[kee/chi - nee/wesk] • *noun* THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

KCI-NIWESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

Lianne Charlie
PROVIDE HEALING THROUGH ART

LAND RECONCILIATION: THE KEY TO NOURISHMENT

Talking to
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS

Healing

ISSUE 14.


THE VAULT

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A MESSAGE FROM NWAC'S CEO

LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO
NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

WELCOME TO THE 14TH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA.

THIS ISSUE IS ABOUT HEALING.

It was the visit of the Pope to Canada earlier this summer that inspired these stories. We saw the pain in the faces of the residential school survivors who turned out to hear his apology, and we knew we had to devote some space in this magazine to finding ways forward.

There are so many aspects of colonization that have left indelible impacts on the Indigenous women and gender-diverse people represented by our organization. Those scars may never fade. But the open wounds can heal.

Sometimes it's difficult to know how to approach people who are still suffering from long-term trauma. So we have talked to Shirley David, a residential school survivor and therapist with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, about the best ways to approach former students of the notorious schools to ask them to share their stories.

Counselling can be good medicine. But professional counsellor Angela Grier tells us about a change in government funding that makes it difficult for Indigenous people to get the help they need.

Food can be healing. Tabitha Robin, an Indigenous (Cree and Métis) food scholar, explains that we need to think of food as more than physical nourishment. It is a connection to the past, the future, and the land.

The physical aspects of healing are also critical. Lynn Lavallée, a Métis professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, tells us how being physically active can help to mend spiritual injuries, and says Indigenous people need more autonomy over how sports and recreation are delivered in their communities.

There is healing in art. Leanne Charlie, a descendant of the Tagé Cho Hudän (Big River People), reconnects with her culture through her visual works, and exposes tensions created by colonization. Her art pushes for reconciliation and healing.

We take you on an early visit to what will be our new Resiliency Lodge near Gagetown in New Brunswick. Elder Alma Brooks talks to us about how the lodge will offer healing programs that are focused on decolonization. We also return to our existing Resiliency Lodge in Quebec, which we hope to eventually replicate in provinces and territories across Canada.

And we talk to four prominent Indigenous women about what healing means to them.

So, thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the 14th edition of Kci-Niwesq. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

MIIGWETCH.

MONTHLY MAGAZINE TO TELL OUR STORIES

WHAT HEALING *is to me*

Sheila North,

CREE LEADER AND JOURNALIST

former Grand Chief of the
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak

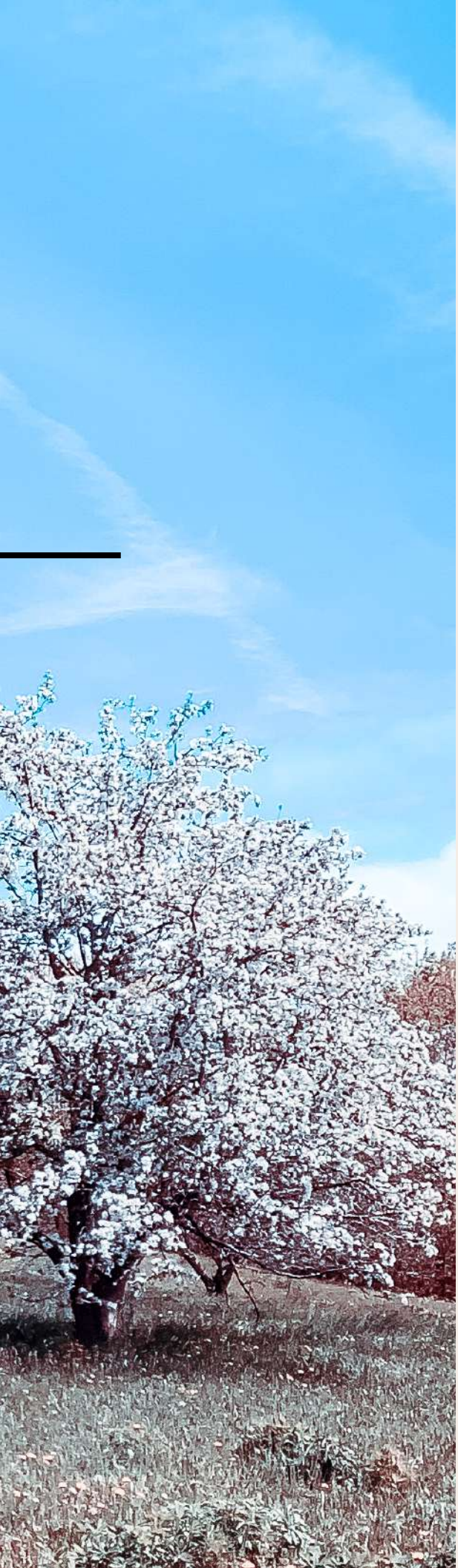
Healing is as critical as breathing. Without healing, life can become very hard, very challenging. However, recognizing that you need healing is not always clear to the one who needs it, because you might be consumed with pain or unforgiveness. Healing is also a process, and while the process can be heavy, it is a necessary one to achieve greater healing. For me, healing means I'm healthier for the people I love and therefore gives me more power to help and care for those around me. Healing is powerful and beautiful.

Marion Buller,

FIRST NATIONS JURIST AND CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

former Chief Commissioner for
the National Inquiry into Missing
and Murdered Indigenous
Women and Girls

The MMIWG2S family members and survivors at the National Inquiry showed me how each one of us heals in our own way and at our own pace. They taught me that healing requires courage, patience, and support. Family members and survivors also showed me (and the whole world!) the importance of culture in healing and resilience. Their gentle and kind lessons stay with me, and I am grateful.



Christi Belcourt,

MÉTIS VISUAL ARTIST

Simply put, the desired outcome of healing is to restore health. I like to try to imagine what a restoration of health looks like for our communities and lands. For the individual, it's healthy bodies, minds, spirits, and emotions. For our communities and people, it's working together as one, protecting and taking care of the most vulnerable among us, discarding colonial ways of governance. It's respect for trans and Two-Spirit people. It's a restoration of our languages to be first languages again and safe ceremonial spaces for all, just to name a few.

For me, health of our lands and waters includes restoration and protections of the habitats for species at risk, protection for water for all species, not just humans. It's having Indigenous laws be respected and adhered. I dream of healthy rivers and lakes, of healthy plants and forests, and a healthy earth. It seems impossible, but it isn't. The power of the human body and mind and the power of the earth to heal is incredible. So having our languages, ceremonies, and knowledge about medicines and healing is vital to the health of our communities and crucial for coming generations.

Collectively, we are healing from the genocide. But the genocide hasn't ended against our people and our lands, and each generation is experiencing various forms of new trauma as well as still dealing with intergenerational trauma. I pray one day the cycle of healing will no longer be necessary because we have come into full health once again.

Crystal Shawanda,

BLUES AND COUNTRY ARTIST FROM WIIKWEMKOONG FIRST NATION ON MANITOULIN ISLAND

For me, music is healing. I do a lot of motivational speaking and that's something that I talk about. My theme, whenever I go to speak anywhere, is that music heals. What I learned from my family is that music can be like cheap therapy. You could be having the worst day in the world and you listen to a certain song and it makes you feel better. It turns your day around, and it reminds you that other people have been through this before and that you're gonna get through it soon. Even though I do mainstream music, all my shows are quite spiritual, and my fans know that. Every song I sing, I am communicating the feelings in that song. And my crowd goes there with me. Many times after a show, people will tell me 'I cried with you' and 'I feel so much better.' Because, at one of my shows, people will sometimes cry, and then they'll dance it out, and then they leave feeling so much better. And that's kind of the point of my shows.

That's what I'm after.

Pictured: **Crystal Shawanda**

THE NEED FOR BETTER **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS**

STARTS AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Pictured: **Angela Grier**

THE NEED FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS STARTS AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Residential schools, the genocide against Indigenous women and girls, and a host of other factors related to colonization have resulted in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people being more prone to mental health issues than other Canadians. And yet, in many parts of Canada, those Indigenous populations have difficulty accessing appropriate and affordable counselling because of a funding change made by the federal government seven years ago.

"It has perpetuated so many problems," says Angela Grier, a professional counsellor with 25 years of experience and a member of Piikani First Nation in southern Alberta, one of three nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy. "These colonial approaches within mental health are not helping us."

The problems began in 2015 when the federal government delisted Canadian Certified Counsellors, who have national certification, from the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program for First Nations and Inuit people in provinces without a regulatory college for counsellors.

Since that time, it has been left to provincial or territorial governments to decide what mental health counselling will consist of for Indigenous public health plans.

In Alberta, for instance, the province covers only practitioners who are psychologists or have master's degrees in social work (MSWs). That means Canadian Certified Counsellors who have been certified by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) but are not psychologists or MSWs are not covered for Indigenous people under Alberta's public health plan.

It means First Nations and other Indigenous communities in provinces and territories that do not regulate the profession no longer have the right to decide to have a counsellor or psychotherapist serve as their mental health provider. And it has drastically reduced the number of mental health professionals available to serve a population that is very much in need of mental health treatment, says Ms. Grier.

"If we were to reinstate Canadian Certified Counsellors in these unregulated provinces, we would have 1,500 practitioners immediately available to aid these issues," says Ms. Grier. "We're really focused on it because it's so detrimental to saving lives."

There is an opioid crisis in Indigenous communities in her part of the country, she says. "We've declared states of emergency because it's so bad. There's so much loss of life every year. But there's just not enough hands on the ground to support these acute health environments."

Canadian Certified Counsellors want to provide services, says Ms. Grier. They meet national standards for mental health practitioners at a master's degree minimum level. But there is a political barrier that is preventing them from providing essential mental health supports.

Indigenous people in remote communities, and particularly those that are accessible only by air, are especially disadvantaged, she says. But the change at the federal level has taken away Indigenous autonomy in the sense that it limits options for Indigenous people looking for culturally appropriate mental health care.

"Our communities are having to carve out their answers," she says. "We need to be able to have choices and, right now, we don't have those choices. They're being made for us."

Recent statistics suggest that Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience major depression at rates that are twice the national average. Suicide is the leading cause of death in Indigenous communities among people aged 10 to 29, and First Nations youth are five to seven times more likely than non-Indigenous youth to take their own lives.

The CCPA has created an Indigenous Circle Chapter, which is a space where people can talk about Indigenous issues in counselling and psychotherapy. Part of its mandate is to promote counselling as a field of choice for Indigenous Peoples.

In 2020, the CCPA implemented Indigenous practice standards into its Code of Ethics.

The organization has been taking reconciliation seriously, says Ms. Grier, and it has recognized that there are special considerations that must be part of working with Indigenous people in counselling.

"Some of those areas include historical trauma. You need to know that history of Indigenous people when you're working with them," she says.

It is true that Indigenous people have not always been well served by the counselling and psychotherapy profession, which has not understood their cultural needs and the historical context of their trauma, says Ms. Grier

There are many questions and discussions right now about non-Indigenous practitioner competencies for supporting Indigenous Peoples, she says. "We need to challenge each other because we need to do better. I think right now you see almost everybody, including the American Psychological Association, which really is the pinnacle for a lot of the work we do, make a statement of apology toward Indigenous Peoples and people of colour."

Acknowledging the different needs of Indigenous people in mental health is a big step toward improvement, says Ms. Grier.

But so is ensuring that counsellors and psychotherapists are available to serve the Indigenous communities.

That is why the CCPA is launching a campaign aimed at convincing the federal government to reverse the policy change of 2015 and once again pay Canadian Certified Counsellors for their services through the NIHB program for First Nations and Inuit people. It will kick off with a letter writing campaign in the week before the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

"This issue is an infringement upon our Indigenous counsellors and psychotherapists and their right to work and to practice," says Ms. Grier. "It's a discriminatory policy in that sense."

> **"THE CHANGE AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL HAS TAKEN AWAY INDIGENOUS AUTONOMY IN THE SENSE THAT IT LIMITS OPTIONS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE LOOKING FOR CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MENTAL HEALTH CARE. "OUR COMMUNITIES ARE HAVING TO CARVE OUT THEIR ANSWERS. WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO HAVE CHOICES AND, RIGHT NOW, WE DON'T HAVE THOSE CHOICES. THEY'RE BEING MADE FOR US."**
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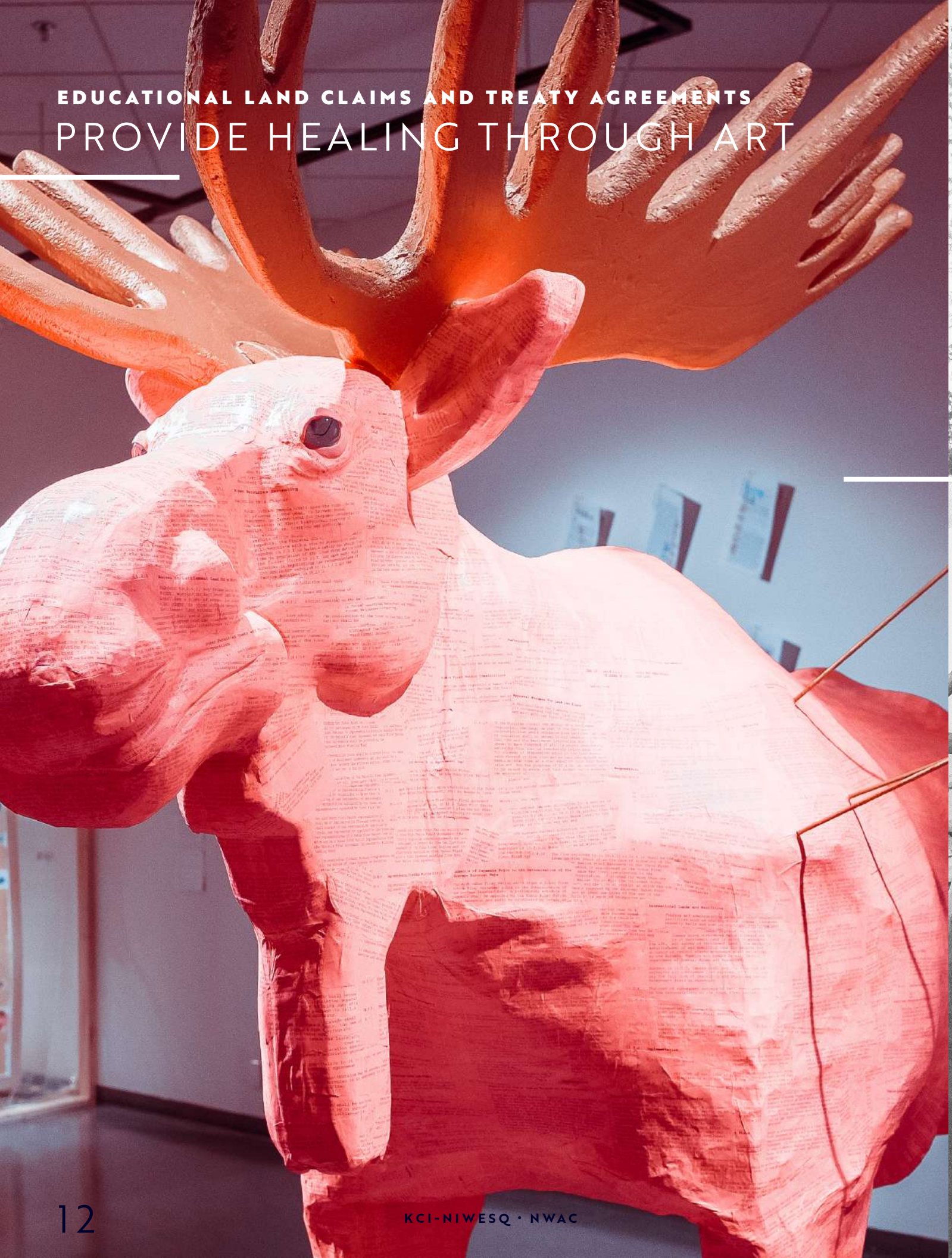
> - ANGELA GRIER



EDUCATIONAL LAND CLAIMS AND TREATY AGREEMENTS

PROVIDE HEALING THROUGH ART

Lianne Charlie

THEY SAY A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS, WHICH COULD NOT BE TRUER FOR LIANNE CHARLIE, WHO CAREFULLY POSITIONS HER ART TO SPARK IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS REGARDING LAND CLAIMS, HISTORY, AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS.

Ms. Charlie is a descendant of the Tagé Cho Hudän (Big River People) of the Northern Tutchone-speaking people of the Yukon, on her father's side. She is a third-generation Canadian with Danish and Icelandic ancestry, on her mother's side.

Though born in Whitehorse, Yukon, Ms. Charlie grew up in Victoria, British Columbia, in a predominantly settler culture. In 2016, she returned to Yukon to reconnect with her Indigenous heritage. Today, she is a faculty member with the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, has completed a PhD in Indigenous politics, and formerly taught political science at Yukon College.

Ms. Charlie is most widely known for her life-size, hot pink, papier mâché bull moose. This powerful statement piece sparks important conversation not for its colour, but for what's inscribed in its skin—the Umbrella Final Agreement, which is the guide for modern treaty-making in the Yukon.

"Art teaches and helps reveal some of these tensions that have very real impacts," says Ms. Charlie. She provides education through art, which in turn, pushes forward for reconciliation and healing for Indigenous Peoples.

"My art pieces work to depict and bring materiality to modern treaty realities, which can seem really abstract and disconnected from us. They're largely understood through lawyers and through modern treaty technocrats. So, these help our people understand what it is that we've signed on to, or agreed to."

A particularly important piece for Ms. Charlie's own personal processing has been a paper baby belt—a traditional Northern Tutchone garment used to carry a child. In Ms. Charlie's piece, she

garnished the belt with pieces of the Placer Mining Act and Little Salmon Carmacks land claims maps.

While her other projects consider "collective impacts of modern treaty" and other "bigger questions," this baby belt was a piece of "personal reckoning" for Ms. Charlie after discovering the land where she held an after-birth ceremony with the placenta that nourished her son is actually located on Category B land, under the land claim.

"This means that the Crown holds the mineral rights for that spot. So, they could potentially mine it if they see value there," says Ms. Charlie. "It continues to bring up emotions."

This discovery was made after Ms. Charlie had ordered the land claims maps to create a project to complement the hot pink moose. She hadn't decided, until that moment, what use the land claim maps would serve—and had no idea the necessary and therapeutic contributions it would provide for her.

"The fact that the land claims order also means that the Crown can have access to much more of our lands is a larger issue," says Ms. Charlie. "It raises larger questions about land claims and its relationship with Indigenous lifeways and our practices."

Ms. Charlie says that since she has connections and lived experiences in both settler and Indigenous cultures, she feels she has a duty to produce informed art. "Because of my own positionality and upbringing, my comfort in the White world, my education, and now my job—because of the platform that I hold—I see a responsibility in the kind of work that I produce."

A disconnect from her Indigenous heritage in her early years was a direct result of the impacts of residential schools. Her father, Peter Charlie, attended Lower Post Indian Residential School in northern B.C., which is where many Indigenous children in Yukon were taken.

Years later, back in Yukon and struggling with substances, her father was in a mining accident that left him badly injured. He sought out medical help for difficulty breathing but was turned away more than once. Then, at the age of just 35—just months after fracturing his ribs and nose, and being denied proper follow-up medical care—her father died in his sleep.

"That family history has definitely spurred a lot of the work that I do, because he didn't die of natural causes. This was an accumulation of the residential school experience and racism, playing out in very real and violent ways," says Ms. Charlie.

Throughout Ms. Charlie's journey, her art has been a physical expression of processing her reconnection to Indigenous culture. Her finished products serve meaningful purposes on more than one level. First, by educating and bringing awareness to the general public and, second, in helping her heal and navigate her "own internal analog of emotional experiences of being disconnected."

"ART TEACHES AND HELPS REVEAL SOME OF THESE TENSIONS THAT HAVE VERY REAL IMPACTS. MY ART PIECES WORK TO DEPICT AND BRING MATERIALITY TO MODERN TREATY REALITIES, WHICH CAN SEEM REALLY ABSTRACT AND DISCONNECTED FROM US. THEY'RE LARGELY UNDERSTOOD THROUGH LAWYERS AND THROUGH MODERN TREATY TECHNOCRATS. SO, THESE HELP OUR PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS THAT WE'VE SIGNED ON TO, OR AGREED TO."

- LIANNE CHARLIE

LAND RECONCILIATION
IS THE KEY TO NOURISHMENT

Traditional foods are an integral part of Indigenous healing. But to achieve true food sovereignty and nourishment, we should look to our Elders, ancestors, stories, and ceremonies and we reflect on our first sacred agreements.

"When we eat food, it isn't just for the physical nourishment. It's more than that," says Dr. Tabitha Robin, an Indigenous (Cree and Métis) food scholar whose doctoral research explored colonial methods that used food as a weapon for control and power.

"It's a connection to our past. It's a connection to our future. It's a connection to the lands that we live on. … We should be concerned with thinking about food as more than physical nourishment."

Throughout her master's and doctoral research, Dr. Robin grew her understanding for the powerful emotions held for food and connection to the land. "Indigenous Peoples have been starved, deliberately, in this country," she says. "Hunger was introduced in our communities via colonialism."

Food was "weaponized" through colonization by being withheld, destroyed, rationed, and substituted, and this has produced generations of people dealing with food trauma and health problems. When fresh plants and wild game became endangered and near-extinct—as well as the environments in which they thrive—and were replaced by insignificant and often rancid portions of pork and flour, Indigenous Peoples became faced with the impossibly paralyzing consequences of surrendering to colonization to feed their families.

Chiefs felt compelled to sign treaties, as doing so would provide further rations for their community and alleviate the newfound hunger their people faced. Hunger among community became widespread as a result of "decimating lands and waters, and by deliberately eradicating key species" through colonization.

"It's not just about food. It's about the ways that colonialism broke our families, our understandings of those sacred agreements with plants and animals, and our ancestors and ceremonies."

Plants, animals, and ecosystems were never considered simply a food source for human consumption; that idea was only introduced through colonization. Dr. Robin explains how animals were "stewards of the land" that provided nourishment and balance beyond providing a meal.

"The beaver gave us fresh water supplies, and the bison was a seed disperser, carrying seeds on its fur for long distances," Dr. Robin says.

Healing those practices and distresses is far more complex than it was in destroying them. Achieving, and maintaining, Indigenous food sovereignty isn't as easy as giving back lands and cooking traditional foods; to achieve healing through nourishment, one must first heal the land.

"The health of the land is our limiting factor," Dr. Robin says. "We have to bring back our roles and responsibilities toward taking care of the land. … Having better land reform is having better land protections so we're able to eat food from the land and access safe lands and safe waters."

To do so, Canadians need to reconsider "the way we think about reconciliation" and to ensure everyone is "reconciling with the land" first and foremost.

"One of the most powerful and important things that we can do is to begin to activate our role as stewards," Dr. Robin says.

To move forward, we need to reflect backward, she says. We must look to our past to examine how to live "in good relations" and how to create a harmonious balance for our future. "No matter where we're from, our ancestors had to depend on the land to live at some point in time," Dr. Robin says.

"Our food sovereignty ultimately lies in larger pieces of governance, including things like language revitalization, community governments, and the restoration of matriarchs. Those pieces are integral for us to be able to have food security and to be able to feed ourselves moving forward," she says.

For example, through language revitalization we unravel simple instructions from our ancestors that tell us exactly how each food nourishes and benefits our bodies. Rather than calling fruit by its colonial name, learning Traditional Cree translations from our Elders provides us with the necessary tools to care for and heal both ourselves and the land.

"When you translate them into Cree, they tell you how they're best used by the body," Dr. Robin says, recalling teachings from her Elders. When translated, foods are called eat this for good health and eat this for good bones. The answers are literally right in front of us, in the translation. We just have to go to the Elders and listen."

"WHEN WE EAT FOOD, IT ISN'T JUST FOR THE PHYSICAL NOURISHMENT. IT'S A CONNECTION TO OUR PAST. IT'S A CONNECTION TO OUR FUTURE. IT'S A CONNECTION TO THE LANDS THAT WE LIVE ON."

- DR. TABITHA ROBIN

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY *feeds the spirit*

Feeding the body through physical activity feeds the spirit, says Lynn Lavallée, Ph. D., a citizen of Métis Nation of Ontario and a professor at Toronto Metropolitan University.

For that reason, Dr. Lavallée says Indigenous Peoples need more avenues for sport and physical play at the non-competitive, grassroots level, and they need more autonomy over how public money is spent to create those types of recreational opportunities.

"When people are physically active, they directly feed their spirit," says Dr. Lavallée. "It's a traditional teaching. It's embedded in our understanding. It's in our blood memory. It comes down to everything being interconnected—everything outside of us, everything within us. We are connected to the environment. We are connected to other people."

The Medicine Wheel shows us how a person's spirit is linked to their physical, mental, and emotional health, says Dr. Lavallée, who did her PhD thesis on the positive effects that a culturally imbued taekwondo program at the Native Canadian Centre in Toronto had on Indigenous participants.

"If you have a thought, right away it's processed in your mind and, if it's a negative thought, sometimes your heart starts racing," she says. "It's just a thought that came into your head, but it changes into something physical in your body. It's the same thing with spirit. Spirit changes into something physical as well."

By spirit, she says, she is not talking about spirituality or religion. Rather, she means the spirit that is within all of us and all of creation and that we connect to other spirits in a subconscious way. Those spirits can be dimmed.

"They can be dimmed with historic trauma, with lateral violence, with anti-Indigenous racism," says Dr. Lavallée. "So, we know that ill health begins with spirit injury. We feed our spirit by learning about our culture, going to ceremony. You feed your spirit when you're eating or if you make a spirit plate. And you feed your spirit by being physically active."

Many Indigenous people, whether they live on reserve, in small communities, or in urban areas, are extremely physically active, she says. Physical activity can be anything from cleaning the house, to walking to the bus stop, to taking part in organized recreation, to competitive sport.

But there are barriers to organized recreation that are amplified for Indigenous Peoples, says Dr. Lavallée.

Some of them are socioeconomic. For instance, it costs a lot of money to put kids into hockey.

And some are personal. "Many Indigenous people, myself included, have participated in some activity where they're faced with anti-Indigenous racism, so they don't go anymore," she says. "Or for people who are Two Spirits or non-binary, the problem might be being misgendered all the time. Sometimes it's like you don't fit in. You just don't have a similar lifestyle as your teammates. So, you're not comfortable in that setting."

That is why there needs to be more culturally safe spaces for Indigenous people to take part in organized physical activity, says Dr. Lavallée. "We need to advocate for more Indigenous-specific programs, where Indigenous people are given priority to participate in these programs."

And the programs need to be created and run by Indigenous people, she says.

In fact, five of the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) relate to sport. Dr. Lavallée says that is the result of the influence of Wilton Littlechild, a residential school survivor and a commissioner of the TRC who has a master's degree in physical education, along with a law degree, and who helped found the North American Indigenous Games.

Among other things, the TRC called upon governments to ensure the long-term development and growth of Indigenous athletes, and to amend federal policies to promote physical activity and reduce barriers to sports participation.

Dr. Lavallée, who is a past president of the national Aboriginal Sport Circle, says the problem is that sports bodies do not get enough funding. For the most part, the sports bodies support competitive events like the North American Indigenous Games or the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships but they don't have money left over to pay for the full spectrum of sport and recreational programs that are needed at the grassroots level.

The provincial and territorial sports bodies "have a certain pot of money and, when it comes to the funding that's available, we're at each other's throats," she says. "We're all fighting for the same pot of money. It's the same thing with Indigenous sport money."

And, she says, the money that is awarded often goes to non-Indigenous groups

"WE NEED TO ADVOCATE FOR MORE INDIGENOUS-SPECIFIC PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS, WHERE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE GIVEN PRIORITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE PROGRAMS."

- DR. LYNN LAVALLÉE

that are running programs which include Indigenous people but are not specifically tailored to them and often does not support capacity building in the community.

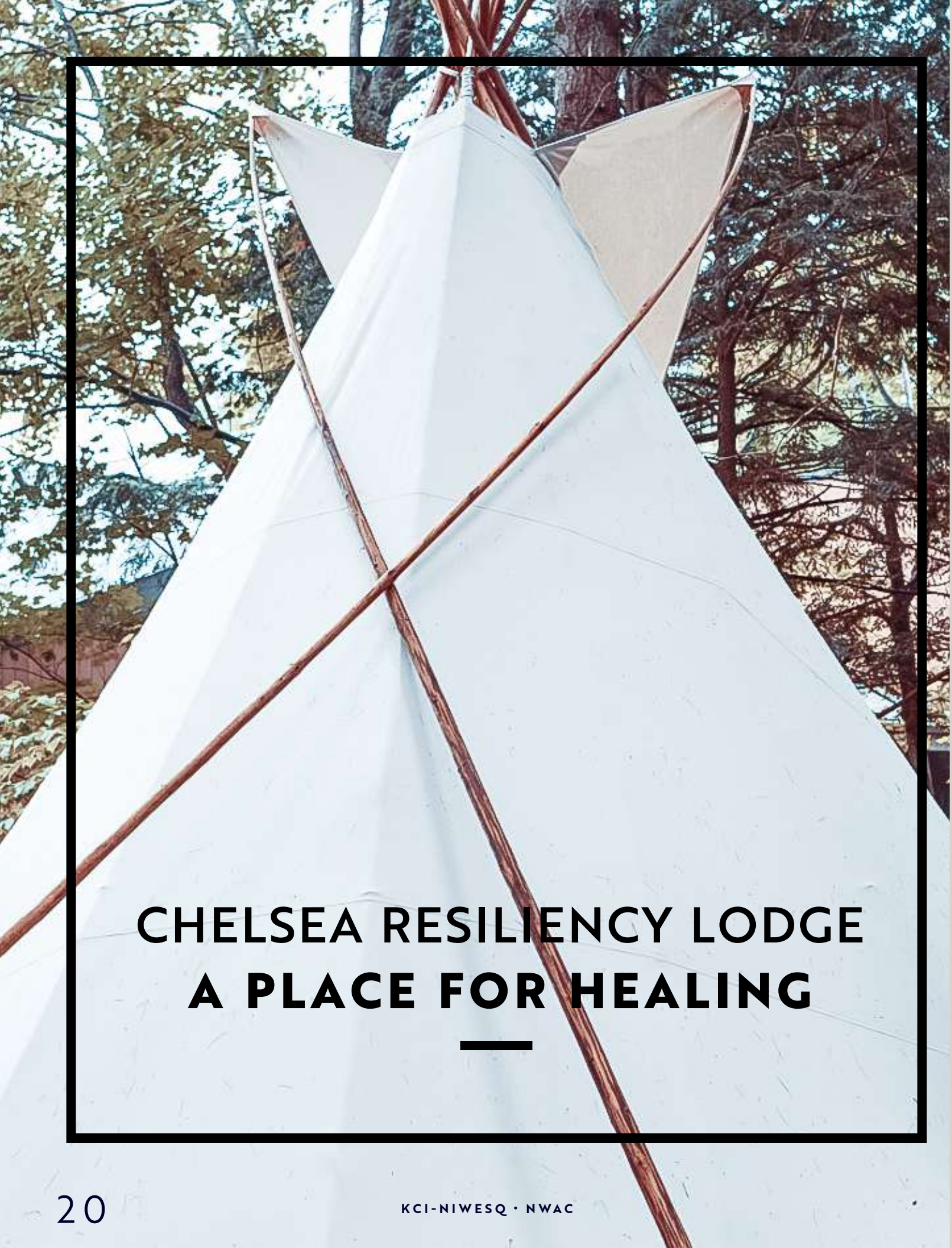
"We need specific funding for Indigenous people," she says. "That might sound exclusionary, but it's so important." That is the only way to break down the barriers to Indigenous participation."

At the same time, says Dr. Lavallée there needs to be more development of Indigenous coaches and more of an effort to get young Indigenous people to train for that kind of work.

Non-Indigenous groups including Right To Play, an international organization that works around the world to encourage physical play, are doing a good job in bringing sports and recreation to Indigenous communities in this country, she says.

But it is the Indigenous people on the ground who know best what their communities need and are best positioned to deliver physical activity programming, says Dr. Lavallée. "The focus needs to be on self-determination and sovereignty when it comes to grassroots sports and recreation."

"ILL HEALTH BEGINS WITH SPIRIT INJURY. WE FEED OUR SPIRIT BY LEARNING ABOUT OUR CULTURE, GOING TO CEREMONY. YOU FEED YOUR SPIRIT WHEN YOU'RE EATING OR IF YOU MAKE A SPIRIT PLATE. AND YOU FEED YOUR SPIRIT BY BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE."



CHELSEA RESILIENCY LODGE
A PLACE FOR HEALING

CHELSEA RESILIENCY LODGE

GUESTS ENTER A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SPACE FROM THE MOMENT THEY DRIVE THROUGH THE GREAT STONE ENTRANCE OF THE CHELSEA RESILIENCY LODGE AND ENTER ITS SACRED, RESTORATIVE SPACE.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) opened its first Resiliency Lodge in Chelsea, Quebec, during the pandemic, which appropriately provided integral healing at a time when Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people needed it most.

The property was once a residential home but now serves as a place of transformative healing. It features five bedrooms, multiple sitting rooms and dining spaces—both indoor and outside—an indoor pool, a sauna, a hot tub, nature trails, traditional healing structures, and creative spaces.

"We wanted to build a safe space for Indigenous women to come to heal from the generational traumas of colonization," Ms. Lynne Groulx, NWAC CEO, says. "We invite guests to return seasonally, to experience and grow with the changes of the seasons throughout their healing journeys."

It features a private Makers Space, where a dozen people can sit comfortably around a long harvest table, allowing ample space for wonder, curiosity, and creativity. A children's play space adjoins the Makers Space room, allowing mothers to create in a restorative space without being burdened with finding childcare. Children can lounge in bean bag chairs, enjoy age-appropriate crafts, or take a nap in the adjoining space.

"We hope to recreate Makers Spaces in every province and territory," says Ms. Groulx. "Crafting and creating is very important for reidentification, reclamation, and healing."

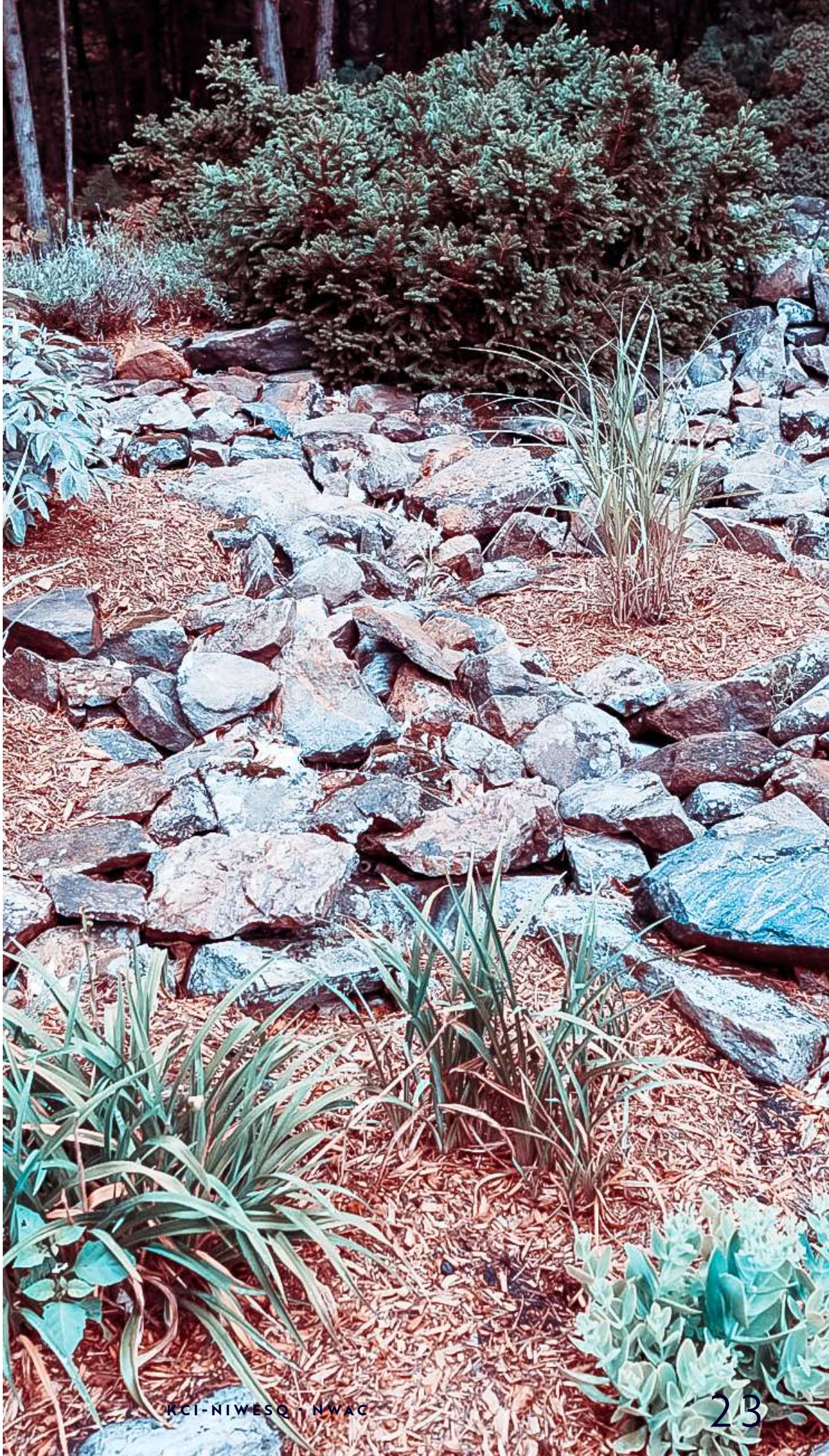
Within the main lodge, medicines and therapeutic elements encompass every room, providing a calm and safe place for restorative growth. Smudges, drums, hides, and ceremonial spaces are in abundance, while the aroma of sage and sweetgrass embraces guests throughout the space.

Several hydrotherapy options are offered, including a restorative bath in a traditional clawfoot brass tub or receiving a homeopathic foot bath from an Elder. Guest bathrooms are equipped with luxurious sunken tubs and walk-in showers featuring bountiful body-jet and steam options.

Swimming therapy is available year-round in a large, heated, indoor pool. This experience can be enjoyed on its own or complemented with a steam in the sauna or a soak in the hot tub. Though located indoors, the pool and sauna area offer a welcoming natural environment, featuring waterfall fountains and lush trees. Oversized windows allow natural light to pour into the space and provide a view overlooking ponds, trails, and trees. Large "grandfather" stones rest alongside the pool, which were extracted from the property and intentionally placed, naturally tying this indoor space to the outdoors.

A circular stairwell connecting the grand suite to a lower common area is a dedicated space for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit+ (MMIWG2S+). It's a powerful, yet sombre, corner of the building, igniting many emotions. MMIWG2S+ artwork and faceless dolls adorn the stairwell. Another MMIWG2S+ space is located outside, near a teepee, and includes a sacred fire space, smudging for ceremony, and a child's red dress, which softly sways in the trees.

> **"WE WANTED TO BUILD A SAFE SPACE FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN TO COME TO HEAL FROM THE GENERATIONAL TRAUMAS OF COLONIZATION. WE INVITE GUESTS TO RETURN SEASONALLY, TO EXPERIENCE AND GROW WITH THE CHANGES OF THE SEASONS THROUGHOUT THEIR HEALING JOURNEYS."**
>
> **- LYNNE GROULX**



WABANAKI RESILIENCY LODGE

HEALING THE SPIRIT THROUGH LAND-BASED PROGRAMS

THE WABANAKI RESILIENCY LODGE BEING CONSTRUCTED BY THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC) BY THE BANKS OF THE SAINT JOHN RIVER IN NEW BRUNSWICK IS ABOUT HEALING THE INDIGENOUS SPIRIT AFTER COLONIZATION.

Wabanaki means People of the Dawn in the Wolastoqey language. It is situated on a 16-acre farm, on the outskirts of Gagetown and will offer a wide range of land-based programs to Indigenous women, girls, transgender, and gender-diverse people, and sometimes Indigenous men.

"Colonization began in Europe and was taken to other countries around the world. It was very well established by the time it found its way to the so-called New World. Healing requires people to decolonize themselves and their belief system," says Alma Brooks, an NWAC Elder and Maliseet grandmother from St. Mary's First Nation who is leading the project.

"That's not an easy thing to do, especially when you've been brainwashed for generations," says Ms. Brooks. Many Indigenous women "have been treated in such a way that we don't like ourselves very much. We try to change who we are, or in some cases we don't even know who we really are any more. A big part of our healing is what we think of ourselves. You are what you think you are and you will become what you believe you are."

The Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge will be the second of its kind opened by NWAC across Canada. The first is in Chelsea, Quebec, and the association hopes to eventually have one in every province and territory.

The lodges are centres of healing for Indigenous women and are created to meet recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

"THE PHYSICAL HEALTH OF OUR PEOPLE IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF HEALING. THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE IN FOOD IS WHAT WE'LL FOCUS ON—TRYING TO GROW FOOD AND TO INCREASE THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE IN OUR FOOD THAT WE EAT."

The farmhouse, which has six bedrooms, is undergoing a complete renovation and will be a place for Indigenous women to stay as they go through their spiritual journey. There will also be a large Makers Space where beaded jewellery, ribbon skirts, medicine bags, and other artisan crafts can be created as part of the healing process.

In a field across from the farmhouse, a gathering space is being constructed with a commercial kitchen and two additional housing units that will have space for another eight people.

A typical participant in the healing programs will stay for at least a month. The days spent at the Resiliency Lodge will often serve as aftercare for other types of treatment, including drug rehabilitation.

While the focus is on women, men will also be invited to take part in day programs, says Ms. Brooks. "We're not going to keep the men away. Much of the violence against women is perpetrated by men. So it's kind of unfeasible to heal women and not consider that the men need healing too."

Pictured: **Alma Brooks**

The Wabanaki property stretches down to the Saint John River and includes a manmade pond and a spot where NWAC is developing an agroforest with the help of students at the University of New Brunswick. The university is sending forestry students to the lodge where they will carry out a number of tasks, including mapping and labelling the vegetation on the property.

An agroforest, explains Ms. Brooks, is a place in which all of the plants can be eaten or used for medicine. But the forest, with its grandmother bur oaks and rock maple trees, will be medicine in itself.

"We could have a hammock or swings or just a place where the women can go and relax, decompress, listen to the birds and feel the breeze and smell the medicinal smells that come from the Earth, where they can just be with the trees," says Ms. Brooks. "If you sit with the trees for a while, you'll be surprised how you can slow your mind. The energy of the forest will slow your thoughts."

That is the thinking behind the land-based programming at the Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge.

There will be an emphasis on food security. Some foods, like grapes, are already growing on the property.

"The physical health of our people is an important component of healing," says Ms. Brooks. "The nutritional value in food is what we'll focus on—trying to grow food and to increase the nutritional value in our food that we eat."

Traditional medicines are also an integral part of the program. Even before the construction has been completed, Ms. Brooks and others have been gathering medicinal plants and bringing them to the property where they are being transplanted and grown for harvest.

Glyphosate, a pesticide, has been sprayed all over New Brunswick, she says. "It's not safe to go and forage for our medicinal plants anywhere. So, we decided to bring those plants here so we can use and protect them."

A large old barn on the hill is being replaced with a medicine building where the plants can be dehydrated, dried, and stored, and then turned into oils, tinctures, and medicinal formulas. Indigenous people will be welcome to take some of the plants back to their own communities where they can also be grown for medicines, says Ms. Brooks.

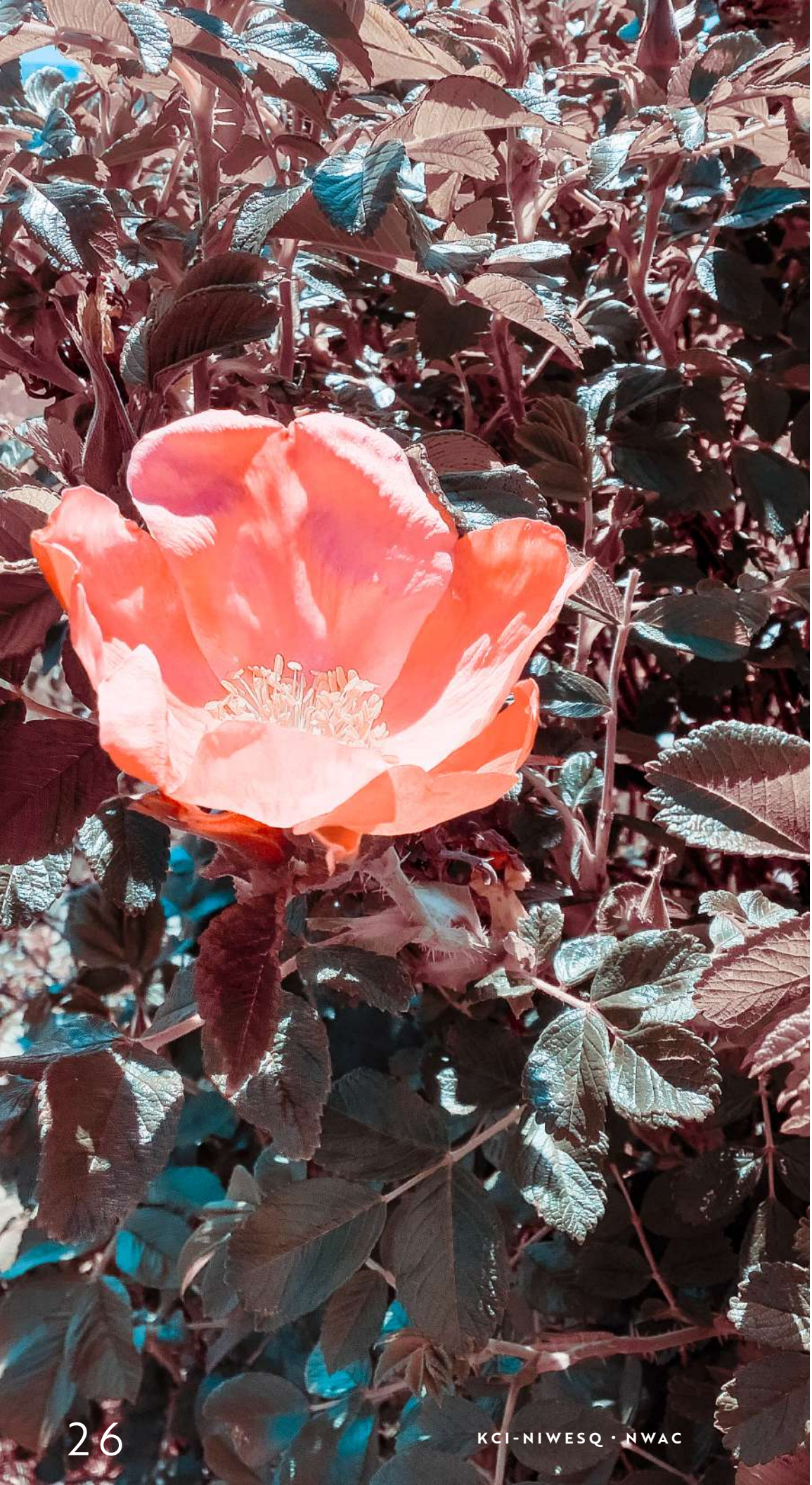
Culture will be central to the Wabanaki programs. Four teepees have been set up. There are plans to create a longhouse. And there will be sacred fires at the existing arbour.

Already this summer, two different groups have booked time on the land for four-day fasts. "That's part of our ceremony," says Ms. Brooks. "Everybody has a different reason for why they're fasting, but it's part of earning their bundles and connecting with the earth. The grounds are going to be blessed by the Elders who are putting these people out there."

Although the lodge is being created for the healing of Indigenous people, there will be times when non-Indigenous people will be welcomed to come and learn. The Town of Gagetown and the property neighbours have been extremely supportive, says Ms. Brooks and it is important to have events to which the local community is invited to take part.

The Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge "is a very ambitious project. We need lots of help to get it up and running," she says. One of her first tasks, once the house construction is completed, will be to gather the local Elders and talk about what each can offer to the program. Even if there is a lot of work ahead, the lodge is absolutely needed, says Ms. Brooks.

"We've been resisting and resisting for how many generations now. That all causes stress. And we've had intergenerational stress that we're born with. We inherited, epigenetically, the trauma," she says. "I'm surprised that we don't have more mental collapse. A lot of people are just hanging on each day."



"A BIG PART OF OUR HEALING IS WHAT WE THINK OF OURSELVES. YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK YOU ARE AND YOU WILL BECOME WHAT YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE"

- ALMA BROOKS

TALKING TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS

IT STARTS WITH UNDERSTANDING AND CREATING A SAFE PLACE

THE SURVIVORS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS HAVE STORIES TO TELL. AND YET, THEIR EXPERIENCES ARE SO DEEPLY PERSONAL, SO POWERFUL, SO FRAUGHT WITH THE POTENTIAL TO CAUSE HARM TO THE TELLER, THAT THE TALES ARE OFTEN LEFT UNTOLD.

Shirley David, a resolution health support worker and therapist with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, says many former students pass away without sharing their experiences. Some do not want their friends, community, and even family to know the full extent of the trauma they suffered as children.

Ms. David is a 71-year-old who is originally from Gitxsan/Wet'suwet'en Nation and grew up with the Secwépemc People. She has a master's in Indigenous social work.

Ms. David attended a residential school from the age of five until she was 17, and says there are many things for people to bear in mind as they ask survivors to revisit that painful period of their lives. "When people approach survivors to talk about residential schools, the first thing I would say is create a safe place," says Ms. David. Some of that safety can be created by fully understanding the cultural background of the former student.

"You need to know the different territories that you're talking about. You need to know the protocol. You need to know the process for approaching an Elder in that territory," says Ms. David. "I live in the interior of British Columbia. Even in our interior territory, there's 15 bands or so. So, even within that region there's different protocols and processes that we need to do before we approach an Elder."

Friendship centres are good sources for that kind of information, she says. College and university Indigenous studies programs can also be helpful. And there is much information that is available online. So "do your homework," says Ms. David.

It is also important to know the survivor's belief systems, she says. Some are still deeply Christian. Some rely more on their Indigenous spirituality. Some have long ago left the Christian church. That will help guide the discussion.

To honour the person and their sharing, come with a gift. "When you're asking for information, you're taking their story and using it," says Ms. David. "They're giving you the gift of their truth. It is their truth and nobody else's."

Gifts acknowledge that they are giving you something precious.

"For example, if it's a spiritual or cultural person, you approach them with tobacco … this could be a pouch, it could be cigarettes. Or it could be sage or sweetgrass," says Ms. David. "Or maybe it could be a blanket, maybe some tea and cookies for an Elder. It may be a scarf or that kind of thing … things that they can use."

Ms. David suggests starting the conversation by saying: "I am interested in hearing more about the residential school and, you know, I don't want to trigger you, but this is what I've heard. And if you'd like to share it, I'm okay with that."

The important thing is to accept the response you are given. "When we pass tobacco here and when the other person accepts it, then we know 'OK, I can talk to you.' And if they say 'no, not right now,' respect that."

You should also let the survivor know why you want the information, she says. If it is for a newspaper story or for a high school project or a research paper, they may want to tell you different things than they would if you are asking as part of your own healing journey.

If you are writing for academic or journalistic reasons, says Ms. David, promise to give them a copy of the report once it is completed. And follow through with that promise.

Make sure that the survivor has support, she says. Bring a list of resources they can access if the discussion triggers a strong emotional response. Or ask if you can bring a support person with you.

In British Columbia, says Ms. David, resolution health support workers are trained to do that work. "Or it could be a family member or somebody else that they trust. But ask them if they can have somebody with them who can look after their emotional and physical needs.

"Be aware that a lot of Elders haven't talked about residential school and haven't even started their healing journey because the fear has been holding them back. A lot of our Elders die without talking about residential school," she says. Some are just triggered by the words 'residential school' or by the mention of a certain priest or nun or teacher or school official. And sometimes survivors don't want their community to know. So you need to give them options."

Before starting the conversation, let the survivor know the direction that it will go. Write down your questions and go over them before you start. Ask if there is anything they don't want to talk about or anything they want to add. "I tell them that I'm not here to retrigger you, I'm not here to traumatize you," says Ms. David.

White people should be aware that their race alone can be an emotional trigger for some residential school survivors, says Ms. David. "That's where the abuse came from. So be aware of that. If the person doing the interview is white, they may look like somebody from residential school. That's a trigger. It's not against the person, it's against what they represent."

Finally, let the survivor know when you have asked your last question, then let them wind down. "You could give them more gifts, or whatever you need to do, and say, 'Is there anything that you want me to do to help you so you're okay?'" says Ms. David.

Tell them you will check up on them or that you will have tea with them again in a couple of weeks, she says. And make sure they have ready access to any supports they will need as they deal once again with the traumas of their childhood.

Above all, says Ms. David, "you need to make that person feel special because you're opening up a wound that they thought they had covered."

"WE WANTED TO BUILD A SAFE SPACE FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN TO COME TO HEAL FROM THE GENERATIONAL TRAUMAS OF COLONIZATION. WE INVITE GUESTS TO RETURN SEASONALLY, TO EXPERIENCE AND GROW WITH THE CHANGES OF THE SEASONS THROUGHOUT THEIR HEALING JOURNEYS."

- SHIRLEY DAVID

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NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.

PUBLISHER

LYNNE GROULX
NWAC Chief Executive Officer

EDITOR

JOAN WEINMAN

SENIOR WRITER

GLORIA GALLOWAY

DESIGNER

KYLA ELISABETH

WRITER

ASHLEY ESPINOZA

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

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