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THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

KCI-NIWESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISE IS GROWING

FASHION WEEK IN NYC:
ALICIA'S DESIGNS

NDP: HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST

DAKHKÁ KHWÁAN DANCERS

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LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



WELCOME TO THE SEVENTH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC).

IN THIS ISSUE, WE HAVE FOCUSED OUR ATTENTION ON WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE THE BIGGEST BARRIER TO THE WELL-BEING AND PROSPERITY OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN CANADA, AND THAT IS ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION.

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls found that to end violence perpetrated against the genocide and us requires a commitment to ending economic marginalization.

And we are determined to stop the genocide.

But you will see in this issue we are doing this by embracing our innovation and economic and business success.

We will introduce you to five successful female Indigenous entrepreneurs.

You will meet Marilyn Jensen, one of the founders of the Dakhká Khwáan Dancers of the Yukon, who have taken Tagish dance and storytelling across Canada and around the world.

We will introduce you to Ashley Lamothe who, widowed and broke with two children to feed, created a business, relying on her own Indigenous roots, to tap into the creativity of others.

We will tell you the story of Sharifah Marsden who brings the images of her Anishnaabe ancestry to her metalwork and the emotional toils of motherhood to her painting.

We will learn how Alicia Stephens turned drawing with a Sharpie on a sandal into a business ... and how she has difficulty keeping up with the demand.

And we will take you to Peru where Luz Elena Champi Romero is turning out hundreds of handmade dolls every week to feed her own family and employ other Indigenous women in her small Andean village.

We talk to the amazing Tabatha Bull, the president

and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, who tells us that businesses started by Indigenous women are growing and there is much untapped potential.

We connect with Carol Anne Hilton whose book *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table* is shattering the false narrative of Indigenous economic dependence and urging an economic relationship based on Indigenous design.

And we interview Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the federal New Democrats, whose party came out on top in an analysis of federal election campaign platforms that compared the policies of election contenders with the priorities of Indigenous women.

What this issue says is that the road to equality for Indigenous women is founded on their economic independence. We, at NWAC, are now introducing programs to teach skills that will allow them to chart their own course, put roofs over the heads of themselves and their families, and enjoy their fair share of the wealth of this country.

I have written a piece about economic reconciliation, which you will also find within these pages, that outlines many of the steps I believe will help us find that road.

So thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the seventh 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

Indigenous women are finding their entrepreneurial wings. Their businesses are growing, both in terms of revenue and number of employees. They are exploring a diverse range of economic opportunities. They are incorporating traditional knowledge into their workplaces and their wares.

AND, DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC, they have found new and innovative ways to support their communities.

Those are the observations of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) that studies the Indigenous entrepreneurial landscape in this country.

"We see a lot more Indigenous people leaving the workforce and doing their own thing," says Tabatha Bull, the CCAB's president and CEO. "In speaking to some Indigenous women business owners, they felt that they really didn't fit into the corporate culture, and they wanted to be able to own their own business, to run their own company, and to be there for their kids or their family."



THERE ARE NOW MORE THAN 60,000 INDIGENOUS-OWNED BUSINESSES IN CANADA AND, ACCORDING TO THE CCAB, 40 PER CENT OF INDIGENOUS SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS ARE WOMEN.

Meanwhile, Indigenous businesses are growing at nine times the rate of non-Indigenous businesses, says Ms. Bull. That has been helped by an increasing interest on the part of corporate Canada to invest in Indigenous enterprise.

Many of the companies started by Indigenous women "are sole proprietors. But there's a significant opportunity for those businesses to grow and we know that they're in every sector and size. There's also an incredible potential for indigenous businesses to export," she says. "So definitely there's a huge potential from the growth that we're seeing in the Indigenous economy."

And there is still much more to be tapped.

For instance, the CCAB says there are important opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs in the export market.

The CCAB has done two virtual export trade missions to Australia, through which it connected 10 Indigenous businesses from Canada with 10 Indigenous businesses in Australia, says Ms. Bull. The businesses have been working together on sustainability, expanding market potential in the other country, and finding products that can be incorporated into each other's supply chain.

"That has been really incredible to witness," says Ms. Bull.

Most businesses owned by Indigenous women are in the service industry, including professional service providers, and large numbers are focussed on retail trade. But agriculture, mining, and construction have also proven profitable for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit female entrepreneurs. Some Indigenous women have created companies

to support the resource sectors in their areas, says Ms. Bull. And some resource companies have sought out Indigenous businesses when planning their procurement.

Ms. Bull points to the example of Suncor that purchased \$911 million in goods and services from Indigenous-owned businesses in 2020, especially those located in communities around Fort McMurray, Alta.

"When you look at the employment within those communities, the salaries within those communities, the infrastructure within those communities, you really see the impact that procurement can have," says Ms. Bull. "And I've spoken to some second-generation business owners who've said, 'you know, I wouldn't be a business owner today if my dad wasn't a business owner, and he wouldn't have been a business owner if it weren't for a corporation like Suncor prioritizing purchasing from Indigenous business.'"

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But there are additional steps that governments could take to further empower Indigenous entrepreneurship.

For instance, the Government of Canada could increase the money it spends with Indigenous owned and operated companies, says Ms. Bull. According to a CCAB study, Indigenous businesses could provide 24 per cent of the federal government's supply chain, "so there's definitely an untapped potential there," she says.

Indigenous women often have difficulty accessing the financial capital they need to get their businesses started. Changes must be made to open those doors.

"And, of course, Indigenous women need basic services like infrastructure and broadband internet, so they have the resources they need to stay in community but are able to run a viable business," says Ms. Bull.

The Liberal government currently does a gender-based analysis of all of its policy and program decisions. It should add an Indigenous analysis to that framework, says Ms. Bull, to ensure that Indigenous businesses are receiving proper attention when policy and program decisions are made.

There are some traits that businesses led by Indigenous women often share, says Ms. Bull. They tend to hire Indigenous people, she says, creating more employment opportunities in their communities.

"MANY INDIGENOUS-OWNED BUSINESSES HAVE SUSTAINABILITY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF THE "SEVEN GENERATIONS" AT THE CORE OF THEIR BUSINESS PLAN. THAT IS SOMETHING THAT CONSUMERS AND INVESTORS ARE INCREASINGLY TAKING INTO ACCOUNT AS THEY DECIDE WHERE TO SPEND OR PARK THEIR MONEY,"

SAYS MS. BULL.

And, lastly, she says, there are many Indigenous women entrepreneurs who say their most important client is their community.

"There is a high percentage of Indigenous businesses that give back, or have some part of their business plan that supports Indigenous youth, or supports Indigenous education."

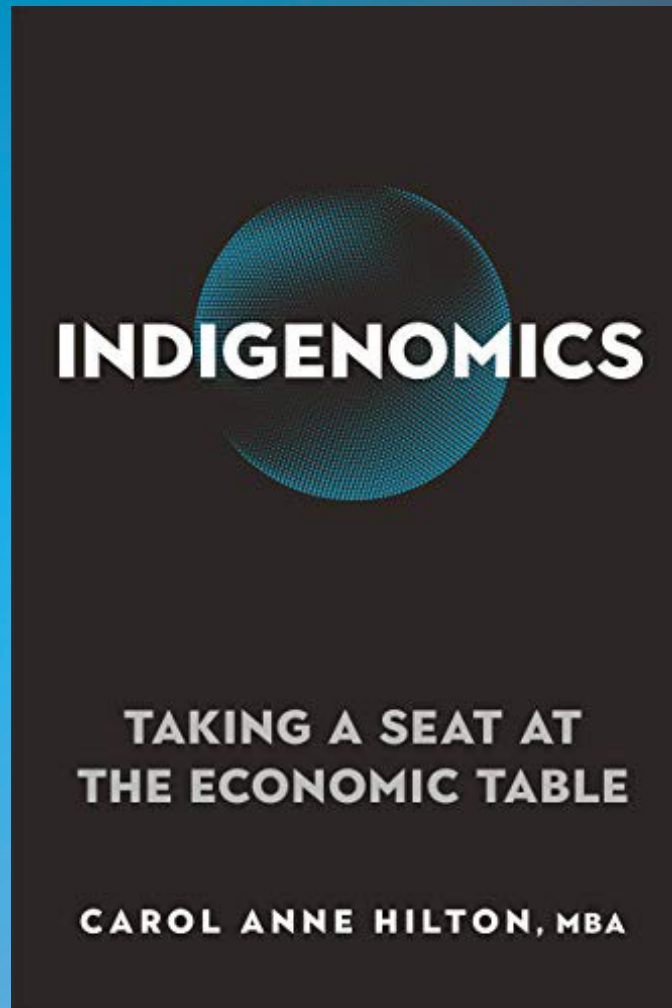
When COVID hit, says Ms. Bull, even though Indigenous businesses were hurt along

with all other sectors of the economy, many devoted parts of their organizations to supporting their communities through the pandemic.

"So, even when businesses run by Indigenous women are struggling," she says, "they're still finding ways that they can support their community and other communities."



INDIGENOMICS: IGNITING \$100B INDIGENOUS ECONOMY BY TAKING SEAT AT ECONOMIC TABLE



INTERVIEW WITH CAROL ANNE HILTON

Book cover: Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table.

INDIGENOMICS: IGNITING \$100B INDIGENOUS ECONOMY BY TAKING SEAT AT ECONOMIC TABLE

Carole Anne Hilton has shattered misconceptions about the Indigenous economy, Indigenous entrepreneurs, and their place in the Canadian economy with her book *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table*.

In it, Ms. Hilton, the chief executive officer at the Indigenomics Institute and founder of the Global Center of Indigenomics, exposes the false narrative of Indigenous dependence. The book is inspired by the igniting of the potential \$100-billion Indigenous economy.

Ms. Hilton calls for a new model of development that advances Indigenous self-determination and promotes reconciliation through economic means. *Kci-Niwesc* spoke to her this fall.

KCI-NIWESC: What is the Indigenous economic potential that's yet to be awakened? Can we quantify it?

CAROLANNE HILTON: Absolutely. If we look at the under-capitalization of the Indigenous economy, that experience has expressed itself in the limitations of government policies and programs for Indigenous economic development. The National Aboriginal Capital Association describes the experience of the limited available capital within the Aboriginal Financial Institutions, the limitation of how much is available, and how this is related to the actual growth of the size of the Indigenous economy and number of Indigenous businesses, and the ongoing surge of Indigenous entrepreneurs. In looking at the TD Economic 2016 Special Report on the size of the Indigenous economy, which was the last marker (of the combined income of Aboriginal households, businesses, and government sectors), it

INDIGENOMICS IS ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT HAPPENED TO US BUT ALSO FOCUSING ON THE DESIGN OF OUR FUTURE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP AND TELLING THE STORY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TAKING OUR SEAT AT THE ECONOMIC TABLE OF THIS COUNTRY TODAY.



was \$32 billion. The Indigenomics Institute established a forward-looking trajectory that supports inclusive Indigenous economic design. This is the playing space — the difference between \$32 billion and the \$100 billion potential of an Indigenous economy.

KCI-NIWESQ: Do Indigenous people just not have access to the capital they need?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: That has consistently been identified as a challenge. There are also structural systemic issues, which include the leveragability of ownership, assets, or land value that don't exist in the same way for Indigenous people on the reserve, which is expressed as lack of access to capital for Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses.

KCI-NIWESQ: You talk in the book about the Indigenous worldview of economics. Can you explain how that differs from the

view expressed within the standard market capitalist system? Can you explain how the Indigenous worldview would impact Indigenous economics, given the chance?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: What I outline is a clear distinction around what is valued from an Indigenous worldview. If you look at some of the characteristics of an Indigenous worldview, it includes long-termism — looking far beyond initial revenue, looking at the concept of relationships and responsibilities that come from that. Those are fundamental components around stewardship and risk management that are very distinct within an Indigenous worldview. It says that you're responsible for future generations; you're responsible for community well-being. Whereas, what we would see within the capitalist system, or the individualized approach of business structures, is very much

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OUR COLLECTIVE ABILITY TO ALIGN INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC INCLUSION TO STRUCTURES OF RECONCILIATION THAT ARE BUILT FROM THE TRUTHS OF OUR PAST — THAT'S REALLY WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT, AND IS ALSO THE LEADERSHIP POINT THAT INDIGENOMICS IS CENTERED ON.'

- CAROL ANNE HILTON



short-termism. Responsibility is externalized and responsibility to communities is not necessarily built into the structure of companies.

KCI-NIWESQ: So, is that the core of Indigenomics?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: No. The core of Indigenomics is about elevating modern Indigenous economic design. It's being able to highlight the fact that the Indigenous relationship of this country was established through structural design of exclusion. The grand design was the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands, territories, and resources as well as from cultural identity through the reserve system. The *Indian Act* removed authority and control from Indigenous communities. The residential schools were another block of that design. It served as a primary building block to the disinvitation of Indigenous Peoples from the economic table of this country. Indigenomics is about acknowledging what happened to us but also focusing on the design of our future economic relationship and telling the story of Indigenous peoples taking our seat at the economic table of this country today.

KCI-NIWESQ: What are the benefits of taking the Indigenomics path and including Indigenous people at the economic table?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: In looking at the concepts of truth and reconciliation, we need to acknowledge the truths of the past and then to center our leadership in building the truths of our future. These truths shape our future; the integral relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canada itself realizes that Indigenous Peoples' economic success benefits Canada, and that Indigenous Peoples' well-being benefits Canada. Our collective ability to align Indigenous economic inclusion to structures of reconciliation that are built from the truths of our past – that's really what is most important, and is also the leadership point that Indigenomics is centered on.

KCI-NIWESQ: How did you start thinking about this?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: Indigenomics started as a hashtag on social media and it was a way to reflect on news and media stories around Indigenous businesses

challenges and business success. And, as I started to distribute stories, I saw patterns and trends that emerged within that thread of content. The realization of the experience of exclusion, the experience of the isolation of the Indigenous economy from the rest of Canada that was really the founding concept of Indigenomics. Reflecting upon questions such as: What is an Indigenous worldview and how is it expressed in our economic development processes? How is that distinct from a mainstream perspective? And how is that important in the management of resources and lands, and the development of Indigenous economies and businesses?

KCI-NIWESQ: What kind of change does this imply must happen? In what significant ways does the traditional capitalist system have to change to embrace Indigenous economics and to ensure that Indigenous businesses are thriving?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: The pathways of economic reconciliation today include tools for Indigenous economic growth and inclusion like procurement. Companies and governments need to build strategies that include Indigenous businesses. Another aspect is looking at the capitalization of Indigenous businesses, looking at pools of capital that support the systemic design of accessibility to capital for Indigenous businesses. Finally, Indigenous inclusion at the board tables, at policy tables, is essential. That is the new normal that we're looking at.

KCI-NIWESQ: Are there Indigenous businesses today in Canada that you can think of off the top of your head that are thriving as they embrace the Indigenous worldview?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: Absolutely, I think the first example that I would give is the work of Sunshine Tenasco in the development of Powwow Pitch. She is escalating the visibility and stories and experience of Indigenous entrepreneurial growth in a platform that highlights the underlying intentions of these entrepreneurs and why they're setting up as Indigenous businesses. Another example that comes to mind is Cheekbone Beauty that was established by Jenn Harper. She established an original line of sustainable makeup, built on the values, ethics, and visibility of the Indigenous worldview and values. Her first line of lipsticks was named

after strong Indigenous women leaders. She created this Indigenous brand with Indigenous value around leadership and sustainability and, most recently, had her line accepted into Sephora, which is a huge deal. And, from my understanding, those products are flying off the shelves and selling out.

KCI-NIWESQ: If you look to the future, what do you see happening out of all of this?

CAROL ANNE HILTON: What is important to me is that we stop measuring the socio-economic gap; we need to stop measuring the negative statistics of Indigenous People, like the lowest amount of education or the highest number of children in care, the highest number of people in prison. Those numbers don't serve us, and they reflect a deficit approach. I would like to shift towards measuring Indigenous economic strength, and that economic strength is directly connected to Indigenous well-being.

This interview has been condensed and edited.

IF YOU LOOK AT SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW, IT INCLUDES LONG-TERMISM – LOOKING FAR BEYOND INITIAL REVENUE, LOOKING AT THE CONCEPT OF RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES THAT COME FROM THAT. THOSE ARE FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS AROUND STEWARDSHIP AND RISK MANAGEMENT THAT ARE VERY DISTINCT WITHIN AN INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW.

- CAROL ANNE HILTON

FROM EAGLE DRAWING ON A SANDAL TO FASHION WEEK IN NYC, ALICIA'S DESIGNS NOW IN HIGH DEMAND



Photo: Alicia presents at New York Fashion Week, September 2019 in Manhattan, New York.
Source: www.aliciasdesigns.ca

IT ALL STARTED WITH A SHARPIE AND A PAIR OF WEDGE SANDALS.

Art had always been a big part of Alicia Stephens' life. A descendent of both the Nuuchah-nulth and the Kwakwaka'wakw people of Vancouver Island, she drew, sketched, and painted when she was a child. She carved paddles. She made plaques and prints.

"What I wanted to be when I grew up was a native artist. That was my number one," says Ms. Stephens, who is a member of Ahousaht First Nation and lives in Burnaby, B.C.

About nine years ago, when she was in her early 30s, she found herself between jobs.

And I was like 'hey, well I have nothing to do, so I might as well just draw,' she says. "So I was drawing for a couple of days. And then I had a Sharpie, and I said 'you know what would be cool? If there was a piece of artwork on a shoe!'"

She grabbed a wedge sandal from her closet and drew an eagle design on it.

"I posted it. And Facebook just blew up," says Ms. Stephens. "I was getting orders. I was like, holy smokes, okay, what do I do with this? So I started doing slippers. And then I tried boots. And it just took off from there."

She has now been at this full time for eight years.

TODAY, HER COMPANY, ALICIA'S DESIGNS, CREATES HIGH FASHION THAT DRAWS ITS INSPIRATION FROM THE TRADITIONAL ART OF HER ANCESTORS. IN 2019, SHE WAS INVITED TO SHOW HER WARES AT NEW YORK'S FASHION WEEK, AND SHE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO RETURNING WHEN COVID ENDS.

"It was a good platform for me to get out and show my pieces," she says. "I want to get First Nations art into the mainstream."

The Sharpies have been exchanged for leather paint. And she has expanded from sandals and boots to shoes, sunglasses, purses, earrings, and backpacks. All of it is hand-painted.

The design of each piece comes to her at the

time it is being created. "Usually, when I start painting a purse, it just kind of pops out," says Ms. Stephens. "And I go with collections. Right now, I'm on thunderbolts and thunderbird designs. So now, everywhere I look, I see thunderbolts and thunderbirds."

When one of her creations is ready for sale, she posts its picture on her website and on social media and Facebook. They are often sold within 10 minutes.

"I used to do custom orders for a years. People would say something like 'I want a black purse with long straps,'" says Ms. Stephens. But that business became overwhelming and she had a hard time keeping up with demand, so now she just makes what is speaking to her in the moment.

Sometimes, she says, she thinks about the way her First Nations ancestors traded art and how her work is an extension of that. She also thinks about her grandmother, who was a residential school survivor, and how far she has come from those hardships. "I really feel like I'm trying to take this further for her."

Ms. Stephens says her goal now is to create clothing for young people between the ages of 20 and 40.

"When I was a teenager, I was modelling for native designers in Victoria, and there were these beautiful gowns and suits and I was like

'wow this is so cool,'" she says. "It'd be so cool to have fashion for a younger generation, regular casual clothes. And that's always stuck in my mind since then."

The most difficult part of having your own company is the business side of the equation, says Ms. Stephens, especially for someone who is an artist and not naturally business-inclined. "And in every small business there are ups and downs, and one month you don't have much, and then the next month large orders come in."

The best part, she says, is that she gets to do what she loves.

"It's so amazing that sometimes it still blows my mind because I can't get enough of it," says Ms. Stephens. "I just like painting. It takes me to this calm place. And I get to work from home, and I get to raise my kids. I don't have to drop them off at daycare. So, yeah, I'm still amazed that I'm able to do this."



TRANSLATING EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD TO ART,

SHARIFAH TELLS STORIES THROUGH PAINTINGS, METALWORK



Photo Credit: www.lattimergallery.com

SHARIFAH MARSDEN'S

art tells the stories of motherhood and of being a woman. It reflects her Anishinaabe heritage, but in a contemporary context, and a lot of her personal experience thrown into the mix.

Ms. Marsden's intricate jewellery, beadwork, weaving, and painting is sold on her own website and through galleries, like the Latimer Gallery in Vancouver. She has also been commissioned to create colourful murals depicting Indigenous life and culture, including "Healing Quilt" to honour the loved ones lost from opioid overdose, and "Unconditional Love" with the Vancouver Mural Festival.

The jewellery, she says, relies heavily on Ojibway floral art and geometric beadwork. And her paintings are inspired by her life.

"I base my imagery on women's storytelling," Ms. Marsden, a mother of a three-year-old son, says of the images that reach out from her paintings and speak to onlookers.

"The Anishinaabe Motherhood series is about all the things that I was going through, the things that I was experiencing. How do I tell that story? How do I find beauty in those moments?" she says.

A recent painting for sale on her website depicts a slumped Indigenous woman on horseback with a child between her thighs and a baby on her back. It is called Wounded Warrior Woman.

"It's about a time in motherhood where you're feeling just overwhelmed, and you're feeling defeated, and you know that you just have to stop and take a breath," says Ms. Marsden. "And then you have to go on because you have so much love for your children. That is what keeps you going. So, it's a reflection of that moment."

Her art, she says, is about explaining the beauty and strength in these stories.

"I find joy and peace when I'm creating" says Ms. Marsden. "My first love has always been art."

Ms. Marsden is from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation in Ontario. She began painting and doing beadwork when she was about 13 and was able to sit long enough to take in the teachings of her mother, who was also a painter.

She connected with elders in her community and began doing leather work, crafting moccasins, and regalia. Then she took courses in Northwest Coast Jewelry at the Native Education College in Vancouver where she became skilled in hand-engraved jewellery. She also trained for two years at the Vancouver Metal Arts School for goldsmithing.

"I learned the skills they taught me and then I created my own designs from my culture," says Ms. Marsden.

"I've always painted but it's just been kind of constant off and on," she says. "The jewellery has been continual, a way to solidify my career as an artist."

She is 44 and has now been working full-time as an artist for 14 years.

The visions of jewellery designs or paintings will come to her throughout the day and she makes a quick sketch to save the thought for later.

"Or I'll do a little writeup of a story that I want to share in a vision, and then I'll put that away," she says, "so when I have the time to sit down, usually in the evenings or when my family helps care for my baby, then I have time to go in the studio and then I can choose which one of those pieces I want to work on."

Finding time to do that work has been her biggest challenge, says Ms. Marsden. That has been especially true during the pandemic when the isolation has given her much time to think about her life which has, in turn, led to a wealth of creative ideas.

Her son will be in preschool soon and she is hoping that will allow more hours in the day for art.

In between creating her own work, she teaches workshops in drum making, beadwork, and moccasin making. "I want to keep teaching what I know to younger people and encouraging them, especially young women, to create because the arts is such a white-male dominated system," she says. "I think women need more encouragement and more support to continue their artwork. Those women's stories need to be shared and heard."

**"THE ANISHINAABE
MOTHERHOOD SERIES IS
ABOUT ALL THE THINGS THAT
I WAS GOING THROUGH,
THE THINGS THAT I WAS
EXPERIENCING. HOW DO I
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I FIND BEAUTY IN
THOSE MOMENTS?"**

- SHARIFA MARSDEN



Photo Credit: www.latimergallery.com

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a pink headband and black-rimmed glasses, is smiling and holding a rectangular sign with a gold border. The sign has a white background with a grey marble pattern and the text "I AM THE BOSS" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. She is wearing a black top with a vibrant pink and green floral pattern. The background is a blurred indoor setting with white walls and a wooden chair.

I AM THE BOSS

CREATIVE KWE

A BUSINESS HELPING OTHERS TAP INTO CREATIVITY

Photo Credit: Heather Doughty



OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR CAME CREATIVE KWE – A BUSINESS HELPING OTHERS TAP INTO CREATIVITY

ASHLEY LAMOTHE relies on traditional Anishinaabe principles to coach her clients out of chaos and into a place of peace in mind, body, and spirit.

She runs her business, Creative Kwe, from a corner of her living room, offering one-on-one creativity coaching by email and video, and workshops for larger groups. It is a work style that allows her to be close to her two children and to carve out her own schedule to fit life's demands.

Typically, Ms. Lamothe's clients come through social media and word of mouth.

"Maybe they have a project, or they're writing a proposal, or their boss is writing a proposal and they're just stuck, they don't know where to start, they're struggling with thinking outside of the box," she says. "I help by providing a safe space and offer tools to unlocking that creative potential and opening the doors to their own creativity."

In many ways, her own journey has provided her with the tools she needs to help others.

The year 2015 marked a massive change

within Ms. Lamothe's journey. Ms. Lamothe was pregnant and the mother of a two-year-old when her partner was killed in Jamaica. She was 30 and had a BA in health sciences but her job in a non-profit organization in Southern Ontario was unfulfilling.

"I had no idea what I was going to do. I was completely broken, completely lost," she says. "I spent the year grieving and just trying to survive, to be honest. I focused a lot of my attention on trying to maintain my pregnancy."

When her contract was not renewed, she packed up and moved her children back to Peterborough where she had been raised in a home heavily steeped in traditional Anishinaabe values and teachings.

With nothing but her belongings and her kids, she did something no parent wants to do. "I'll never forget – it still makes me tear up – walking into social services and being like, I need help. For the first time in my life, I felt like a failure," says Ms. Lamothe. "I had an employment counsellor. She looked at my certifications, my skill sets, and just my

energy and my determination, and she said, 'have you ever thought about starting a business?' And it kind of clicked. It unlocked something in me, because creativity has always been in my life. It's been my saviour for a lot of things. I just never thought of it as a business."

She spent a year taking a program in self-employment and then launched Creative Kwe in 2017. She also began meeting and networking with other Indigenous women who were also starting businesses.

"I finally was like 'You know what? I'm gonna do this my own way.' I reframed my business model to fit the seven grandfather teachings," says Ms. Lamothe. "That was when the business actually starting being successful. Not only that, I was moving towards happiness. And that's kind of where we are today."

She also took advantage of the #BetheDrum program of the Native Women's Association of Canada, which is a navigational outreach program for Indigenous female entrepreneurs. "It really just helped solidify that, yup, as Indigenous women, we are capable of so much when we let go of that negativity and that stigma attached to it," says Ms. Lamothe.

Some of her clients are Indigenous and some are not. She helps them to set goals, meet deadlines, and focus on their own self-care.

"I'm a big time-management and planner nerd so I help people with their schedule," says Ms. Lamothe. She gets her clients to find new ways to do things through journaling but also through unconventional creative practices like drawing. *(continued on page 16)*



Photo Credit: Heather Doughty

**"OUR IMAGINATION AS ADULTS
TENDS TO GET PUSHED DOWN
TO THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL
BECAUSE WE HAVE SO MANY
OTHER THINGS THAT TAKE
PLACE," SAYS MS. LAMOTHE.
"HOWEVER, IF YOU PULL THAT
UP AND USE THAT, YOU'RE
GOING TO FIND SO MANY MORE
OPPORTUNITIES."**

- ASHLEY LAMOTHE

(continued from page 15) Creation is the process of producing something new, says Ms. Lamothe.

“When we engage our creative abilities, we produce material from energy. Creativity begins with energy. Indigenous women are gifted with deep rooted energy but through colonization and systemic oppression, this energy has been diminished and destroyed,” she says.

Ms. Lamothe works with those who are ready to embrace their creativity by supporting their journey and creative practices. “Creative Kwe also focuses on advocating for the decolonization of creative and corporate spaces,” she says, “through a wholistic, human-centered model of service customized to each organization and experience.”

**THE SCARIEST ASPECT
OF STARTING HER OWN
BUSINESS, SHE SAYS, WAS
THE POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE.**

“When I finally made the jump, it was absolutely petrifying. It was ‘if I fail at this, I will literally lack money for food or to pay bills,’” says Ms. Lamothe. “The financial aspect of being an entrepreneur is scary, and sometimes mind-numbingly so. I still get moments where, if something I tried doesn’t work or I only have three participants at a workshop, it’s like, ‘oh my gosh, what am I doing?’ And it’s that roller coaster, that up and down, that’s probably the biggest thing.”

Talking to other entrepreneurs has helped her through that. “That fear is always there. But it’s more using that fear to launch myself into something new and doing it despite the fear.”

The best part, she says, is having the freedom to make her own hours and to attend to the needs of her children without having that conflict with the demands of more a structured type of employment. And she is helping people with her traditional Anishinaabe knowledge.

“I always looked at it as mind-body-spirit, just yourself, and starting with yourself,” says Ms. Lamothe. “We’ve had this knowledge for thousands of years. This whole idea of holistic business, and looking at life in a holistic view, and rest-recharge, and following the seasons, all of this stuff, is not new to Indigenous People. The Indigenous

women immediately get it. And, when it’s approached in a different way with non-Indigenous women, they’re very receptive to it, without even realizing that this is rooted in Indigenous culture.”



**“WHEN WE ENGAGE OUR CREATIVE
ABILITIES, WE PRODUCE MATERIAL
FROM ENERGY. CREATIVITY BEGINS
WITH ENERGY. INDIGENOUS WOMEN
ARE GIFTED WITH DEEP-ROOTED
ENERGY BUT THROUGH COLONIZATION
AND SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION, THIS
ENERGY HAS BEEN DIMINISHED
AND DESTROYED,”**

- ASHLEY LAMOTHE

ECONOMIC RECONCILIATION – THE MISSING LINK TO SETTING THINGS RIGHT

BY LYNNE GROULX, NWAC CEO

There has been much talk about reconciliation as Canadians awaken to the centuries of harm done to the Indigenous Peoples of this continent by settlers and their descendants.

Reconciliation means restoring the relationship or setting things right between two peoples. That settling of accounts will have to take many forms and will require action on many fronts for true reconciliation to take place in Canada.

One of those fronts — perhaps one of the most important — is the economy. Indigenous Peoples need to be “let in” and strong financial support and investment is needed to fill the economic gaps between First Nations and Canada.

IN RECENT YEARS, CANADA HAS RANKED BETWEEN 6TH AND 8TH ON THE UN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX WHILE FIRST NATIONS FALL BETWEEN 63RD AND 78TH ON THE INDEX. THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!

Economic reconciliation is not an abstract thought or an aspirational target to be worked upon in earnest at some future date when conditions are just right. Economic rights are human rights that demand immediate action if the word reconciliation is to have any meaning to it at all.

Economic reconciliation requires concrete actions towards ending social and economic marginalization and encouraging prosperity in both the near and longer terms.

Really, for Indigenous Peoples, what it means is the government stepping back and allowing us to take ownership and control and leadership over our own economies with appropriate investments and supports.

How can this be achieved? To start, our economic initiatives need to be fully funded

in order to start reaping the benefits of the investments.

Today, the economic dependency of Indigenous individuals, communities, and organizations is still much too widespread. We need to be freed from the current government vortex and complicated system of unstable temporary funding that forces us to limp from one day to the next, never knowing if there will be money to keep the lights on tomorrow.

Economic reconciliation means investing in the economic security that Indigenous Peoples need because we have been in chronic instability since colonization began. The lands were taken away, the hunting and fishing and livelihood were restricted — even the children were taken away.

Let's be clear. This economic stability would not be a gift of a beneficent friend called Canada. It is what the Indigenous Peoples of this land are owed for what was taken.

And it comes from the taking of the resources. Every ounce of natural metals lifted from the ground, or piece of lumber cut from a tree, or fish harvested from the sea has become part of the economic equation because Indigenous Peoples agreed to share the bounty of this land. They did not agree to have it taken away without a fair exchange. Treaties were signed and promises were broken, leaving Indigenous peoples living under impoverished conditions.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls have both determined that a genocide has been perpetrated against the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit. Under international law, genocides require restitution.

That must come in the form of investments in our communities and our people. That is what is required for our relationship to be put back into balance. That would be economic reconciliation, or at least part of it.

Indigenous Peoples are deeply impacted by colonization, in particular the loss of land, residential schools, and the loss of traditional livelihood. Another part of this

conversation on economic reconciliation has to do with decolonization because right now, the control of our lives from birth to death lies with the government.

That ownership, and that leadership, must be handed back to us. We must be given the space we need to take care of ourselves.



FEDERAL NDP:

ESSENTIAL HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST, TO MAKE INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAMS REALITY

WITH JAGMEET SINGH



Photo Credit: Lindsay Duncan

Before Indigenous women can realize dreams of starting their own businesses, Jagmeet Singh says they must have the basic necessities of life, including housing, clean water, health, and childcare.

So, while the leader of the federal New Democrats says his party will push the new Liberal government to provide dedicated support and resources to Indigenous entrepreneurs, it will also demand that essential human rights are being met.

"I can't buy any of the excuses that the problems facing Indigenous communities, which are caused by colonialism, have not been fixed," Mr. Singh said in an interview in early October.

Two weeks earlier, 25 New Democrats had won seats in the House of Commons in an election that gave his party the balance of power — which means the Liberals need NDP support, or that of the Bloc Quebecois, to get any measure passed into law.

During the campaign, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

commissioned Nanos Research to compare the parties' platforms with the 11 issues NWAC determined to be of primary importance to Indigenous women. The NDP was the only party to score an A in that analysis, with top, or close to top, marks across the board.

"Having met with so many Indigenous communities and leaders and spoken with kids and families, I can't look them in the eyes and think that, in a country as wealthy as ours in the 21st century, they don't have clean drinking water," says Mr. Singh. "I can't meet with them, and speak with them, and think that 'it's okay just the way things are.'"

For instance, housing is becoming unaffordable for many Canadians, but it is particularly a problem for Indigenous communities and Indigenous women, he

says. "It's hard to imagine starting a business or any other entrepreneurial project when you don't have a place to call home," says Mr. Singh. "So housing is key."

The New Democrats, he says, are calling for a housing strategy that is led by Indigenous Peoples, for Indigenous Peoples, that will serve First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in urban areas as well as in their own communities or on reserve.

In addition, says Mr. Singh, his party is committed to fighting for more affordable childcare and childcare that is culturally appropriate and responds to the needs of Indigenous Peoples. "Access to childcare will specifically help women be economically stable or pursue an economic interest whether it's employment or entrepreneurship," he says. *(continued on page 20)*



Photo Credit: Lindsay Duncan

"I CAN'T BUY ANY OF THE EXCUSES THAT THE PROBLEMS FACING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, WHICH ARE CAUSED BY COLONIALISM, HAVE NOT BEEN FIXED," - JAGMEET SINGH

(continued from page 19) And New Democrats want more investments in health care and dental care, says Mr. Singh.

"Staying healthy allows people to live their best lives, which includes pursuing any sort of dreams of entrepreneurship or employment or whatever interest people want to pursue," he says. "If you don't have your health, it's hard to do anything else."

There are also some basic demands that Mr. Singh says his party will be making of the Liberals that are unrelated to economics, but are critical to the overall well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

The NDP will be calling on the government to stop fighting Indigenous people in court over improvements to child welfare, says Mr. Singh. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has said there was willful and reckless discrimination against Indigenous children in the child-welfare system financed by the federal government, he says, "so let's put our effort towards fixing the problem, not fighting it in court."

The perennial issue of clean drinking water on reserves must be solved, says Mr. Singh. "There's been a lack of political will to fix this," he says, "If we wake up every day as government and say, 'there are people in our country that don't have clean drinking water, what are we doing today to fix it?' — if it had that level of priority, it would get fixed."

And, says the NDP leader, his party will press the government to meet the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. "These Calls to Action and Justice are clear guidelines of steps that need to be taken," he says. "So, really listening to Indigenous people and responding to what they know they need, those are some of the top priorities."

There are ways to pressure the government to answer these demands, says Mr. Singh — methods he says the NDP successfully employed during the last session of Parliament to improve benefits for people who were harmed economically by the pandemic. Rather than constantly threaten to bring down the minority government with a vote of non-confidence, he says, the New Democrats negotiated their support for Liberal priorities by demanding reciprocal support by the government to issues of importance to the NDP.

And Indigenous issues, says Mr. Singh, are priorities for the entire NDP team.

Going forward, he says, "I imagine a partnership and a nation-to-nation-relationship, a relationship based on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the day that recognized that Canada played a role in specifically trying to wipe out a people, and doing it directly by stripping kids of their language, their sense of who they are, their identity, their teachings, in residential schools."

And Canada must commit to economic justice, he says. It must commit to economic development that uplifts the First People of this land and to projects in which Indigenous Peoples "are equal partners, and are also beneficiaries. That's what I want to see — that we build and move forward in a Canada where we are working together, nation to nation, as allies and partners, not a top-down kind of forcing or imposing, but collaborative working together and building together."

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- JAGMEET SINGH



THE DAKHKÁ KHWÁAN DANCERS:

SHARING INDIGENOUS CULTURE WITH CANADA, PEOPLE AROUND THE GLOBE

Photo Credit: Simon Ager

The lure of potential income from the tourist trade that was blooming in and around Carcross/Tagish First Nation in the southern Yukon in 2007 prompted the formation of the Dakhká Khwáan Dancers.

But 14 years later, after travelling to every part of Canada and to places like New Zealand and Taiwan, after appearing at the Olympic Games in Vancouver in 2010 and the Pan Am Games in Toronto in 2015, after being nominated for an Indigenous Music Award, it has become more about the experience than the money.

"We just have fun," says Marilyn Jensen, one of the founders of the dance troupe. "It's just a beautiful, wonderful, joyful thing to do. And you know, it really has provided a lot of wellness for people. As Indigenous people coming from an Indigenous community, we're continually on this path of healing and finding wellness and joy in life. And it does that."

Ms. Jensen is of Tlingit and Tagish ancestry. Dancing has always been a large part of her culture and she started traditional dancing when she was just two years old. So, when the tourists began to show up in her village, the idea of creating performance art to capture some of that revenue seemed to make sense. Ms. Jensen and her friends put together a show that blended storytelling and drumming with dance in traditional regalia.

Unfortunately, it was not particularly lucrative. The tourists did not provide the revenue expected. But the troupe stuck

together and continued to dance and hone their skills.

"The business kind of switched focus. We were being invited to dance at conferences, and at events, and to travel around and present our culture in a different way than we first anticipated," says Ms. Jensen.

Now based in Whitehorse, there are about 20 members of the Dakhká Khwáan Dancers. Sometimes they all dance together. Sometimes groups as small as six will go on long tours. And they have formed a children's group called the Dakhká Khwáan Juniors where children learn the songs and dances.

"We wanted to give them space to do their own little performances," says Ms. Jensen. "But also, we will invite them to come down with the senior group sometimes for great big community shows and things like that."

None of the dancers have been able to quit their day jobs. But the members of the troupe spend much of their free time on weekends and in the evenings rehearsing and performing. And they do get paid individually for their efforts, especially when

they are on multi-week tours – though most of the money goes back into the general coffers.

For the most part, the performance money takes care of expenses including gas mileage, materials, masks, and other costs associated with the shows.

"We're not trying to become millionaires. But we're reinvesting back into the development of our culture," says Ms. Jensen. "The real payment is obviously the opportunity for all these young people from the Yukon to be able to travel and see the world."

"WE'RE NOT TRYING TO BECOME MILLIONAIRES. BUT WE'RE REINVESTING BACK INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CULTURE," SAYS MS. JENSEN. "THE REAL PAYMENT IS OBVIOUSLY THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL THESE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE YUKON TO BE ABLE TO TRAVEL AND SEE THE WORLD."

The members of the troupe have had to learn myriad traditional skills just to create their traditional regalia, including beading and sewing. They have also learned about music and the music industry.

They put together an album that married techno music with the traditional Tlingit songs. Although they did not win an Indigenous Music Award, the fact that they were nominated was "pretty cool," says Ms. Jensen.

The COVID pandemic curtailed the troupe's live performances over the past year and a half, but the dancers have participated in many online events. They can be seen in a variety of YouTube videos.

The Dakhká Khwáan Dancers have considered incorporating, said Ms. Jensen, "but at this point, it just doesn't seem to fit right." (continued on page 23)



Photo of Marilyn Jensen
Photo Credit: Simon Ager

(continued from page 22)

Many of the dancers say they would like to be able to turn their passion into full-time jobs that would pay their mortgages, says Ms. Jensen. “We have thought of alternative kinds of business models where a few people would be able to do that,” she says, “We had all these ideas floating around, and then COVID hit us. We’re just kind of picking ourselves up again and getting busy.”

The dancers recently did a video shoot for CBC that aired on the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, and they performed in another video for the BBC about the Yukon River.

The performances will continue, whether or not they ever become a main source of employment, says Ms. Jensen, “because I feel a sense of responsibility to my ancestors and community to reclaim, revitalize, and just keep traditional dance going.”



Photo of Marilyn Jensen, Photo Credit: Simon Ager

A GRANDMOTHER'S CRAFT BECOMES THRIVING BUSINESS IN SMALL ANDEAN COMMUNITY

When Luz Elena Champi Romero was a young girl, she helped her mother stuff hand-made dolls, filling out arms and legs of toy figures in traditional Andean dress.

Today, Ms. Romero runs a small workshop in her home village of Paullo, Peru, that employs five women who produce about 600 of the dolls every week.

"The dolls transmit the culture of the Andean people, how the women used to dress, how they carried their babies on their backs, how they harvested their products," says Ms. Romero. "They are considered as toys and also as ornaments. Each doll has a significant value, as they represent each Andean region, with typical clothes of each region."

Like many Indigenous women around the world, Ms. Romero has turned a family craft into a small business that allows her to work close to her home and her children and, at the same time, to contribute significantly to the family income.

"I started making the dolls when I was very young with my mother, Zenobia Romero, who learned it from the first woman who created an Andean doll, my grandmother, Pilar Ojeda," she says.

Her grandmother's dolls were originally stuffed straw and then corn leaves. "As time passed, they (her mother and grandmother) were improving the dolls and they were modernizing them without losing their representation of their culture."

Ms. Romero wanted to go to university when she finished high school but there was no money to send her. And then, when she was 18, she met and married her husband, Joel Condori.

While Mr. Condori worked, Ms. Romero also wanted to be bringing money into the household. She thought about her mother's dolls.

"When I started to innovate, to create new dolls, a great love began to be born in the business that I started," she says.

**"I FELL IN LOVE WITH EACH
PIECE, EACH DOLL, I LEARNED
MANY THINGS BECAUSE A
LOT OF IDEAS RAINED IN MY
HEAD AND I EMBODIED THEM
IN EACH DOLL, SO I COULD
HAVE MY OWN INCOME AND
CONTRIBUTE TO MY FAMILY."**

They are made of Andean blankets, fabrics, wool, cotton. Each piece represents a culture, custom, myth, or legend of an Andean region.

The dolls help children to grow in their imagination, says Ms. Romero, who is now 28 and has two young children. Some of the dolls are imbued with meaning, like the *puñuyupñucha* (sleeping baby) which was created to help babies sleep peacefully at

night and to take away the sorrows and griefs of a home.

"When I first started with the dolls, I only made one or two models," says Ms. Romero. "Over time I was able to innovate and improve the dolls, giving other finishes and making other models that are adapted to the needs of the client. So now we are able to create new models without losing the cultural style."

She has introduced some machinery into the workshop to improve the products and develop new ones. Now she is adding more lines of crafts like *pomponia*, which are crochet fabrics, and *amigurumis*, which are stuffed animals created using a Japanese technique.

"We also make elves, key chains, backpacks, purses, etc. With all these lines added to the workshop, we will have the opportunity to give more work to the women of my rural community of Paullo," says Ms. Romero.

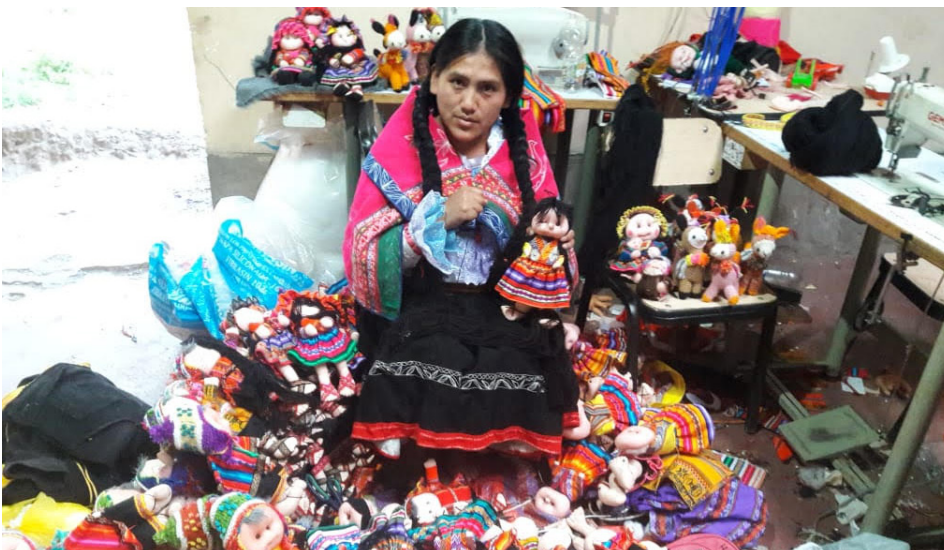
In the broader district of Coya, which is in the Cusco region of Peru, it is customary for the men to go to work and for the women to stay home, take care of the children, and do enough farming to keep their family fed.

"But there are women farmers who work with us and want to improve themselves," says Ms. Romero. "We adapt to send them work to take home so they do not neglect their home, children, and animals."

She sells the dolls at a Saturday fair in the city of Cusco, which is about an hour away from her home. But she is also relying more and more on Internet sales, which is done over social networks.

Now she is teaching other women how to make the dolls, with courses that are open to the general public.

"Our craftsmanship will continue over the years," says Ms. Romero, "because it is a teaching that is transmitted from generation to generation."



KCI-NIWESQ

is a monthly magazine of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). Its objective is to highlight the work of the organization and to tell the stories of the Indigenous women of Canada.

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.

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