



SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 17 • NEW INITIATIVES • AUG-SEPT



Native Women's Association of Canada
L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada



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Message from the CEO

The Native Women's Association (NWAC) represents Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse+ (WG2STGD+) people across this country. It's their voices that we carry in our head when we engage with federal government departments on issues like housing, health, the environment, economic marginalization, and so forth. It's their voices that we want when we go across the country to meet them face to face in their communities or when we hold online sessions.

These are the voices of the grassroots people we represent ... and their voices are very important to us.

That's why, in this issue of *Shining the Spotlight*, we talk about how and why we consult with all of you.

Our Legal Unit brings a story on this very topic. Inclusive and meaningful consultation with Indigenous stakeholders, including our grassroots people, isn't just a procedural step; it's an ethical cornerstone that informs

all our initiatives. Holding discussions at roundtables, conducting personal interviews, gathering your opinion helps us develop recommendations that will meet your needs.

NWAC is looking at advocating for the housing needs of Indigenous Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse+ people, who face much discrimination when it comes to housing and accessing emergency shelters. They're also more likely to experience homelessness. You'll read a story about our efforts in this area, where it was important to gather lived experiences. We held an online sharing circle to hear what you and service providers who support the housing needs of Indigenous Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse+ people had to say on this topic.

And, we're in stage 2 of a housing model that hinges on sustainability, affordability, and being culturally appropriate. This model is ground-breaking—it's being designed, planned, and user tested by Indigenous women and community organizations.

We're consulting our grassroots about how the climate crisis is impacting their everyday lives. Their voices, their opinions, are helping us bring their unique and critical perspective to climate discussions and policy-making.

We bring you an update on a survey we conducted with our grassroots on the impacts that COVID-19 is having on them. As we all know, the pandemic magnified already-existing disparities and created specific and unique challenges for Indigenous WG2STGD+ people. We will be developing a report from our findings, which will be used in our research, policy, and advocacy work.

Advocacy. Without knowing how you feel and what is happening in your lives, we would be unable to advocate effectively on your behalf. So consulting with you is critical.

A huge part of empowering the people we speak for and represent is the economic piece obviously. Ending the economic marginalization of Indigenous WG2STGD+ people is one of the key calls to action issued by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. And so, as always, we bring you stories on the work we continue to do in this area.

The story on our National Apprenticeships Program (NAP) tells you about Amanda who received training as a welder at the age of 40. Leanne's story is about how the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program is helping her fulfill her dream to become a medical doctor and return to her

northern Dene community. In her words: "It is Dene law to share, give back, and take care of one another. Being able to give back is what motivates me."

We update you on our work with the Community Workforce Development Program, #BeTheDrum, and the Women's Entrepreneur Accelerator component—all designed in their own way to pave a brighter, more inclusive future for Indigenous WG2STGD+ people.

So many Indigenous women and girls across the globe are living in extreme poverty. My mission tours to countries within the Central American Integration System is designed to share our successes, develop business partnerships, and help empower the women in these countries. Two stories feature our international work and the cultural and economic benefits that arise from robust global partnerships. You'll also read about NWAC's participation in the Fifth convening of the Trilateral Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls, our meeting with UN Special Rapporteur Tomoya Obokata, and the annual Sisters in Spirit vigil.

As you can see, our advocacy efforts cross all topics—economic development, skills development and jobs, legal affairs and justice, violence prevention and MMIWG2S+, health, environment, housing, social development, and international. Our goal, as always, is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of Indigenous WG2STGD+ people.



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Leanne's Story

Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET)

Leanne Niziol is from Yellowknife in the Northwest territories. She became aware of NWAC's Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program while studying medicine at the University of Manitoba. Her goal is to complete her medical education (she is currently in her fourth year) and practise in the North, where she wants to give

back to her people and community. "My community has always been a part of my journey and being able to give back is what motivates me. It is Dene law to share, give back, and take care of one another. This is our way of being," she says.

Leanne grew up in Pehdzeh Ki First Nation, and like most First Nations communities, her community faces many challenges accessing

healthcare services, let alone culturally safe care. She has also never seen any First Nations physicians practising in the North.

"There are significant gaps and barriers in healthcare for our people that negatively impact our well-being and futures. I want to be a part of creating positive change for our people, and giving our communities access to a First Nations physician is the first step. Having shared lived experiences, culture, and identity makes the world of a difference when providing healthcare and building therapeutic relationships. There is a level of trust when you are receiving care from your own people, an understanding and a deep sense of commitment from the providers that allows them to provide care in ways that non-Indigenous providers cannot. Culturally safe care saves lives because people feel seen, heard, and understood, and needs get met," she says.

Leanne's decision to pursue medicine grew out of this recognition that she wanted to do more for her people. "I have worked in health care for nine years and felt that it was time to change direction and increase my scope of practice. Healthcare has always been my passion. I love learning and building relationships with patients; it is very rewarding. I also want to set an example and be a role model for youth. You can do whatever you set your mind to, regardless of where you come from and what you have been through. Unfortunately, we do face more barriers and inequities on many levels, but with support and the right mindset, it is possible to overcome this," she says.

When writing about the most difficult challenge she faced on this educational journey, Leanne says cites building up the courage to take the risk and step into the unknown. "It can be challenging to do something that nobody else you know has done before you. I was pursuing a career that nobody in my family or community had done before, and there is a level of self-doubt that comes with this." Although Leanne had very limited mentorship and guidance when she began her journey, she says she was able to build her own support system.

Another significant challenge was financial, especially since medical school is a significant financial commitment. On top of the academic challenges, students with racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities face significant barriers to success, she adds.

Through the ISETS program, Leanne received a significant source of support. She also accessed community support through the university's Indigenous service. While in medical school, she started beading and sewing again—Dene crafts that both her mother and late grandmother had practised. "Another Indigenous medical student who is a dear friend of mine is an avid beader and she also inspired me. I have had the privilege of sharing my work with others. I find it therapeutic, and it makes me feel more connected to my culture and people while living away from my community in Treaty 1 territory. Practising our traditional craft has taught me about myself and become a part of my healing journey," she says.

"Through my academic journey, it is important to me to ensure that I always speak our truths, spread awareness, and bring my Dene perspectives into spaces and conversations that we have historically and continue to be excluded from. As a First Nations person, successes and challenges are always shared.

This year, we are hosting over 47 workshops and networking circles, with at least one event occurring each week.





Empowering Indigenous WG2STGD+ People

Community Workforce Development Program

Funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Community Workforce Development Program (CWDP) is a one-year project, ending in March 2024. Its mission is to empower Indigenous WG2STGD+ people living in communities with populations of fewer than 10,000.

The CWDP consists of two vital components:

- skills training, which can be conducted either online or in person
- facilitating work placements within local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with the provision of wage subsidies for individuals who have completed their training

- the aim is to encourage local employers to hire the individual once the subsidized work placement ends

The training sessions may encompass a wide range of skills, including digital literacy, job-specific proficiencies, and hands-on trade-like training in areas such as barista or culinary positions. By offering a diverse range of training opportunities, we aim to give participants the tools needed to thrive in the workforce.

We are implementing the project in collaboration with our provincial and territorial member associations (PTMAs). The PTMAs are identifying the communities that would be targeted and determining local distinct labour market needs. This involves engaging with SMEs to determine available job opportunities and skills gaps.



This partnership with ESDC enables us to contribute to the development of a national workforce strategy. The strategic framework will outline key priorities, policies, and initiatives that shape an approach to workforce development and employment for Indigenous WG2STGD+ people. As part of our commitment, we are conducting extensive background research and engaging in roundtable discussions with various stakeholders. Our aim is to foster a more inclusive and resilient workforce, addressing the unique challenges faced by Indigenous communities and contributing to overall economic resilience.

We are eager to see this transformative project unfold, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

#BeTheDrum

#BeTheDrum is an entrepreneurial outreach and navigation program that NWAC developed. It is designed to build the skills of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people entering business, management, or entrepreneurship fields.

#BeTheDrum works to engage and prepare existing and budding Indigenous entrepreneurs for continued success. The only program of its kind to support Indigenous entrepreneurs, new members who join our program will be greeted by our full team of dedicated entrepreneur navigator mentors, who provide access to relevant opportunities such as workshops, networking events, peer-to-peer groups, and targeted one-on-one supports to ensure everyone's unique interests are supported.

This fall, #BeTheDrum continues to amplify entrepreneurial leaders through workshops that target and serve the needs of our national membership. Our networking circles have been hosted by Matriarch and Olympian Waneek Horn-Miller and continues to attract gender-diverse Indigenous entrepreneurs who are interested in collaborating and learning from each other. #BeTheDrum hosts one event each week and is proud to continue the important work of creating space and opportunity for our membership.

Indigenous Women's Entrepreneur Accelerator

Through the WES Accelerator component of #BeTheDrum, we have held two workshops this September and will continue to cover several business-related topics for future workshops. This month featured a presentation by Chrystal Toop, temporary manager for #BeTheDrum and founder of Blackbird Medicines. Chrystal's workshop, titled "Stepping into the Entrepreneur Ecosystems," introduced various entrepreneurial support networks offering opportunities to entrepreneurs that would benefit our more than 330 Indigenous members. Presenter Tasheena Sarazin hosted a workshop titled "Letting Your Culture Feed You," which invited the many Indigenous entrepreneurs who are simultaneously Culture Carriers to consider how their practices can inform their self-employment goals. Mentorship and navigational support continue to be a key aspect of our program.



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Engaging Indigenous People in Climate Change Policy

The Environment Unit has been hard at work on the “Engaging Indigenous People in Climate Change Policy” project. We are highlighting the environmental issues pertaining to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse+ (WG2SGD+) people in a monthly newsletter.

Our main goal is to raise awareness of climate change and associated policies among Indigenous WG2SGD+ people. Readers will find relevant support resources in each edition, so readers may respond to the impacts of the climate crisis.

For instance, our July issue focused on the catastrophic wildfires across Canada. Studies have shown that Indigenous communities

are more susceptible to wildfire-related risks due to their ongoing marginalization. This risk increases for gendered minorities such as women and Two-Spirit people. The issue highlighted various centres dedicated to supporting Indigenous people. Note also that readers can seek help from a support centre during a critical time of need.

Upcoming themes will include funding opportunities for Indigenous-led climate initiatives; food insecurity and community-led culturally informed agriculture, and climate disaster recovery, to name a few. We also plan to provide information on governance to encourage Indigenous self-governance and environmental leadership.



Our central theme is that Indigenous people, especially those who identify as women, children, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse, have a unique and critical perspective to bring to climate discussions and policy-making. And as you will see in our newsletters, toolkit, and other works, we wholeheartedly believe that WC2SGD people can provide some of the solutions to counteract the impacts of climate change. Our hope is to champion these solutions in our newsletter.



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International Meetings and the Sisters in Spirit Vigil

In this issue we are shining the spotlight on the MMIWG2s+ team's participation in the Fifth Convening of the Trilateral Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls, our meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur Tomoya Obokata, and preparations for our annual Sisters in Spirit vigil.

UN Special Rapporteur Visit

The MMIWG2S+ team met with Tomoya Obokata, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, on August 25. We discussed the systemic causes of human trafficking. Our discussion focused particularly on the conditions of vulnerability for marginalized groups that exacerbate the rates of human trafficking, as well as the ongoing MMIWG2S+ genocide seen in incarceration rates, the child welfare system, disparities in housing quality, lack of adequate and safe transportation, and absence of

a universal basic income. For instance, traffickers are known to target Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse individuals who are transitioning out of incarceration or aging out of the child welfare system, which means they have reached the age limit for government care.

Trilateral Working Group

The MMIWG2S+ team attended the Fifth Convening of the Trilateral Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls (TWG) on September 6 and 7. Indigenous women leaders from Mexico, Canada, and the United States gathered to share knowledge and best practices as a commitment to coordinated action to address the disproportionate levels of violence faced by Indigenous women and girls across the continent. The focus will be on strengths-based and solutions-oriented best practices related to access to justice



and the prevention of human trafficking of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse+ (WG2STGD+) people. We also highlighted Safe Passage as a promising initiative and shared information about its features. The Trilateral Working Group is comprised of grassroots and government representatives from each of the three countries.

Sisters in Spirit Vigil

On October 4, for our annual Sisters in Spirit vigil and events, we partnered with the YWCA to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous WG2STGD+ people, support grieving families, and create opportunities for healing. The day's events included workshops, a film viewing, a comforting hot chocolate station in the Rooftop Garden, an afternoon gathering with speeches and hot foods. These events were hosted in person and live-streamed through a virtual platform to participants attending remotely.





Understanding the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse (WG2STGD+) people in Canada. The pandemic has magnified already-existing disparities and created specific and unique challenges for this group.

Throughout the pandemic, there was a noticeable lack of detailed, nuanced information about how Indigenous WG2STGD+ people have been impacted by COVID-19. To gauge the long-term health and mental health impacts, NWAC's Executive Policy Unit has developed a survey.

The significance of gathering targeted information like this is paramount. Crafting public policies without considering the distinct experiences of marginalized groups, including Indigenous WG2STGD+ people, can lead to ineffective solutions.

Our efforts will go beyond simply collecting data; our goal is to drive change at the national level. Armed with a comprehensive understanding of the impacts and grassroots perspectives, NWAC will be able to advocate strongly for policies and programs that can address the unique issues affecting Indigenous WG2STGD+ people.

We have received survey responses from over 50 respondents, and are working hard to analyze the results and develop a report, which will be released later this year.

We look forward to amplifying the perspectives of Indigenous WG2STGD+ people as it relates to the impacts of COVID-19, to help inform NWAC's future advocacy, policy, and research work.





National Apprenticeships Program Brings a Message of Hope and Goal for the Future

The National Apprenticeships Program (NAP), funded by the Government of Canada, continues to lead engagement sessions and meetings with Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast. NAP brings a message of hope to these sessions and meetings.

Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals who go through the program earn good wages, become a member of their union, and, most importantly, have acquired the competencies they need to address the infrastructure needs of their communities ... whether it's developing housing, building roads, or erecting schools.

We have heard incredible stories of achievement from Indigenous communities that have benefited from NAP. We have met journeywomen who entered a skilled trade as a plumber or millwright late in life as an apprentice and were able to transfer their skills to their own communities. And, we have seen how empowered this has made the Indigenous women and gender-diverse graduates feel.

The Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals who have graduated from NAP realize the importance of normalizing their work—to demonstrate that they can be great welders, heavy equipment operators, plumbers,



electricians ... really anything they wish. Their voices and their personal stories send a powerful message to all Indigenous youth who aspire to join the skilled trades, but have not dare to imagine the possibilities of doing so in what has been a male-dominated field.

Trades and other types of training programs are being developed in many reserves across the country and in urban centres for Indigenous youth. Pre-apprenticeship or work preparedness programs are so important in helping youth understand the skills that are needed in each trade, what the work conditions are, and the types of tasks that will be done. Programs like these cover a wide range of topics from skills development, trades math, using power tools, safety measures, problem-solving, teamwork, and a general introduction to a specific trade. They are proving to be the best entry-level option for those who are still exploring their career options.

During our September engagement meeting in Akwesasne, the NAP team heard Amanda's story. Amanda has been working as a welder in her nation for five years. She decided to join the trades at the age of 40. Her story reminds us that even though she came from a family of ironworkers, Amanda had never had a real chance to try certain tools and techniques when she was young. It was just assumed that she would not pursue an ironwork job like her six brothers. Decades later, she started to question why there was a wage gap between

her and her siblings. It was because they were skilled workers. She started to visualize that future for herself, received training, and introduced herself to a local company that hired many Indigenous man as ironworkers from her community. She landed a job because she believed in herself and in her ability to do the same work as the men in her nation were doing. Amanda told us it was worth every minute to see how wrong those who did not believe in her were.

There are many Indigenous communities in the country that need new builds and maintenance services. There are many development corporations within nations that plan and implement construction projects for reserves. What would happen if all of those projects across the country hired an Indigenous woman or a gender-diverse person to apprentice in a trade or sponsored an Indigenous woman or gender-diverse person to be trained by them? What would happen if every contract for developmental projects insisted that an Indigenous woman or gender-diverse person be involved? How would communities change if women were given the chance to put their minds and skills to work?

Our vision is that NAP will not only expand the scope of people's understanding of what a skilled worker is, but that Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals will, as a matter of course, work to help build their communities.



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Housing Projects for the People We Serve

Documenting Housing Needs

Supported by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate (OFHA) at the Canadian Human Rights Commission, NWAC is undertaking a project to explore, document, and advocate for the housing needs of Indigenous Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse+ (2STNBGD+) people.

Current events in the media highlight that in all areas of life, including access to housing and housing-related services, Indigenous 2STNBGD+ individuals face extra layers of discrimination due to ignorance, intolerance, irrational fears, a lack of empathy, racism, and heteronormative and cisnormative biases and stereotyping—that people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth—and the stereotyping associated with these biases (Thomas et al.). (Note: Cisnormativity is the societal, systemic, or personal prejudice that assumes that a person's gender identity

should align with a sex assigned at birth and asserts that this is the correct or ideal form of gender identity and expression.)

Further, it has been recognized that "gender-diverse, Two-Spirit, and trans people face significant, intersecting, human rights violations when it comes to housing and accessing emergency shelters, and are more likely to experience hidden homelessness" (Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network).

NWAC has produced a brief literature review to supplement information on this housing topic as it specifically relates to Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people. It will soon be posted in the Knowledge Centre.

Informed by this literature review and an external advisory committee of Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people with lived experience, NWAC conducted an online sharing circle in June to gather more lived experiences.



A second sharing circle took place in September. It focused on lived experiences and knowledge shared by service providers who work to advocate for and support the housing needs of Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people. Here is some of what we heard:

- everyone should have clean water in their houses
- there is a lack of affordable housing
- what housing does exist needs major repairs to make it healthy
- shelters often lack policies (such as the definition of a family) and systems that enable, respect, and welcome Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people and their children, and/or their cultures and values
- many people lost housing because neighbours did not like their gender expression and/or made false allegations of sexual assault
- not everyone is aware of legal protections in terms of tenants' rights and legal support for Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people in cases of discrimination
- even where legal protections exist, there isn't confidence that the people charged with upholding these rights will offer protections

We heard about youth ending up homeless when their immediate families learn about and reject their sexuality and/or gender identities. This can lead to a heavy reliance on extended family and friends to stay housed.

Systemic barriers like access to gender-affirming ID or cheques required for rental deposits also create barriers to accessing housing. Participants spoke loud and clear about Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people needing to be included in decision-making about housing for them, the need for more education to increase compassion, equity, and understanding in the public, the need for housing staff and case workers, and the need for wrap-around supports for Indigenous 2STNBGD people who are healing from trauma as they try and navigate the housing system to stay housed.

We know that Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people who are precariously housed are more susceptible to gender-based violence and human trafficking, which underlines the urgency of addressing this issue.

We also heard a lot of valuable information about the need for accountability. Housing staff and case workers staff need to be adequately trained and paid to best support the housing needs of Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people, and they need to be accountable for client success. Housing policy and urban planning lack coordination across agencies; governments need to enable non-profits to produce more affordable, affirming housing; we need separate clean/sober shelters; and there is a need for an Indigenous WG2STNBGD+ people's housing plan, along with timelines and accountabilities.

In the days that follow, especially leading up to any elections, think about what we heard. Pause and reflect on the experiences of Indigenous 2STNBGD+ people. Consider Indigenous values embedded in the Seven Grandfather Teachings: respect, humility (including compassion), bravery, honesty (integrity), truth/generosity (cultural teachings in some nations), wisdom, and love. Act and vote with your heart and head in agreement.



Vote for those likely to create policies that will create inclusive housing for all. We are collectively stronger when we include, value, and respect everyone.

Developing a Sustainable, Affordable, and Culturally Appropriate Housing Model (Stage 2)

Through this project, NWAC continues to research and advocate for the human rights and better housing for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse+ (WG2STGD+) people. By researching and developing a sustainable, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing model, NWAC can contribute to increased housing security and related socio-economic benefits for Indigenous WG2STGD+ people and their communities.

Stage 2 of this project expands upon the preliminary design that was created following research in Stage 1. In the coming weeks, NWAC will collaborate with team members at our Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge and engage with community organizations in New Brunswick, including the Indigenous women of the Wabanaki Territory, to support the feasibility study and architectural designs to prepare to build. We plan to engage folks in the area on the design, tweak the design/model based on local lived experiences and needs, finalize the plan, get detailed cost estimates, and meet any other requirements needed to get funding to build a model unit (building to take place in stage 3).

Funds permitting, NWAC will build one unit, likely on the Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge site, beginning in spring/summer 2024. After doing some user acceptance testing and adjustment, we envision scaling up the model to build more units in other locations in a stage 4 for this project.

Sources:

Thomas, M., McCoy, T., Jeffries, I., Haverkate, R., Naswood, E., Leston, J., and Platero, L. (2022). "Native American Two Spirit and LGBTQ Health: A Systematic Review of the Literature." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 26(4), 367–402.

Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network. (2023). "A Portrait of Homelessness Amongst Gender-Diverse People in Canada," Homeless Hub. https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/portrait-homelessness-amongst-gender-diverse-people-canada?utm_campaign=hh&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_term=26012023



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Amplifying Indigenous Voices: The Legal Unit's Approach to Indigenous Consultation at NWAC

The Legal Unit at NWAC takes pride in leading transformative change for Indigenous communities. Central to our work is a commitment to inclusive and meaningful consultation with Indigenous stakeholders. This isn't just a procedural step; it's an ethical cornerstone that informs all our initiatives.

Our consultation approach is designed to be multi-faceted, capturing the richness and diversity of Indigenous voices. We employ a variety of engagement mechanisms, from expert round tables to one-on-one interviews. These sessions are inclusive, bringing together a wide array of voices from Indigenous persons across Canada—legal experts, social workers, academics, community leaders, Elders, youth, gender-diverse people, and individuals with lived experience in care.

For example, in our recent milestone initiative on *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*, we employed government engagement mechanisms (GEMs) involving expert round tables and one-on-one interviews. These discussions were comprehensive, covering 17 topics identified by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), along with several other emergent issues. While the project serves as a specific example, the underlying principles of comprehensive discussion, inclusivity, and actionable insights are consistent across all our work, leading to key recommendations that reflect the collective wisdom of the communities we serve.

Our engagement goes beyond merely gathering opinions; it ensures that these diverse voices are integrated into the final



recommendations. For instance, the inclusion of Indigenous WG2STGD+ people in consultations is a principle we uphold across all projects, ensuring that every community member's voice is heard and considered.

Informed by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), our consultation methods are continually evolving to meet the unique needs and expectations of Indigenous communities. We are committed to making our engagement not just a box-ticking exercise but a meaningful dialogue that leads to actionable outcomes.

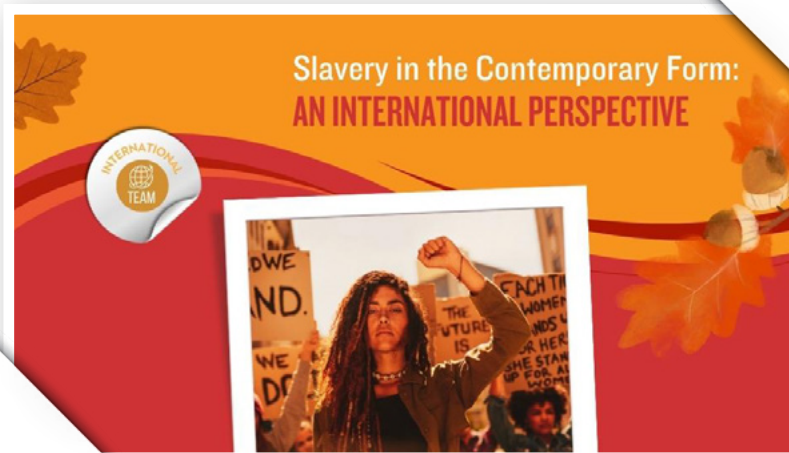
The conclusion of any project is a milestone, but our work doesn't end there. The recommendations serve as a roadmap for future action, and we remain committed to advocacy efforts to ensure their implementation. We extend our gratitude to everyone who has participated in these important dialogues.

To learn more about the Legal Unit's work, please visit [NWAC's Legal Affairs and Justice page](#).



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Slavery in the Contemporary Form: An International Perspective

Professor Tomoya Obokata, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, visited NWAC's Social, Cultural and Economic Innovation Center on August 25. During this visit, the International Unit engaged in a meaningful dialogue concerning the current human rights situation faced by indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals in Canada.

Professor Obokata is a renowned Japanese scholar specializing in international law and human rights, particularly in areas like transnational organized crime, human trafficking, and modern slavery.

Slavery was the first human rights issue to arouse wide international concern. Yet its practices continue to remain a grave and persistent problem, which often involves hidden populations.

The most vulnerable and marginalized individuals, particularly Indigenous women and girls, bear the brunt of this problem due to historical colonialism and discrimination. Fear, lack of education, and the struggle for survival make them prime targets for human traffickers.

During Professor Obokata's country visit, we voiced our concerns for the well-being of our indigenous children, who disproportionately face challenges within the child welfare system when transitioning out of care.

We advocated for the safety of our Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals, who are at heightened risk when travelling to access essential resources.

We raised awareness about the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse (MMIWG2S+)

people whom we have diligently tracked through our "Safe Passage" initiative.

And our voices were heard! Professor Obokata expressed his deep concerns to the United Nations Human Rights Council regarding the alarming rates at which Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people go missing or are tragically murdered, often as a result of being trafficked for forced labour or sexual exploitation. He highlighted the connections between Canada's colonial legacy and the disproportionate impact of contemporary forms of slavery on Indigenous Peoples.

In his remarks, Professor Obokata pointed out that while Canada has made updates to its domestic frameworks aimed at addressing contemporary forms of slavery in recent years, there remains a notable absence of trauma-informed personnel and human rights-based approaches in law enforcement and the court system.

We have also been actively enhancing our international connections and fostering a revival of Indigenous relationships throughout the Americas. In May 2023, NWAC

established a letter of understanding with the Central American Integration System (SICA), with the objective of collaboratively promoting social and economic integration, along with democratic security.

Currently, CEO Lynne Groulx is on a journey to visit the eight nations comprising SICA. Over the past few months, she has visited El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Guatemala.

Additionally, we are delighted to announce that this month marked the start of a series of cultural events aimed at showcasing Salvadoran Indigenous culture. These events will vividly illustrate the cultural and economic benefits that arise from robust global partnerships.

Our goal is to support the micro-economies of Indigenous Peoples, enabling them to achieve full economic participation. Each product sold contributes to the support of the eight SICA member states artists and the preservation of artistic traditions.



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NWAC Communications: Helping NWAC Support, Uplift, and Advocate

During the months of August and September, NWAC's communications team developed and produced content to support, uplift, and advocate for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse+ (WG2STGD+) people.

In August, we released **edition 20 of Kci-Niwesq**. This edition celebrated the languages of our ancestors and presented land-based learning as vital traditional teachings to be preserved and practised with pride. Feature interviews, including those with Dr. Amy Parent, who runs classes about living in harmony with the environment, and Julie Flett, a Cree-Métis author, illustrator, and artist.

We launched the **POETA DigiSpark channel** to publicize the innovative Partnerships for Economic Opportunities through Technology in the Americas (POETA Digi Spark) project. In collaboration with The Trust for the Americas, The Organization of American States (OAS,) and Microsoft, it aims to empower Indigenous WG2STGD+ individuals in Canada by providing vital digital skills, facilitating job opportunities and technology-supported entrepreneurship. The page provides information about the project, ways people can get involved, and how to stay up to date on news and events related to future POETA DigiSpark progress and initiatives.



We also launched a new microsite to promote **Room Rental at NWAC**, highlighting the unique spaces at our Social, Cultural, and Economic Innovation Centre in Gatineau, Quebec, which are available to book for events, meetings, or ceremonies, healing, and creative expression.

NWAC issued a **press release** on August 30 condemning the treatment of a First Nations woman who was left without access to emergency health treatment after a violent attack. Disruptions to the ambulance service in Témiscamingue, Quebec, led to inferior care, which may have contributed to the tragic outcome for Cindy Pagé.

On September 21, NWAC issued a **press release** concerning the protests against gender diversity policies in Canadian schools. The statement noted that these actions put vulnerable youth at risk and attempt to remove protections that help safeguard transgender and gender-diverse children and adolescents.

On September 29, NWAC published a press release that brought attention to the fact that after eight years there has still been little progress on the TRC's 94 Calls to Action following their final report.

The press release was sent out on the third National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and demanded progress on the recommendations without further delay.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation ✨

To commemorate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we launched a campaign to raise awareness and donations. The campaign content included:

- **Sign the letter**

A letter that members of the public could sign urging their MP to make progress on the TRC's 94 calls to action:

- **"Hard Truths About Reconciliation"**

This op-ed article by NWAC was featured in the *Toronto Star* and highlighted the inaction following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. It called the federal government's response to the Calls to Action "a series of half measures."

- Social media posts promoting the video for Cindy Paul's haunting song "He Can Fancy Dance," which describes the terrible legacy of residential schools and colonial erasure that created a stolen generation of children
- Posts containing important questions and answers on truth and reconciliation to educate the public and encourage advocacy
- An invitation to the public to visit a commemorative art exhibition to honour survivors and their families



Going Global Missions 🌍

We also produced two reports detailing NWAC's recent Going Global work in both a **Mission Report to Costa Rica** and a **Mission Report to Panama**. These initiatives summarize CEO Lynne Groulx's international work across the Americas to continue essential relationship-building between NWAC and the eight nations that make up the Central American Integration System (Spanish: Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana, or SICA). The missions include components that help build connections with both government representatives and entrepreneurs to foster economic growth for Indigenous Peoples across the continents. Social media posts were created to highlight the objectives and achieved goals of the international Going Global Missions.

Social Media

Our social media campaigns and posts helped spread messages about our important work and promoted our other marketing and communications efforts.

Efforts to increase the frequency of our social media posts were rewarded in the month of August when we achieved a 33.1 per cent increase in post clicks and gained a 25.1 per cent increase in our total audience growth, with our LinkedIn and X.com (Twitter) accounts receiving the most new followers.

Our video views in particular saw an increase of 47.4 per cent, mostly from those promoted on Facebook posts. Content concerning our

National Apprenticeships Program and the Voices of Indigenous Elders: Share Your Aging in Place Perspective survey were particularly well received.

In September, we published 415 social media posts and saw a more modest increase in audience numbers of 1.6 per cent, with Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn receiving the most new followers. The LinkedIn audience was particularly receptive to our messaging, with a 70.8 per cent increase in impressions for posts on that site and an engagement increase of 126.6 per cent.

Posts promoting our workshops and #BeTheDrum networking circles were well received, as were videos, which reached 67,020 views on Facebook.

Our National Day for Truth and Reconciliation campaign performed well, with posts on the op-ed in the *Toronto Star* receiving a potential reach of 65,049. Posts about sending a letter to your MP to urge them to make progress on the Calls to Action and the "He Can Fancy Dance" video received a reach of more than 40,000 each.

Follow us on **Facebook**, **X/Twitter**, **Instagram**, **TikTok**, and **LinkedIn** to stay up to date on all of NWAC's initiatives, and be sure to subscribe to our magazine, **Kci-Niwesq**.





**SHINING THE
SPOTLIGHT**

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER



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