

# SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

NEW INITIATIVES • ISSUE 02 • AUGUST 2021



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## A Message from the CEO

June was an incredibly busy month at NWAC—filled with critical advocacy work, building capacity with our PTMAs, engaging with new and potential partners, providing corporate training, and developing a monthly e-newsletter.

### ENGAGING IN ADVOCACY

June 1 saw us launch our MMIWG action plan, Our Calls, Our Actions, after the Government of Canada (GOC) failed to hand down a true action plan in response to the National Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice. The GOC's plan lacks concrete actions, measurable goals, budgets, and timelines. In contrast, our plan not only includes those components. It also sets out more than 65 concrete actions that address culture and language, health and wellness, human security, international action, justice, and public awareness. The media covered the lack of concrete action in the government's action plan extensively and NWAC received extensive national media coverage on this matter. Just as we advocated for the National Inquiry, NWAC will continue to advocate for the full implementation of the 231 Calls to Justice.



As part of our MMIWG action plan, NWAC printed 1,000 copies of a "little red book," which contains the 231 Calls to Justice, and distributed these to Indigenous women across Canada. We want Indigenous women to be aware of their right to have these "legal imperatives" implemented.

We also launched our newest initiative, Safe Passage. This dedicated website hosts the first Indigenous women-led database on MMIWG cases in Canada and provides important educational and training resources on violence prevention.

As part of our advocacy work, NWAC met with the Minister of Justice and the Commissioner of the RCMP to demand that charges be laid in the deaths of Indigenous children at Indian residential schools after the horrific discovery of 751 unmarked graves at the Marieval school in Saskatchewan. We demand that charges be laid





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### A Message from the CEO (CONT.)

against people still living who perpetuated these crimes. This includes members of the religious orders that ran the schools, governments, and the churches that we know to be complicit. The Criminal Code of Canada allows such charges to be laid against governments and institutions, including churches, in cases where they have failed to provide the necessities of life to people who were in their care.

### **BUILDING PTMA CAPACITY**

In June, NWAC held meetings with some of our provincial and territorial member associations as part of a cross-Canada tour. We discussed the supports they need to continue to build their capacity—critical given that the demand for services increases at the grassroots level. During this tour, we heard about the need for training opportunities and information sessions for PTMA leaders, board members, and staff in the areas of finance, communications, governance, proposal writing, and fundraising. In response, we are developing a series of online webinars for PTMAs. These will be delivered by subject matter experts.

As NWAC and our PTMAs continue to grow, we want to ensure that every PTMA has the ability and the tools to provide the best possible advocacy, programs, and services possible.

### **DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS**

Over the past few years, NWAC has developed a partnership with the Bank of Montreal (BMO) to help us acquire the first Resiliency Lodge property, located in Chelsea, Quebec, and develop our new Social and Economic Innovation Centre, located in the heart of Gatineau, Quebec. BMO announced the partnership in a press release this month. NWAC has received broad support from the community for both initiatives.

The Resiliency Lodge is a beautifully designed elder-led healing centre located on 2.5 acres of land. It has been designed to provide online and in-person healing services to Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. Our 45,000-square-foot Social and Economic Innovation Centre is expected to open in October. It will provide NWAC with flex-office space, training and workshop space, space for the artisan boutique, called Artisanelle, which features collections from across Canada and the Americas, a new café concept called Bouleau, with its own commercial kitchen, and a rooftop greenhouse garden and designated commemoration area.

Our growth plans for the artisan boutique involve developing a network of artisans from across Canada and the Americas, including Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela,

A Message from the CEO (CONT.)

Colombia, and Peru. Artisans will be able to showcase their art pieces, jewellery, clothing, accessories, baskets, and many more items through the store's online presence and in the boutique. Artisanelle will officially launch in the fall of 2021. This initiative supports Indigenous women's micro and small businesses by purchasing their goods and marketing them on two platforms. The items sold online will be available to U.S. and European markets.

NWAC values our relationship with BMO, and we look forward to working together to expand the Resiliency Lodge concept across the country and to develop other projects that will benefit Indigenous women in Canada.

## RECONCILIATION AND TRAINING

This month, NWAC delivered high-level corporate training to Hootsuite employees on colonialism (past and present) and how to attain a decolonized future. Providing culturally appropriate training is part of NWAC's action plan in response to the MMIGW Calls for Justice. As recently stated by our new Governor General, "reconciliation is about getting to know one another." NWAC will continue to provide high-level training both on-line and in-person, where possible.

## NEW MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

Our new monthly newsletter is called Shining the Spotlight. The newsletter provides monthly updates on NWAC's work, including the #BeTheDrum program and the LEGISreform project, and on the Resiliency Lodge's virtual and in-person programming. In this first issue, we also highlighted our international advocacy work and research projects on cannabis use, Indigenous women in the workplace, and the protection of oceans and fisheries. I hope you enjoy reading about some of the impactful work NWAC is doing in this month's issue.

## NWAC TEAM

As with many other workplaces, NWAC's employees have been teleworking throughout the COVID pandemic. When some conditions were lifted this month, we took the opportunity to meet in groups at the Resiliency Lodge to reflect on the past year, discuss our work, plan new innovative and strategic initiatives, and talk about how we can continue to best serve our communities.

Miigwetch, Thank you, Merci,

*Lynne Groulx*



## Protecting our Water Beings and Oceans Critical to Our Survival

**At NWAC, we are doing our part to shed light  
on the importance of protecting our water.**

The ocean covers over 70% of the planet and produces at least 50% of the planet's oxygen. It's also home to most of the biodiversity found on earth. Biodiversity and conservation are critical to our planet's survival.

Yet today, all the oceans on our planet are facing an environmental crisis caused by humans.

Fish have become a main source of protein for more than a billion people around the world, yet fish stocks are being harvested without recognition paid to the ocean's ecological importance to our planet and to human life. Indeed, the ocean is key to the global economy, with an estimated 40 million people employed by ocean-based industries by 2030.

About 90% of big fish populations are depleted, 50% of coral reefs are destroyed, and we are taking more from the ocean than can be replenished.

To protect and preserve the ocean and all it sustains, we must create a new balance, rooted in true understanding of the ocean and how humanity relates to it. We must build a connection to the ocean that is inclusive, innovative, and informed by lessons from the past.

NWAC is working with Indigenous women across Canada to advise government, through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, on the importance of protecting our water beings and oceans. Please see our Fish and Fish Habitat Protection (FFHP) Platform for more information and sign up for continued updates at [www.nwac.ca](http://www.nwac.ca) within the Policy section and Fisheries.



## #BeTheDrum: THE Program for Existing and Budding Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

**Peer mentorship, navigation and networking add up to business success.**

NWAC believes that Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people have the right to improve their economic conditions through employment, entrepreneurship, education, and training. In the late fall of 2019, we created a program for Indigenous women entrepreneurs called #BeTheDrum.

Why that name? For most Indigenous Peoples, the sound of the drum stirs up a sense of belonging, a feeling of great joy in knowing we are all connected in a way that gives us hope and keeps us strong. The drum signifies a calling to existing and prospective entrepreneurs to come alive with determination, strengthened through the support of peer mentorship and navigation.



#BeTheDrum is built on four keystones of support to engage and prepare existing and budding Indigenous women entrepreneurs for continued success. Those who join our program will be greeted by one of our dedicated Entrepreneur Navigators. Our program also provides access to relevant workshops, networking events, peer-to-peer groups, and live social media Q&A sessions.

Our workshops have gained a lot of attention since #BeTheDrum started. Only this past month #BeTheDrum hosted a highly anticipated and in-depth workshop on "Accessing Business Financing." Participants learned about the different types of financing available to support their businesses, how to approach banks and funders, and the steps needed to create a business plan. They also received an electronic package containing useful finance tools.

For more information, visit our #BeTheDrum webpage. You can also email us at [bethedrum@nwac.ca](mailto:bethedrum@nwac.ca) or phone us at 1-833-652-1392.



## Legal Unit's "LEGISreform" Project: Keeping A Sharp Eye on Legislative Changes

**We're taking back our decision-making powers key to create a gender-equal society.**

NWAC's legal department has started a "LEGISreform" project to monitor and examine proposed legislation introduced in both chambers of Canada's Parliament.



Our goal is to identify bills that impact Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people far in advance of any proposed legislation becoming law. Our team will closely analyze the precise wording and the exact impacts a proposed Bill may have on Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. We will then research and analyze the issues that the Bill proposes to address.

Our mission is to proactively engage with members of parliament and committees be prepared to provide thorough and critical legal commentary on the proposed Bills.

Our legal team will outline the ways that the proposed Bills will impact our communities and explain the amendments that are needed to ensure proper protection for and representation of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

Prior to colonization, Indigenous women held leadership roles and actively participated in governing their communities. Colonizers forced their patriarchal ideologies into communities to perpetuate violence against Indigenous women, while attempting to silence and exclude them from participating in the political processes that affect their daily lives and survival. The Canadian government used its legislative powers to enact the Indian Act, which continues to control and discriminate against Indigenous women.

Through this important LEGISreform project, NWAC intends to take back those decision-making powers by amplifying the voices of Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse people and the grassroots organizations that we represent in Canada's legislative process.

Our LEGISreform project will directly impact the formation of Canadian laws while working towards creating a gender-equal society free of discrimination and that respects the self-determination, diversity, and uniqueness of all Indigenous nations, women, girls, and gender-diverse people.





## International Spotlight on Canada's Continued Failure to Translate Words into Actions

### NWAC appeals to UN and OAS over weak government response to genocide.

NWAC recently embarked on an energetic flurry of global advocacy to throw a much-needed international spotlight on Canada's woefully inadequate response to the Final Report to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The federal government published its response, entitled Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQA+ People, on June 3, 2021.

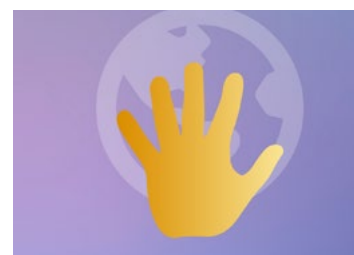
Straight on the heels of this response, NWAC contacted key United Nations (UN) and Organization of American States (OAS) human rights experts and bodies. We expressed our deep concern that the government's response will result in the continuation of race-based genocide in Canada—a key finding of the Inquiry's Final Report.

Key actors at the international level included the highly respected UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Cali Tzay. In a detailed letter to Mr. Tzay, we indicated that the Federal Pathway plan focuses on a small handful of short-term goals, which primarily relate to the National Inquiry's follow-up process and not the content of its 231 Calls for Justice.

Simply put, in its current form, the federal government's plan does not provide a viable way forward on how, when, and by whom the Calls for Justice as a whole will be acted upon in practice and how they will be financed. Not surprisingly, a number of Indigenous and civil society actors, several former National Inquiry commissioners, and families who have lost loved ones have heavily criticized the plan's lack of substance and steps needed to achieve real progress.

We also conveyed our concerns about the federal government's lamentable response to such an important, high-profile domestic human rights inquiry to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the OAS's Office of the Secretary General and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

We can only hope that more action and fewer empty words will ensue as a result. respects the self-determination, diversity, and uniqueness of all Indigenous nations, women, girls, and gender-diverse people.



## Indigenous Women and the World of Work

**Stories, experiences to help inform how laws can better meet Indigenous women's needs.**



NWAC's Social Development Unit has been engaging with Indigenous women on four issues related to the world of work: mental health in the workplace, the right to disconnect, protections for workers in the gig economy, and pay equity. The stories and experiences we heard will help NWAC make a case to the federal government on how laws and regulations on these issues can meet the needs of Indigenous women.

The process began in March when we held three 90-minute online engagements on mental health, gig workers, and the right to disconnect. Following these sessions, the team presented draft reports on each topic to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Each of these reports highlighted key findings and recommendations. In June, we hosted four webinars to gather feedback on federal pay equity legislation. We also sent a short online survey to individuals who were unable to participate in the webinars due to limited space and a high level of interest. The stories shared during these webinars will form the basis of a final report to ESDC on what pay equity means for Indigenous women.

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.

The Indigenous women who participated in these engagements made several thought-provoking points. For example, we heard about how differentiating between psychological wellness inside or outside of the workplace is not culturally appropriate, and how the extra pressure that Indigenous women feel to prove themselves at work makes it hard for them to "switch off" at the end of a work day. We also heard about how the flexibility of gig work—short-term and specific or one-off tasks completed in person or digitally—makes it easier for some Indigenous women to enter and stay in the workforce, but that they continue to be undervalued and underpaid by employers.

It's also clear that for Indigenous women, pay equity is as much about eliminating pay gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as it is about eliminating pay gaps between men and women.

## Raising Awareness About Cannabis Use: A Community-Informed Approach

### NWAC health department project aims to reduce rates of problematic cannabis use.

NWAC is working on a three-year project entitled "A Community-Informed Approach to Cannabis Public Health Education and Awareness," which is being funded by Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program.

This project entails working with urban, rural, and remote Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) communities to identify the priorities of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people and to develop culturally safe resources related to cannabis. In addition to addressing the needs and priorities of our target audience, these resources will raise awareness and literacy around cannabis. The goal is to help Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people make informed decisions about cannabis use.

During our preliminary work on this topic, NWAC received feedback through engagement sessions with First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and gender-diverse people, who referenced cannabis in relation to harm reduction in some form or another. For example, in the Inuit community, questions were posed about using cannabis as an alternative to opioids ("cannabis can be used as an alternative to fentanyl" and "cannabis is better than oxy's"). Inuit would like to know if cannabis is a viable option over opioids and could be covered under their health care benefits.

In drawing a connection to cannabis use and harm reduction, First Nations Elders noticed that cannabis is considered 'less harmful' than alcohol, and thus a more acceptable substance to use. Within a First Nations context (both on and off reserve), cannabis can be used as replacement therapy and to ease the burden of and physical transition from detoxing or coming off of other 'hard drugs' ("the dispensary owner helped people who used needles for their drug use to detox using edibles[and] it worked").

In the short term, NWAC intends to create culturally safe, gender-based, trauma-informed cannabis public education and awareness resources. These resources will help Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people make informed decisions about cannabis use that best meet their distinct needs and priorities.

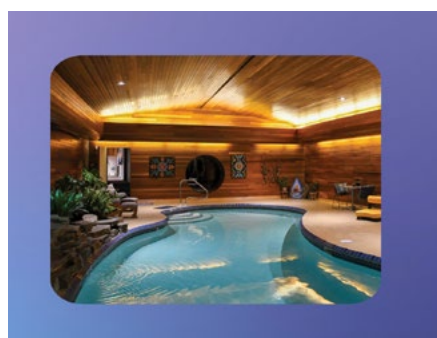
Our long-term goal is to reduce the rates of problematic cannabis use among this population group.



## The Resiliency Lodge: Growing a National Program

**NWAC's Resiliency Lodges are breaking new ground in so many ways.**

Our Chelsea Resiliency Lodge in Quebec has been open for over a year, providing in-person services when COVID-19 restrictions have allowed. All of the Resiliency Lodge's services—online workshops, virtual Elder support or in-person services—are geared to violence prevention and empowered healing intervention. Providing support and empowerment through Elder-led, trauma-informed programs is one of NWAC's responses to the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).



In response to the positive feedback, NWAC continues to expand on this groundbreaking program.

We are delighted to announce that the Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge will be opening in New Brunswick in the spring of 2022.

The Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge will offer healing services, ceremonies, educational opportunities, economic development opportunities, and agriculture, food security, and traditional medicine programs to help Indigenous women and gender-diverse people heal and to support violence prevention efforts. This Elder-led program gives Indigenous women and gender-diverse people access to stay at the Resiliency Lodge and its services for up to a month.

NWAC is also expanding our online services. Between September 2020 and March 2021, the Resiliency Lodge hosted 52 workshops. Buoyed by the positive feedback and the tremendous demand, we continue to develop and deliver new workshops—over 50 alone in the past three months.

This is only the beginning. NWAC will continue to work tirelessly to provide support to Indigenous women and gender-diverse people across the country.



## Advocating for Indigenous Rights: We Will Be Silent No More

**Our voices will only get louder, until justice and fairness is achieved.**

In March, with the announcement of NWAC's Summit of the Americas on Violence Against Indigenous Women, we said we would be silent no more—and that is exactly what we have done since.

Over the past few months, NWAC has vocally expressed disappointment about the lack of government action in addressing the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice. We were not alone in feeling let down by the government, but we took it two steps further. First, we developed our own action plan, entitled *Our Calls, Our Actions*. Outlining concrete steps forward, NWAC is leading the way in putting the 251 Calls for Justice into action. However, the lack of movement on the part of the government is negligible, which is why NWAC also filed a human rights complaint in Canada and requested international intervention from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations.

At the same time, NWAC has been advocating for justice for residential school survivors and their families. As mass and unmarked graves continue to be uncovered, and this heinous legacy of the Canadian government is being put in the spotlight, it is time for justice. NWAC has called for criminal charges against governments, churches, and others who are responsible for the deaths of thousands of children who were forced to attend residential schools.

The advocacy work that is a central part of NWAC's mission is essential to advancing Indigenous rights and finding concrete steps forward to address ongoing crises, like the genocide against Indigenous women and girls. This advocacy work will continue to expand as NWAC's role on the national stage continues to grow.

Three months ago, NWAC pledged that we would be silent no more.

Now, we pledge that our voice will only get louder.

