

SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

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UN Committee to Focus on the Rights of Indigenous Women and Girls

Call for submissions a golden opportunity to have your voice heard.

NWAC is working on our written submission, and urges others to do so as well. You can find out more about this exciting initiative and how to submit a document on the following UN webpage.

CEDAW makes General Recommendations on an issue affecting women that it believes states should devote more attention to. Since 1986, the committee has developed some 38 opinions on a wide scope of human rights issues. This will be the first one devoted to the rights of Indigenous women and girls.

This call for submissions is a golden opportunity for Indigenous activists to have their voice heard on the international stage.

In addition, the UN Committee is set to hold two online virtual sessions to discuss the initiative on 24 June. Registration is now open, so please consider signing up to make your thoughts known regarding the content of the future opinion. Whether you wish there to be a focus on gender equality for Indigenous women, greater recognition of the over-incarceration of Indigenous women, the need to counter domestic violence or forced sterilization against Indigenous women, or even an emphasis on cultural genocide, your opinion matters!



Walking the RED Path for Incarcerated Indigenous Women

Walking the Red Path project empowers women, fights stigma, and promotes a connection to culture.

Walking the RED Path (RED stands for Re-forging connections, Empowering Indigenous women to heal, and Driving change for a healthy future) is a five-year Public Health Agency of Canada-funded project that aims to connect with and empower federally incarcerated Indigenous women. The goal is to help them make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Indigenous women in Canada are incarcerated at a higher rate than any other population in Canada. They now account for 42% of the women inmate population in Canada, according to the 2018–2019 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator. Federally incarcerated Indigenous women have the highest rates of HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) compared to any other group in Canada. With their unique needs, culture, and experiences with colonization, this is an issue that requires a response that is rooted in their strength and culture.

This is where the RED Path Project comes in. We aim to improve knowledge of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) in a setting that focuses their strength and connects them to their Indigenous culture, with an Elder providing support throughout the process.

Currently, RED Path works with Indigenous women in federal institutions and Section 81s to deliver workshops designed by and for incarcerated Indigenous women. Through these workshops and other activities, RED Path has been successful in increasing knowledge of STBBIs and empowering Indigenous women to prevent infection, while fighting stigma and promoting a connection to culture.

Among the many interesting and rewarding parts of working on the RED Path Project is the opportunity to see the power of peer-led support in action. Many people who have worked on the project (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) have their own stories to tell around trauma, addiction, and living with HIV and incarceration. Through this project, we have been able to grow and learn alongside the population we're working with. In the process, we have made many powerful connections.



The Safe Passage Project: VP-MMIWG Unit

New project raises awareness about sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

The National Inquiry into MMIWG's Final Report highlights the role of the transportation and hospitality industry. Specifically, Call for Justice 8.1 states: "We call upon all transportation service providers and the hospitality industry to undertake training to identify and respond to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, as well as the development and implementation of reporting policies and practices." In response to this Call, NWAC has launched the Safe Passage project, which is designed to raise awareness about MMIWG and human trafficking.



The Safe Passage project is hosted on a website that features an interactive map of MMIWG cases across Canada. The map, which was created in partnership with Nanos Research, allows visitors to explore MMIWG through a visualization of case data. Companion educational materials address the role that sexual exploitation and human trafficking plays in the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ crisis. A number of exceptional partners helped NWAC create these educational materials for Indigenous community members, the hospitality industry, and the transportation industry.

Working with Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Truckers Against Trafficking, and Intertek, this project offered NWAC an opportunity to share and explore anti-colonial approaches to violence that centre settler colonialism as the foundation of MMIWG. The Safe Passage project emphasizes the long history of violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Through the project, readers may learn about colonialism and thus become better equipped to recognize and respond to systemic violence.

We will be publicly announcing the launch of the Safe Passage site in the near future. Once officially launched, on the site you will be able to access the MMIWG map, anti-trafficking and educational materials, and additional research and resources. Stay tuned for the official launch!



#BeTheDrum: Your Business, Our Focus

Our latest peer support and navigational program is proving a success.



Since 2012, NWAC has hosted several Aboriginal Women's Business Entrepreneur Network conferences designed to build the skills of Indigenous women entering the sphere of business, management, and entrepreneurship. Among the requests from past participants was one for ongoing support in the form of peer mentoring and navigation. #BeTheDrum was born!

For most Indigenous people, the sound of the drum stirs up a sense of belonging and a feeling of great joy in knowing that we are all connected in a way that gives us hope and keeps us strong. The drum signifies a calling to unite us in a place of healing, strength, and momentum toward greatness.

#BeTheDrum is a calling to existing and budding entrepreneurs. Through the support of peers, who provide mentorship and navigation guidance, Indigenous women entrepreneurs thrive. Our network of support is especially helpful when navigating through a global pandemic, where businesses confront new challenges.

Through workshops, one-on-one navigational support, peer support circles, and networking events, #BeTheDrum has proven its success in helping and supporting Indigenous women entrepreneurs. For more information, email us at bethedrum@nwac.ca or phone us at 1-833-652-1392.

The Right to Belong: NWAC's Searchable Online Database of Membership-Related Laws

NWAC is developing the first-ever national online searchable database on membership rights.



The right to belong to one's Indigenous community is an indivisible component of the bundle of Indigenous rights. Yet, it can be challenging to access documents related to membership rights. It's for this reason that NWAC is developing the first national online searchable database of laws, treaties, and teachings on membership rights.

There is a long history in Canada of laws and policies that attempted to deny the right of Indigenous Peoples to belong to their communities. These laws, including the Indian Act, targeted women in particular.

With the coming into force of Bill S-3, most of the sex-based discrimination under the registration provisions of the Indian Act have been eliminated. However, accessing the many documents that can affect an individual's right to status under the Indian Act or membership/citizenship in their community/nation can be daunting.

Over the coming months and years (funding permitting), NWAC will be conducting thorough research and engagements to identify laws and teachings across Canada that relate to Indigenous membership rights. We will make these documents available to the public (where free, prior and informed consent is provided when necessary) on our Indigenous Rights Membership Database.

We hope that this database will be a resource for Indigenous Peoples across Canada to research and learn about the laws and teachings related to the membership rights of their communities. Our ultimate goal is to address the long history of sex-based discrimination Indigenous women and their children have faced as a result of the colonial processes that worked to deny them their identities.



 **SUBSCRIBE**

Working towards Canada's Water Agency and the Inclusion of the Indigenous Worldview of Water

It's crucial that the Indigenous worldview of water be reflected in the new Canada Water Agency.

The federal Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change and the Ministry of Agriculture are holding public consultations to help launch a new Canada Water Agency to manage freshwater across Canada. The goal of the Canada Water Agency is to "find ways to safeguard our freshwater resources for generations to come."

It is important to note that Canada is home to a fifth of the world's freshwater resources and Canadians rank water as the country's most important resource.

Through our Environmental Conservation and Climate Change Office (ECCCO), NWAC was pleased to be part of the initial consultations in these very important discussions. Individual discussions took place with 28 Indigenous women from across the country. These discussions included Elders, Water Keepers, Knowledge Keepers, people who work in the environmental and water sectors, academics, and youth.



"Water is a source of all life, not a resource."

Every participant expressed a holistic Indigenous worldview that "water is a source of all life, not a resource." It's essential to all life on earth. One cannot separate water from land, because where water flows and where there are bodies of water, there is land underneath. To many Indigenous women and their communities, water is a living entity with a spirit.

Many participants spoke of their responsibilities towards water. They noted that in their ceremonies—which have been handed down through the generations since time immemorial—water requires caretaking and acknowledgement as a living being.



ECCCO invites you to further discover the Indigenous worldview of water on our newly created water page. You will find videos, stories, art, dance, and photos to help you explore the importance of water to Indigenous Peoples.



Shining a Spotlight: Social Development

"Restoring the Circle" training program set to launch this summer.

NWAC's Social Development Policy Unit's WAGE-funded project provides training to service providers to improve the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous survivors of gender-based violence in their service setting. Our team marked an important milestone in May with the design and development of "Restoring the Circle," a three-hour, self-led online training curriculum for service providers.

Back in 2019, we held eight trauma-informed regional engagements with Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ gender-based violence survivors. We also launched a national survey to learn about the gaps in services that survivors have experienced and to receive their thoughts on potential interventions. Following these sessions, our team held a two-day national gathering last September to review the results of these regional engagement sessions and to co-develop training recommendations.

This winter, we were honoured to have two participants from the national gathering join our team as advisors and co-creators of the training materials. Chi Miigwetch to Two-Spirit Elder Albert Macleod and Two-Spirit Knowledge Keeper Paulie Poitras for their generosity and guidance. Their contributions to this important project include grounding the process in ceremony and highlighting the importance of intergenerational knowledge-sharing. The training materials include stunning creative content by the Indigenous design team at Design de Plume.

In March, when we put out a call for pilot testers from the housing and shelter sector, we were overwhelmed by the response. More than 40 service providers expressed interest in participating. In early May, we launched our pilot test of "Restoring the Circle" with 19 service providers from across Canada. Their feedback will help us to refine the training program in preparation for our official launch of "Restoring the Circle" in mid-July.



New NWAC Head Office Promotes Indigenous Culture, Economic Independence

The Native Women's Association of Canada is looking forward to opening its new head office in a culturally appropriate space that has been created in downtown Gatineau, QC.

The Social and Economic Innovation Centre is a place that will help to foster the economic independence of First Nations, Metis and Inuit women, while showcasing their art and their culture. It is the first of its kind in the world.

It will also provide a revenue stream to NWAC that will diversify its funding streams.

The Centre is located across the street from the buildings that house the federal departments of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Indigenous Services.

Culturally inspired meeting rooms will provide the backdrop for workshops and teaching sessions. But those rooms can also be rented by outside parties, generating financial resources that will be directed to programs that serve the grassroots Indigenous women of Canada.

Some of the meeting rooms have been designed in a way that is distinctions based, with a First Nations room, an Inuit room and a Metis room. There is also a room dedicated to Grandmother Moon, a Cedar Room, a Healing Room and another that recreates a more traditional meeting space.

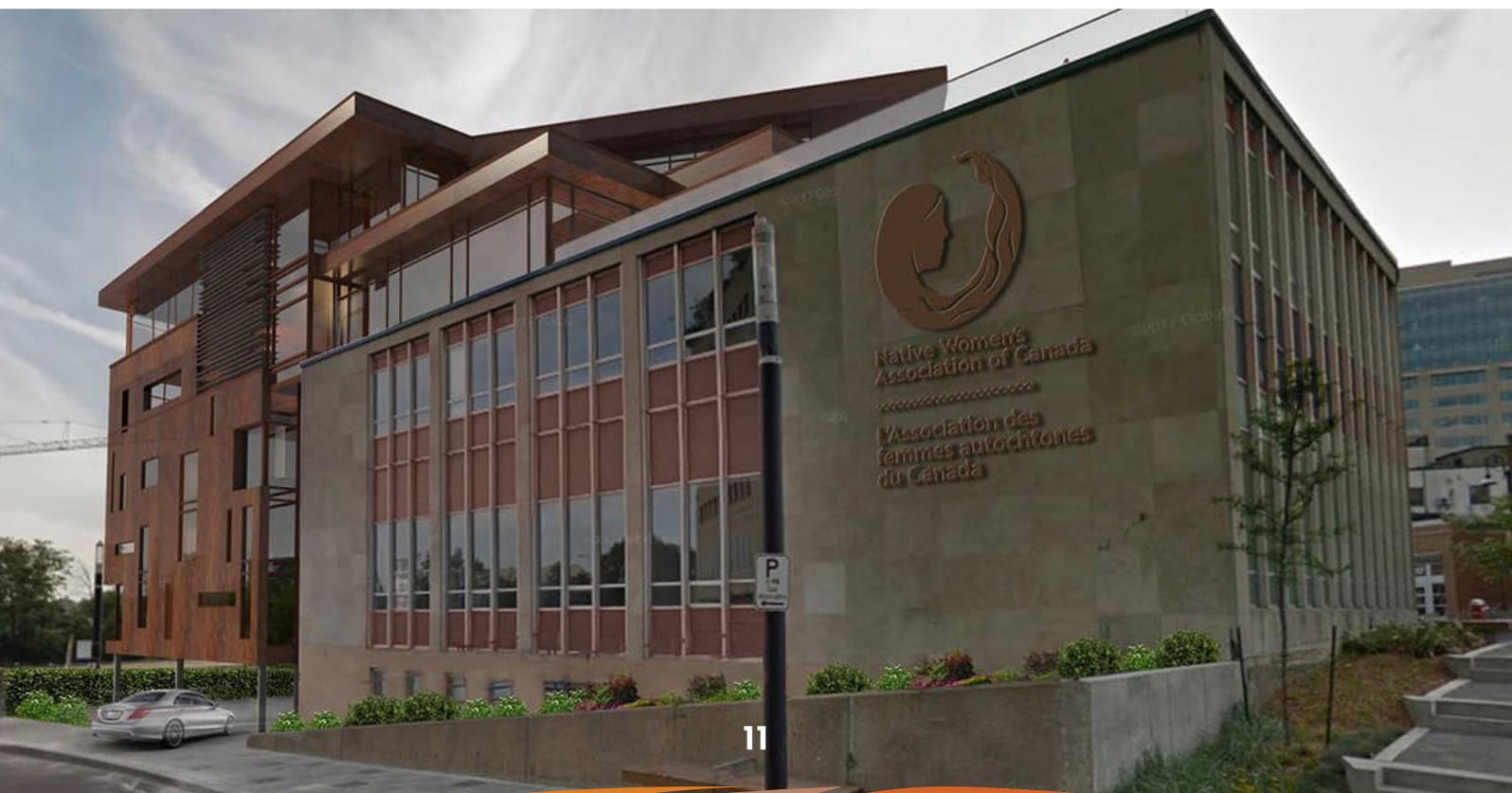


On the ground floor of the Centre is Café Bouleau, a café with some take out food items, specializing in artisanal coffee, pastries, and a special selection of bannock. NWAC is setting its sights in the future that will offer an Indigenous-infused menu incorporating foods grown in the building's rooftop garden.

Also on the ground floor is a boutique, called Artisanelle, which will sell the artisan crafts of Indigenous women from across Canada and the Americas. Its shelves will be stocked with jewellery, dolls, artisan crafts, clothing and giftware, and other items that are hugely popular online. All of the profits will be returned to support NWAC programming.

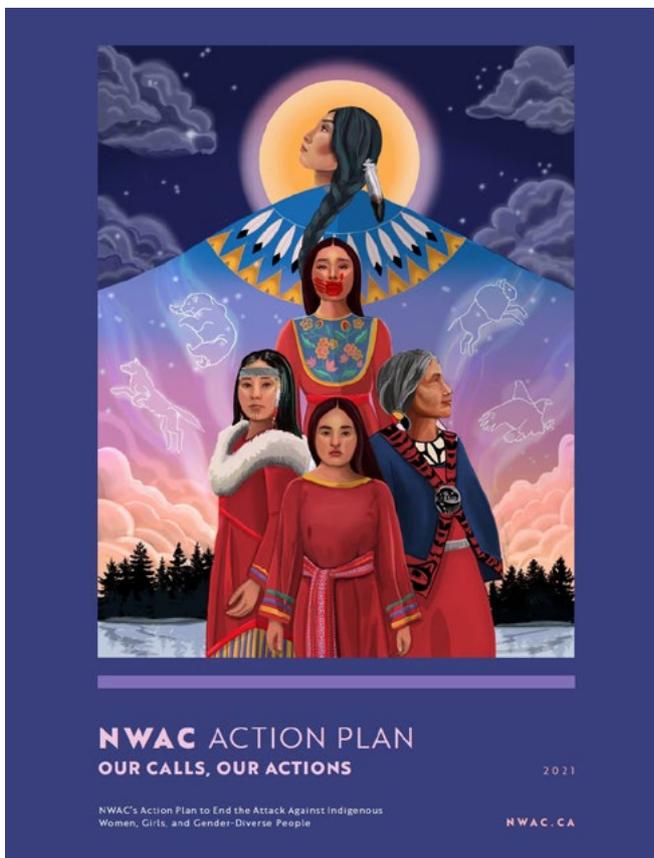
The opening of the new Social and Economic Innovation Centre will mark the start of a new era for NWAC – one in which Indigenous women proudly chart the course of their own futures in a building of great beauty that reflects their traditions and heritage in new and innovative ways.

In March, when we put out a call for pilot testers from the housing and shelter sector, we were overwhelmed by the response. More than 40 service providers expressed interest in participating. In early May, we launched our pilot test of "Restoring the Circle" with 19 service providers from across Canada. Their feedback will help us to refine the training program in preparation for our official launch of "Restoring the Circle" in mid-July.



Resiliency Lodge is Focus of NWAC's Plan to Address Genocide Against Indigenous Women

The Native Women's Association of Canada is not sitting idle, waiting for governments and others to respond to the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls.



On June 1, two days before the second anniversary of the release of the Inquiry's final report, NWAC released its action plan *Our Calls, Our Actions*.

It is a document outlining 65 measures NWAC will take that align with the Inquiry's 231 Calls. As prescribed by the Inquiry Commissioners, the measures are costed, they have timelines, they are goals that can be measured.

Central to the NWAC plan is the creation of Resiliency Lodges across the country that replicate what the association has already built in Gatineau, Que., and is planning to open next year in New Brunswick.

They will be places of healing, but also centres where Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people can reconnect with their culture and learn skills that can lead to economic independence.

NWAC Leaders had hoped that the federal government would release a national action plan of its own on June 3, one that would complement what NWAC is doing to end the violence that the National Inquiry found to be a genocide.



Unfortunately, the government instead released a hollow Pathways document that makes no commitments other than to say it will act at some undetermined point in the future. There are no costed measures, no timelines, and no measurable goals. The government is offering nothing more than a plan to have a plan.

For that reason, NWAC is appealing to international bodies to force the Canadian government into action.

The Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry are not recommendations, they are legal imperatives. And no country that is found to be the place of a genocide can ignore the violence that is taking place within its boundaries.

NWAC is committed to carrying out its own plan. But it is also committed to force the Canadian government to create and implement the action plan that was demanded by the National Inquiry. Too many lives hang in the balance to tolerate inaction.

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Coloring Workshops Create Space for Healing and Teachings of Elders

Healing through art is the aim of online coloring workshops that are being run out by the NWAC Resiliency Lodge.

Indigenous women are invited to have a cup of tea and enjoy meditative coloring as they listen to the teachings of an elder.

The coloring workshops are among hundreds that NWAC has held since last fall, many of them focusing on artisan crafts. More than 5,000 women have participated in the full range of courses offered.

Each of the participants in the coloring workshops is sent a package, at no cost, that contains a tea bag, a language guide, COVID-19 personal care items, and the coloring package.

In one of the coloring workshops, NWAC President Lorraine Whitman who is also known as Grandmother White Sea Turtle, taught about the importance of marshlands in the ecosystem and how wetlands are essential to the environment.

In another, Ms. Whitman taught about the seven sacred teachings.

And, in another, she taught about forests and hunting grounds as sacred lands, and talked about sustainable forestry practices. In that workshop, the participants colored an original forest scene.



Adult coloring has become extremely popular in recent years. Those who color find it reduces stress and brings a sense of inner peace. It is a way of taking attention away from turmoil and allowing the brain to shut out negative thoughts.

At the same time, the elders who lead the workshops impart knowledge that restore the sense of tradition and culture that can be lost as Indigenous women deal with the adverse impacts of colonization.

The workshops provide a safe space for Indigenous women to gather and share their experiences, while relaxing and learning. More workshops will be offered in the coming months and years. They will also be held in person as the pandemic subsides and as NWAC builds more Resiliency Lodges across Canada.

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