventually, he starts asking for small 'favours,' and then it escalates. He might say, 'I know this older guy — he just wants to spend some time with a nice girl.'"

Popcorn pimps: "These are less boyfriend-like but manage multiple women at the same time. It's less emotional, but the exploitation is still there."

Gorilla pimps: "These are the most violent. They know exactly how to target the most vulnerable, and they use fear and violence to control them."

"These dynamics are not about consent or choice, but about coercion, manipulation, and survival. Some of these situations end in serious harm or death. That's why it's so important for people to understand how exploitation actually works," she added.

Recognizing these patterns is essential for prevention and early intervention, particularly for those working with youth and vulnerable populations.

Advocacy and Global Awareness

Wiberg has been part of a growing global movement raising awareness about missing, murdered, and exploited people across Indigenous and marginalized communities worldwide. During Human Trafficking Awareness Month, her story is being shared to highlight both the dangers of exploitation and the resilience of survivors.

Her advocacy and lived experience have been featured in media and public education efforts, including the trailers *The Missing, Murdered, and Forgotten* and *The Right Track*.

"I didn't realize I was being trafficked in the moment," she said. "When you're inside it, you're just trying to survive."

She explains that this lack of awareness is common among those being exploited, particularly youth and young women who are groomed gradually over time.

"Trafficking doesn't always look like what people expect. It often looks like relationships,

Continued on page 7

Proposed new riding has increased Indigenous representation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A proposed new northern Alberta provincial riding encompassing 18 Indigenous communities could help spur Indigenous participation in provincial politics, says the chief of Tallcree First Nation.

The new riding, Mackenzie, was proposed in the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission's (EBC) October 2025 interim report. With a proposed population of 39,072, it would be the province's largest riding geographically but the smallest by population.

The proposed boundaries were selected, according to the commission report, "with particular view to the desirability of an electoral division having a high Indigenous population."

Mackenzie would effectively replace the existing riding of Lesser Slave Lake, with the municipal district of Lesser Slave River, including the Town of Slave Lake, moved to a reconfigured Slave Lake-Westlock-Athabasca riding and portions of Big Lake County in the southwest corner moved to Peace River-Notley.

The new riding incorporates Mackenzie County, which includes the North Peace Tribal Council nations of Tallcree, Beaver First Nation, Little Red River First Nation and Dene Tha First Nation, and Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement from the existing Peace River riding in the north, which would cease to exist.

These Indigenous communities joining the First Nations and Metis settlements in Lesser Slave Lake would give the new riding 14 First Nations and four Metis settlements, potentially increasing their power as a voting bloc.

Tallcree Chief Rupert Meneen told *Alberta Native News* that the North Peace Tribal Council, of which he is also chief, supports the changes.

"It gives us the opportunity to put somebody in the legislature, a First Nations person, that would be our voice in there," said Chief Meneen.

In the Peace River riding, he noted, the North Peace nations have to contend with higher turnout in the non-Indigenous communities of Peace River, La Crete, High Level, Grimshaw and Manning.

"Nobody cares about First Nations people because nobody votes," said Meneen. "I'm trying to change that. I'm trying to get our people out to vote."

He added that this is especially urgent, given the legislation that the UCP government has passed that conflicts with First Nations Treaty rights, namely the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act and the more recent Justice Statutes Amendment Act, which removes courts' ability to reject referendums on constitutional grounds.

Premier Danielle Smith is "not a big supporter of our nations, unfortunately, so we need to start changing that somewhere, somehow," said Meneen.

He acknowledged that the changes have been contentious among other Treaty 8 First Nations who are content with their current representation in the Lesser Slave Lake riding.

Scott Sinclair, the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake, is himself Indigenous. He was kicked out of the UCP caucus in March for publicly stating his intention to vote against the 2025 budget, which he argued shortchanged rural communities in favour of Calgary and Edmonton.

He published an Oct. 29 statement calling the decision to eliminate his riding an "attack on democracy," which made no mention of Indigenous representation.

Sinclair noted that Lesser Slave Lake is already the largest riding in the province at 70,000 square kms, "which is two and a half times the size of the Netherlands."

Mackenzie would double that size while removing the riding's largest municipality — the Town of Slave Lake. "It's absurd," the independent MLA wrote.

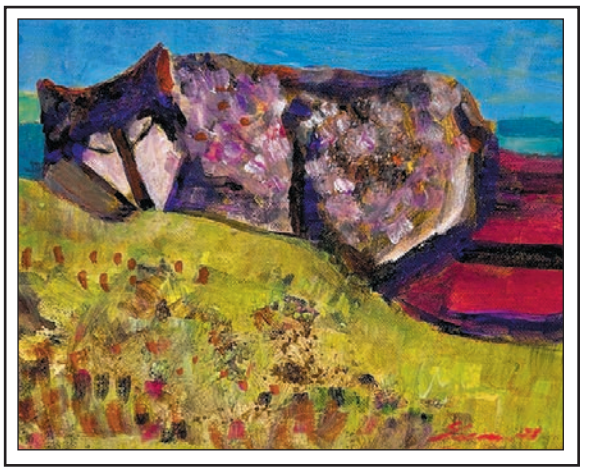
Sinclair, whose office didn't acknowledge an interview request, takes the removal of his riding personally. He wrote that "it's hard not to believe" the elimination of his riding "isn't a retaliatory move" for refusing to support the UCP budget.

But the UCP MLAs who represent the other nine northern ridings also expressed opposition to the EBC's proposals in a joint Oct. 29 statement calling the reduction in representation "unacceptable."

"For northern Albertans, losing our voice is not an option," they wrote, proposing that rather than eliminating Lesser Slave Lake that its boundaries be pushed southward.

In November 2024, Justice Minister Mickey Amery introduced legislation to increase the number of ridings in the legislature from 87 to 89 to reflect population growth in the Edmonton and Calgary regions, activating the EBC.

The commission is chaired by Dallas K. Miller, a Court of King's Bench justice who was



formerly the executive director of the Home School Legal Defence Association and the Canadian Centre for Home Education.

It includes two UCP-appointed commissioners – retired University of Alberta historian Julian Martin and lawyer John Evans and two NDP-appointed commissioners – former Alberta Party leader Greg Clark and former Sylvan Lake mayor Susan Samson.

The EBC is holding in-person and virtual public meetings during the month of January for feedback on the interim report. Those seeking to present to the commission can register at abebc.ca.

The final EBC report is due on March 28.

Tyler Moody inspires youth with culture, creativity and honesty

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

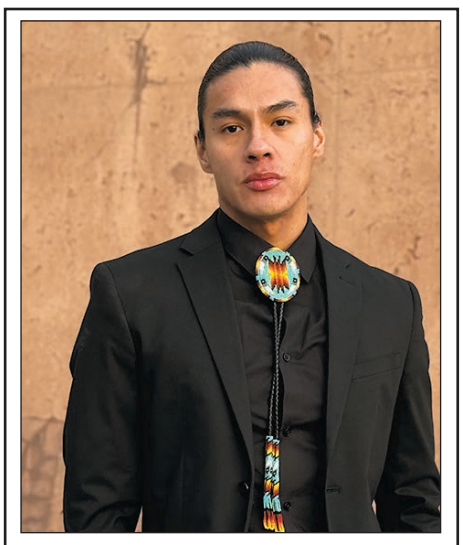
From the northern community of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (Nelson House, Manitoba), Tyler Moody carries a story shaped by resilience, culture, and survival. Raised in a family of seven siblings by a single mother, Moody grew up surrounded by instability and addiction, often living in what he describes as "survival mode."

"I was raised in a family of seven siblings by a single mother, and from a young age I experienced instability, addiction around me, and periods of survival mode," Moody said.

Between the ages of nine and fourteen, Moody lived with his grandparents, a period he credits as foundational to who he is today. Through them, he learned traditional Cree life skills.

"They taught me traditional life skills – hunting for survival, using medicines from the land, and making clothing from what we harvested," he said. "Those teachings grounded me."

Today, Moody is a model, youth mentor, and fashion artist whose work is deeply informed by his heritage. He says culture is not something separate from his career, but the foundation of it.



Youth mentor Tyler Moody

"My heritage influences everything I do," Moody said. "It reminds me that our culture is strength, our stories matter, and our people carry knowledge that deserves to be seen and respected."

Moody's journey, however, was not linear. He speaks openly about struggles with addiction, mental health, and uncertainty about his future. In his late teens and early twenties, he survived multiple suicide attempts while trying to navigate adulthood without stability or direction.

"There were moments in my life where I didn't think I would make it," he said. "I felt lost and unsure of my purpose."

Healing, Moody explained, came gradually and intentionally. Sports, mentorship, reconnection to culture, and eventually sobriety became key supports. A major turning point came when he moved abroad at the age of 21.

"Moving abroad at 21 was a turning point," he said. "It forced me to grow, reflect, and take responsibility for my life. Healing isn't linear, but choosing yourself every day is powerful."

Moody did not enter modeling or content creation for recognition or fame. Instead, he stepped into those spaces to create representation – something he says was missing in his own upbringing.

"I didn't set out to become a content creator or model for fame," he said. "I stepped into those spaces to create representation and to show Indigenous youth that we belong everywhere."

Mentorship followed naturally. Today, Moody engages with youth through speaking engagements, workshops, storytelling, and one-on-one mentorship. He believes honesty – not perfection – is the most important leadership tool.

"I don't lead from a place of perfection," he said. "I lead from honesty. Youth deserve real examples, not unrealistic ones."

Moody believes Indigenous representation in media and social platforms has grown, but says there is still significant work to be done. For generations, Indigenous stories were told by others, often through harmful stereotypes.

"Social media has given us the ability to reclaim our narratives and show our culture as living, evolving, and strong," he said. "Representation isn't just about visibility, it's about authenticity."

He says seeing Indigenous people thrive in creative, professional, and leadership spaces can change how young people see themselves.

"When Indigenous youth see people who look like them thriving, it changes what they believe is possible," Moody said. "Media can either continue old stereotypes or help heal generations."

His message to Indigenous youth is grounded in both lived experience and hope.

"Your story matters," he said. "You don't have to have everything figured out. Hold onto your culture, it will carry you through spaces that weren't built for us."

Everything Moody does, he says, is rooted in gratitude – especially for those who never felt seen or heard – particularly in northern communities across Canada.

"My vision is a future where Indigenous youth know their worth, feel pride in who they are, and believe they belong in every room they walk into," he said.

If his journey helps even one person choose healing, self-belief, or reconnection to culture, Moody believes the work is worth it.

"We are still here," he said. "We are strong. And the next generations deserve to see that reflected everywhere."

For inquiries contact Tyler at tylerwwmoody2025@gmail.com.

New book helps Inuit children see themselves in early reading books

A heartfelt new children's book, *Sanikpiaq and Amagana Go Ice Fishing*, has been released, offering young readers a warm and engaging introduction to life in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Written by Gloria Iatridis and illustrated by her daughter Olivia Kate Iatridis, the story follows siblings Sanikpiaq and Amagana as they head out onto the ice with their father, learning patience, traditional fishing practices, and some introductory Inuvialuktun words, such as *iqaluk* (fish).

The book is inspired by the real childhood of Sanikpiaq, Sarah Anderson (née Nasogaluak), an Inuvialuk born on Baillie Island and raised in Tuktuyaaqtuuq (Tuktoyaktuk). As the oldest daughter in a family of eleven children, she grew up helping her parents, working on the land, hauling ice, harvesting wood, trapping, and she even had her own dog team and trap line. Formal schooling did not exist in her community until she was thirteen, when she entered kindergarten and learned to read from the *Dick and Jane* series. Sanikpiaq shared with her daughter Gloria that she never saw herself in school. The educational tools never reflected her, her culture, or the Arctic world she knew so well.

Sanikpiaq and Amagana Go Ice Fishing was created to change that experience for today's Inuit children. Too often, northern students still read stories centered on southern Canadian communities or faraway places. This early reader book ensures that when kindergarten children begin school, they see themselves, their families, their land, and their traditions represented in the pages in front of them. Through simple sentences, repetition, and culturally grounded imagery, the book supports young readers in building confidence, pride, and early literacy skills while strengthening cultural understanding.

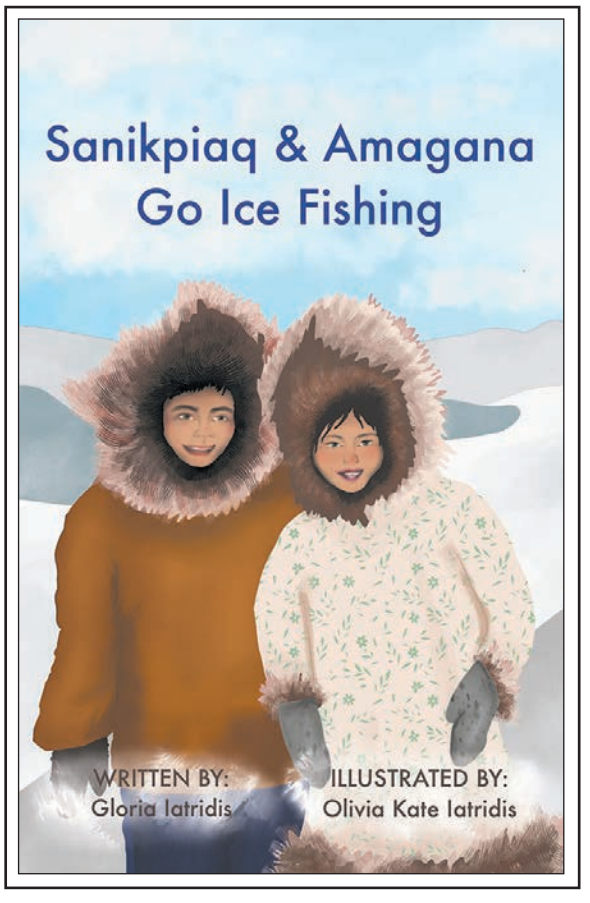
"Inuit children deserve to see themselves in books in ways that feel normal and that encourage pride and confidence in who they are. For non-Inuit readers, the story offers an opportunity to learn about Inuit culture and the Arctic through a joyful, everyday experience," says Gloria. "I am grateful to be able to create a book that inspires positive change."

This book also honours Sanikpiaq's legacy as an educator. As an adult, she returned to school, upgraded her education, and became an Inuvialuktun teacher. She spent twenty-seven years teaching language and culture at Mangilaluk School in Tuktoyaktuk. Her belief in culturally appropriate education and the importance of Inuit voices in learning resources continues through this book and plans for future titles in the series.

This release is especially meaningful as it marks Olivia Kate Iatridis's debut as an illustrator, bringing warmth, vibrancy, and Inuvialuit identity to every page.

"This story honours my Nanuk, who I loved deeply and admired for her strength," says Olivia. "Illustrating this book allowed me to share her spirit and bring the Inuvialuit culture to young readers everywhere."

It was important for Gloria and Olivia to make the book Irlen-friendly to ensure every young reader can enjoy the story comfortably. Irlen Syndrome is a perceptual processing condition that can make reading difficult due to sensitivity to light contrast and certain visual patterns. The colours, spacing, and font choices were selected to help reduce visual stress and support children with Irlen Syndrome.



Sanikpiaq and Amagana Go Ice Fishing reflects Gloria and Olivia's commitment to creating culturally grounded early-reader books that celebrate Inuit identity and support early literacy for young learners.

The book is now available for purchase at Sanikpiaq and Amagana Go Ice Fishing - ReadersMagnet and major book outlets.

April Eve Wiberg cont. from p 4

survival, and manipulation — until you're already trapped."

Survivor Leadership and Advocacy Work

Wiberg acknowledges the weight of survival.

"I'm very blessed. I'm very fortunate. A lot of my sisters did not survive, but I survived. It's a lifelong journey of healing and self-discovery."

She continues to seek specialized therapy to address the trauma she endured while giving back through advocacy. Today, she serves as a volunteer board member with the Alberta Centre to End Trafficking in Persons and is the only survivor on the board.

"It's a real honour and a privilege, but it's a huge responsibility."

Wiberg highlights the importance of mentorship and learning from other survivors. She points to Juanita Murphy, who works with CEASE — the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation — as a guiding influence.

"Juanita has been helping other women and girls who have suffered from human trafficking for many years, supporting survivors on how to heal and navigate the aftermath of exploitation."

Beyond advocacy, Wiberg is focused on systemic change, calling attention to gaps in education, social services, and law enforcement responses.

"We need to teach young people about healthy relationships, boundaries, and online safety. We need communities that see vulnerability and respond with care, not blame."

Looking Forward: Hope and Empowerment

Wiberg continues to mentor other survivors and support grassroots movements. By combining lived experience with leadership and advocacy, she provides both guidance and hope to those navigating life after exploitation.

"Survivor leadership is powerful. We can transform pain into action, trauma into change. That's what gives me purpose every day."

As Human Trafficking Awareness Month continues, Wiberg's story serves as a reminder of both the dangers that persist in vulnerable communities and the resilience, courage, and leadership survivors bring to the fight against exploitation.

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Provincial separation without informed consent violates Treaty Rights

By John Wirth, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Alberta Judge Colin Feasby has ruled that a proposed citizen-initiated referendum on provincial separation is unconstitutional. In a decision delivered on December 5, 2025 – just hours after the provincial government introduced Bill 14 to bypass the Court of King's Bench – Justice Feasby ruled that the move violates both Charter rights and the Numbered Treaties that form Alberta's very foundation.

The court has ruled that separation cannot proceed without, at the very least, the prior informed consent of the Treaty First Nations.

The Legal Wall: Indigenous Consent

Indigenous consensus remains a hurdle that ardent secessionists may never leap. While the Alberta Prosperity Project (APP) claims to "unite all Albertans," their struggle to gain mainstream traction suggests otherwise. They can dress up their rhetoric all they like, but they cannot hide the fact that their agenda serves only a few, rather than the entire province.

At the heart of the clash is the 2021 Citizens' Initiative Act. While framed as "direct democracy," the Act has effectively become a tool for well-funded groups to bypass legislative debate. Recently, the application fee for a petition was hiked from $500 to a staggering $25,000. While the government claims this fee is refundable at the Legislature's discretion, the abrupt shift suggests that the only voices being considered are those with 25 grand hidden in their couch cushions.

Treaty Rights are Not Negotiable

The initiative was supposed to have a "guardrail" that the APP conveniently ignores: proposals cannot violate the Canadian Constitution, which recognizes and affirms Treaty rights under Section 35.

The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations responded to the ruling with a clear victory message:

"The Confederacy applauds the decision… to deem any referendum seeking to establish Alberta as a sovereign country as unconstitutional. We will never be silent when Treaty is threatened."

Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi, speaking for the Treaty 8 Confederacy, was equally firm:

"Treaty 8 expects the Province to respect this decision. Decisions that affect Treaties cannot be advanced through political shortcuts, legislative maneuvering, or processes that exclude the Peoples whose rights are at stake."

He reaffirmed the rallying mantra of the Treaties:

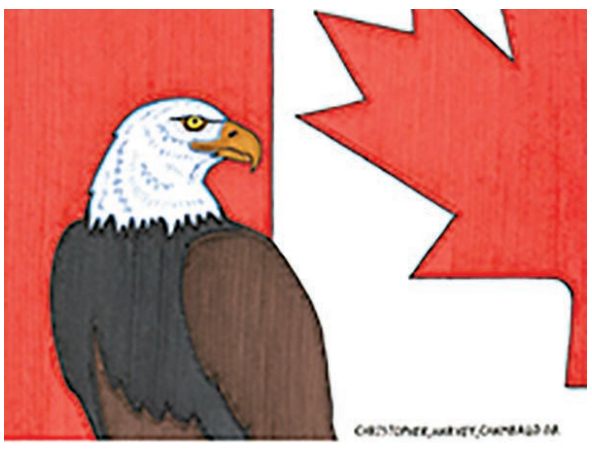
"The Sovereign Chiefs of Treaty 8 will continue to defend the promises our ancestors made with the Crown… for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow."

A Cautionary Tale: The Risk of "Sweet Talk"

We shouldn't ignore these warnings. As a community, we have to wake up to the actual risks. History shows us how easy it is to be tricked by "sweet talk" and big promises of wealth.

Look at Brexit: people in the United Kingdom were promised a better life if they left the European Union. Instead, they ended up voting against their own interests, facing higher prices, less trade, and years of confusion.

The same thing is happening here. Separation isn't just a "yes" or "no" vote; we are standing on the edge of a legal nightmare. By ignoring the Treaties, separation fans are promising a future they can't actually deliver. We cannot let ourselves be led into a trap by pretty words, only to realize too late that we've broken the very foundations – our laws and our Treaties – that keep us stable.



Author Shelly Nelson shares Seven Grandfather Teachings through children's book

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Plains Cree author and knowledge keeper Shelly Nelson, from Onion Lake, Saskatchewan, is sharing Cree teachings with the next generation through her newly released children's book, *My Name Is Kona*.

Released last year, the children's book is rooted in the Seven Grandfather Teachings, a core value system embraced across many Cree communities. Written for young readers from kindergarten to Grade 5, the book uses land-based imagery, descriptive storytelling, and Cree language to connect cultural teachings with identity and place.

"The Seven Grandfather Teachings were part of my way of life growing up," Nelson said. "They were always present in my community, and that's something I wanted to reflect in the book."

Nelson describes *My Name Is Kona* as Cree-based for the region, incorporating familiar scenes such as activities along the river to ground the teachings in lived experience. Cree words are woven throughout the book, supporting both language learning and cultural continuity.

The response to the book has been overwhelmingly positive. Over the past three years, Bent Arrow Healing Society has hosted community events featuring Nelson's work, partnering with Edmonton Police and distributing books they purchased to families and children. Most recently, Bent Arrow Healing Society purchased approximately 100 copies of *My Name Is Kona* and distributed them during community gatherings.

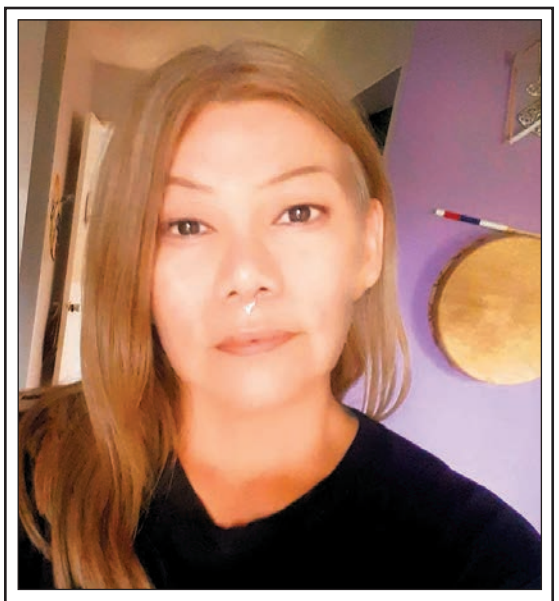
The events included shared meals and public readings, creating welcoming spaces for families, children, and community members. Edmonton Police attended the gatherings, listening to Nelson's readings and supporting the events alongside Bent Arrow Healing Society.

Nelson has already begun reading *My Name Is Kona* at schools and community events, where the book has resonated strongly with young audiences. "It's been really fun," she said. "The kids really connect with the stories and the teachings."

Nelson's journey as a writer began early. She says she knew she wanted to be a writer as young as Grade 5, spending extensive time in libraries and participating in writing groups within her community. Her passion for research and storytelling continued into her youth, where she developed her own learning and research methods.

She previously pursued post-secondary education at MacEwan University and the University of Alberta, and also studied at the Nehiyaw (Nechie) Institute. Her education in Indigenous knowledge systems and Cree teachings has helped shape her work as a writer and part-time knowledge keeper.

Reflecting on her path as an author, Nelson says the decision to publish was life-changing.



Author Shelly Nelson

"I got the opportunity to write a book, and I took it, and I'm glad I did," Nelson said. "One of my first books was about my ribbon skirt, and when it was released, it really affirmed that this was the path I was meant to be on. I'm really happy with what this journey has brought me."

Nelson published her work through Eaglespeaker Publishing, which has supported her in bringing Indigenous stories and teachings to wider audiences.

Today, Nelson balances her work as an author with her role as a part-time knowledge keeper and serves on two Indigenous boards. Much of her work focuses on author visits, community events, and sharing knowledge through storytelling.

For Nelson, *My Name Is Kona* is more than a children's book – it is a way to pass down teachings, language, and values that have sustained Cree communities for generations.

RCMP break into Chief Allan Adam's home on Christmas

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation was in Fort Chipewyan celebrating Christmas with his family when he learned the Wood Buffalo RCMP had broken into his home.

Adam told *Alberta Native News* that on Christmas Day, the Mounties broke down the front door of his house, tore into a ceremonial drum that was gifted to him from the Athabasca Tribal Council, damaged the doors to his wife's and grandson's bedrooms, and took three pairs of his wife's boots.

"I can't call the RCMP, because it was the RCMP that broke into my house," Chief Adam said in a Facebook live stream recorded when he arrived at his Fort McMurray home in the early hours of Dec. 26.

The video, one of several he posted in relation to the incident, showed his front door boarded up by a wood panel left by the cops.

Adam told this newspaper in an interview as he was fixing his front door that he did call the local detachment about the break-in, with an officer telling him that he and his wife are "completely safe."

He said footage of the police break-in from his home security cameras show nine officers entering his property, with two walking upstairs. "One came up the stairs, was looking around, and the other one came up with his hand on his holster, so tell me if I'm safe," said Adam.

Cpl. Mathew Howell, a spokesperson for the Alberta RCMP, disputed Adam's characterization of a break-in, noting in an interview with *Alberta Native News* that police had executed a "legally obtained warrant" signed by a judge for an ongoing criminal investigation.

Chief Adam acknowledged that the RCMP was exercising a search warrant, which they left behind, as part of an investigation of his stepdaughter and her partner, who live in a basement apartment, looking for allegedly stolen goods.

But Adam questioned why the police broke down multiple doors in his home and went through items upstairs if only the people living downstairs were the target.

"They caused more damage upstairs to the house than they did downstairs," said Adam.

His stepdaughter and her partner were arrested in October on charges of theft under $5,000, which have yet to be heard in court.

Adam noted that when the RCMP came to their house in October to execute a search warrant, they simply knocked on the door and his wife let them in.

"Both times they came up empty handed," he said, "but yet they keep coming back, because some officer says, 'I saw them take the stuff inside the house,' so that means my house is under surveillance."

Howell of the RCMP said he can't speak to "what pushed the breaking down of the door" in this specific instance, but said in general "there's a few different aspects that can come into play," including "officer safety" and the "need to secure evidence."

He added that Adam can submit a claim for any items that were damaged or lost during the warrant's execution.

Adam said it feels like there's an "open search warrant on my house."

"The RCMP are going to keep coming in here, executing that search warrant because it's an ongoing investigation. They haven't found no evidence, but still my house is guilty," he said. "I'm guilty for a crime that we didn't do."

This wouldn't be the first time Adam was targeted by the RCMP.

In March 2020, Chief Adam was violently arrested outside of Boomtown Casino in Fort McMurray, which has since been renamed Rivers Casino, after police pulled him over for driving a truck with an expired license plate.

After a verbal altercation with the officers, Adam was hit to the ground and then beaten while on the ground, leaving him with a black left eye and a cut down the left side of his face.

He faced charges of assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest, which were quickly dropped after video of his arrest was released by himself and the RCMP.

In December 2024, almost exactly a year before the RCMP broke into his home, Alberta's police watchdog concluded that the officers acted "properly in the execution of their duties," dismissing Adam's claim of "racist treatment."

The chief had launched a civil lawsuit against the RCMP, reaching an undisclosed settlement that precluded him from commenting on the result of the investigation.

Adam told this newspaper that he believes his stepdaughter's legal issues are being used by the RCMP to target him in retaliation for his legal settlement.

"Whatever they're doing to the house, whatever they're doing to my own personal property at this point in time, has nothing to do with the arrests that they've made of my stepdaughter and her boyfriend," he said. "If I was home, I wouldn't put up with it."

"Carberry Wolf" by Linus Woods, Acrylic on stretched Canvas mounted on wood. 8 x 10 Inches. Available to view and purchase at wakinagallery.com.

Carving for Sale

Soapstone carving by Leo Arcand. 9" tall x 5.25". Available for purchase at WakinaGallery.com

Sherry Greene's vision for Indigenous-led sustainability

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On Treaty 6 territory in Edmonton, Sherry Greene – known as Night Lodge Woman – is building more than a business. As the founder of Askiy-Eco Distribution, Greene is advancing an Indigenous-led model of sustainability grounded in Cree teachings, lived experience, and a long-term vision for economic reconciliation.

Greene is from Samson Cree Nation in Maskwacis, Alberta, where she spent much of her early life on reserve and attended residential day school in Ermineskin Cree Nation. Like many Indigenous survivors, her childhood was shaped by trauma, including abuse and bullying. Rather than allowing those experiences to define her future, Greene says they strengthened her resilience through *mâmawi-kiskinwahamâtowin* – learning together through lived experience.

At just 18 years old, Greene left the reserve as a single mother, determined to create a safer and healthier life for her child. That decision marked the beginning of a long journey of healing, sobriety, and self-discovery – a journey that would eventually lead her back to the land and toward entrepreneurship.

"As a Cree woman, the land is my teacher," Greene says, referencing the teaching *nihtâwîhcikan*. "My connection to my Nation, our Elders, and our territory continues to guide everything I do."

That guidance became the foundation for Askiy-Eco Distribution. Inspired by her healing journey and reconnection to the Earth, Greene pursued education in environmental technologies, deepening her understanding of sustainability and responsibility. The result was a business rooted not only in environmental solutions, but in Indigenous values.

"Askiy means 'Earth' in Cree," Greene explains. "It reflects our relationship with the land as a living being, not a resource, and our responsibility to future generations."

Askiy-Eco Distribution supplies compostable and biodegradable food-service packaging – including containers, cups, lids, and take-out solutions – helping organizations reduce plastic waste while honouring *askiy-pimâtisiwin*, living in balance with the Earth. But Greene's work extends beyond products; it represents a shift in how business can be done.

Her business philosophy is grounded in *wahkohtowin*, the Cree principle of kinship and relational responsibility. For Greene, this means operating with respect for people, community, and the environment, while thinking far beyond short-term profit.

Indigenous businesses, she says, bring something essential to Canada's sustainability efforts. "Our teachings are rooted in *kistêyihtamowin* – respect – and *pimâtisiwin*, a good life. Sustainability has always been part of our way of life."

The path to entrepreneurship has not been without barriers. Greene faced limited access to capital, systemic bias, and the challenge of being underestimated as an Indigenous woman. She also navigated personal struggles connected to trauma and addiction. Through healing, education, mentorship, and *sâkihitowin* – love and compassion – she transformed those challenges into sources of strength and leadership.

Today, Greene is a certified member of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and actively engages with Indigenous entrepreneurship networks. These relationships, built on *mâmawi-wîcihitowin* – working together – support Indigenous procurement and community-based economic development.

Sherry Greene is owner of Askiy-Eco Distribution.

Measuring success, for Greene, goes beyond revenue. Environmental impact includes reduced plastic waste and increased use of compostable alternatives, while social impact is reflected in representation.

"Showing Indigenous women and survivors that entrepreneurship is possible is powerful," she says. "When business is grounded in *miyo-pimâtisiwin* – living a good life – it becomes a tool for change."

Looking ahead, Greene plans to expand Askiy-Eco Distribution across Western Canada, strengthen Indigenous and government partnerships, and contribute to Indigenous-led sustainability initiatives. Her long-term vision includes Indigenous manufacturing, job creation, and advancing economic reconciliation grounded in *wahkohtowin* and respect for the land.

For Greene, entrepreneurship is not just about building a company – it is about restoring balance, reclaiming responsibility, and creating a future rooted in Indigenous knowledge, resilience, and hope.

Former Alberta Cabinet Minister launches “Forever Canadian” initiative to counter separation push

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

EDMONTON — Former Alberta cabinet minister Thomas Lukaszuk is warning that renewed separatist efforts in Alberta threaten Canada’s unity, the province’s economy, and the constitutional rights of First Nations.

“Referendums are very dangerous and economically damaging,” he said. “They divide families, communities, and cause long-term harm.”

Personal Background and Motivation

A teacher by trade, Lukaszuk was self-employed for several years before entering politics. His family, refugees from Poland, arrived in Canada 43 years ago, instilling in him a deep appreciation for freedom and democracy. He was elected to the Alberta Legislature in 2001 and served nearly 15 years, holding cabinet positions including Minister of Education, Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Enterprise, Minister of Labour (twice), and Deputy Premier of Alberta.

He ended his public service in 2015 and founded his own financial company, currently specializing in mortgages. “I want to be Canadian forever,” he said. “I’m a proud Canadian. I carry my Canadian passport proudly. I can’t imagine being a citizen of any other country.”

The Forever Canadian Petition

Lukaszuk launched the Forever Canadian Initiative after changes to Alberta’s referendum rules, which he said favoured separatist organizers.

“My petition is not asking for a referendum,” he said. “I filed under the legislative provision that allows the Legislature itself to vote. I am confident that the majority of MLAs would vote against separation.”

Under the original rules, his petition required 300,000 signatures within 90 days, but those requirements were later altered.

“Premier Danielle Smith lowered the number to 170,000 signatures for the separatists from the 300,000 that I had,” he said. “She allowed them to have a second petition and gave them 120 days instead of my 90 days. She changed the rules.”

Despite obstacles, Lukaszuk said his petition gathered close to half a million signatures, making it one of the largest in Canadian history.

“No province has the right to break the treaties,” he said. “That alone made it necessary to act. There are a number of reasons why I collected these signatures.”

Economic and Geopolitical Risks

Lukaszuk warned that separatism could seriously harm Alberta’s economy.

“Most Canadians remember that Montreal used to be the business centre of Canada,” he said. “During separatist talks, companies moved to Toronto. Bank of Montreal, Royal Bank, and insurance operations relocated. Investors don’t stay where there is uncertainty. I’m worried the same thing will happen in Alberta. Investment is already drying up.”

He dismissed the idea that Alberta could thrive independently.

“The whole idea of separating is a pipe dream,” Lukaszuk said. “Alberta is landlocked and would be 100 per cent dependent on volatile oil and gas prices. It cannot stand alone.”

He also warned of U.S. threats: “The United States would invade and swallow up Alberta,” he said. “They already have their eyes on Greenland, and now they are referring to Alberta as the 51st state. This province, with fewer than five million people and rich in natural resources, would be prey to American foreign policy.”

Treaty Rights and Constitutional Violations

Separation, Lukaszuk said, would violate First Nations treaty rights and Canada’s constitutional framework.

“The referendum question the separatists are collecting signatures on is unconstitutional,” he said. “It violates our Charter rights, treaty rights, and international treaties that Canada has signed with other countries. It also puts us in jeopardy with the United States – and that’s exactly what Donald Trump wants. He wants Canada so they can access our natural resources.”

Alberta is covered by Treaties 6, 7, 8, and parts of Treaties 4 and 10.

“You cannot separate without violating those treaties,” he said. “They were signed directly with the Crown, in London, with Buckingham Palace. No province has the authority to break them.”

“First Nations have more to lose because of treaty rights,” he said. “If every First Nation voted against separation, it would change everything. I look forward to walking side by side with First Nations, because we all have a lot to lose.”

He also emphasized the vital role of Indigenous people in national decisions: “Indigenous people have a huge role in any constitutional discussions,” he said. “First Nations should stand side by side with Canadians forever.”

To learn more about Lukaszuk's initiative, visit: https://www.forever-canadian.ca/a-letter-from-thomas-lukaszuk.