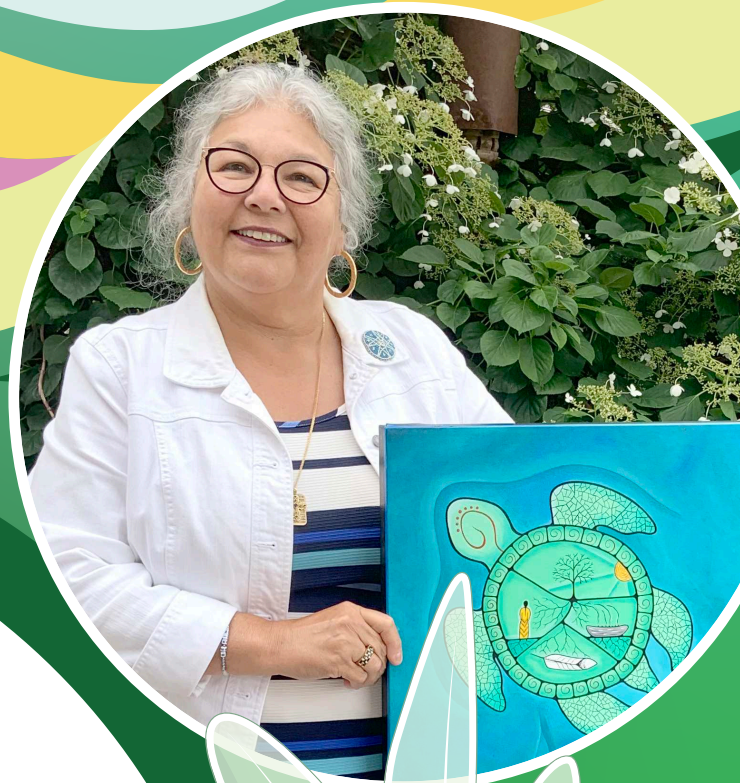


NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This publication highlights the various activities the President has undertaken throughout the month of July.



LORRAINE WHITMAN

Lorraine Whitman was elected as the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada on September 14, 2019. Prior to her presidency at NWAC, Ms. Whitman served as President of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and has been advocating for Indigenous women's rights over the past 45 years.

July 2020 President's Report

Dear friends,

Mother Earth sustains all life. As I sit in my hosta garden and listen to birdsong and feel the warm breeze on my face, I am reminded of the special connection Indigenous Peoples have with Mother Earth. We are her caretakers, and we respect her gifts.

Recently, our association has been engaged in competitions designed to inspire creativity, honour our heritage, and promote pride in our culture. Whether a ribbon skirt or a cake, the final products highlight Indigenous Peoples' artistry, imagination, and deep connection to nature.

These creations also symbolize so much more. They symbolize the resilience of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis—resilience despite centuries of colonialism and oppression, and resilience even amidst the legacy of colonialism. NWAC's recent call for Indigenous art to display in our new office, the Social and Cultural Innovation Centre, and to sell in our store and online, underscores the value that Indigenous creations hold in our culture.

The colonial legacy still at play today has placed Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people in positions of vulnerability. It has led to entrenched poverty, poor health outcomes, unsafe housing and water scarcity issues, racism and discrimination, and violence. The current COVID-19 pandemic has only served to highlight the enormous inequity at play in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities compared to the rest of Canadian society—not to mention its impact on gender-based violence, on employment and skill development, and on education in general. Once again, on behalf of NWAC, I pressed home the need for COVID-19 funding in separate teleconferences with Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations (July 3), and with Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services (July 13). The disparity, the discrimination, the violence ... this is why I continue to advocate on behalf of all Indigenous communities and all Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people across this land. On a visit to the Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, on July 15 and 16, I saw first-hand the impact of homelessness, addiction and mental health struggles, disrupted family lives, and

experiences with the criminal justice system on Indigenous women and girls. The centre helps at-risk clients between the ages of 15 and 45.

I was reminded of the violence that Indigenous women and girls face every day when I sat down on July 13 with author Jessica McDiarmid to talk about her book *Highway of Tears: A True Story of Racism, Indifference and the Pursuit of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. While the 725-kilometre Highway of Tears corridor between Prince George and Prince Rupert in British Columbia has been the location of many murders and disappearances beginning in 1970, Indigenous women and girls are facing violence (both in and outside the home) every day.

Most disturbing is the violence at the hands of police forces. On July 22, I travelled to New Brunswick to offer my personal condolences and those of NWAC to Chantel Moore's mother. Just this past month, on June 30, I began a conversation with RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki about the recent killings and assaults of Indigenous People by police/RCMP officers, and the broader issue of systemic racism among Canada's police forces. On July 16, I issued a statement on the decision by Statistics Canada



and Canadian police chiefs to report race-based information about victims and accused persons. Such information will help to highlight the inequities in our justice system and the over-representation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people—especially Indigenous women—in Canada’s prisons. A follow-up letter by me to Ms. Lucki on July 20 applauded the RCMP’s decision to address systemic racism and its influence on policing in Canada. And on July 29, NWAC aligned its support behind the Moore family to call on a public inquiry into the circumstances of Chantel’s death.

As I sit in my garden and enjoy the summer sun, with thoughts turning to the harvest, I am ever reminded of the important job we have at NWAC in advocating for Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people across this land.

Thank you, Wela’lin



President Lorraine Whitman



Summer is all about appreciating nature's bounty. Spending my spare time in my garden, with our dog Max, gives me pleasure and a chance to reflect about life—my own and that of the Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people that NWAC represents and fights for.

COVID-19 federal funding for national Indigenous organizations, as well as targeted funding for Indigenous women through NWAC's member associations, occupied my teleconference calls with both **Minister Carolyn Bennett (July 3)** and with **Minister Marc Miller (July 13)**.

I also sought funding support for our new Resiliency Lodge, which will be the first land-based holistic healing lodge in the country dedicated to the healing, resiliency, and empowerment of indigenous women and gender-diverse people. Our Lodge is a practical response to the need for healing centres (identified in the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice 7.1 to 7.9).



A follow-up call with **Ms. Bennett (July 17)** and a follow-up letter (**July 20**) focused on making sure that NWAC has a voice on federal committees dealing with Indigenous issues. As the largest national organization representing the interests of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people, it is critical that we be at the table. In addition to being invited to sit on CIRNAC's Core Working Group (I will represent NWAC) and the data sub-working group, I pressed home the point that NWAC needs to be involved in all the other committees and sub-working groups related to LGBTQ, urban, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, family and survivor, and federal departments.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWA) studies the policies, programs, expenditures, and legislation of departments and agencies that conduct work related to the status of women. In a video conference meeting on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on **July 7**, I stressed the need for financial support for Indigenous women, specifically for women's shelters, women living off-reserve, and female-run businesses. A recent survey conducted by our association clearly shows that domestic violence during the pandemic is on the rise. We discussed this during our July 28th webinar *Home remedies: Addressing domestic violence, racism, and sexism in the context of COVID-19*. Our webinar looked at how poverty and homelessness pose challenges for vulnerable populations during a pandemic, and the considerable strain placed on homeless shelters and domestic abuse relief homes.

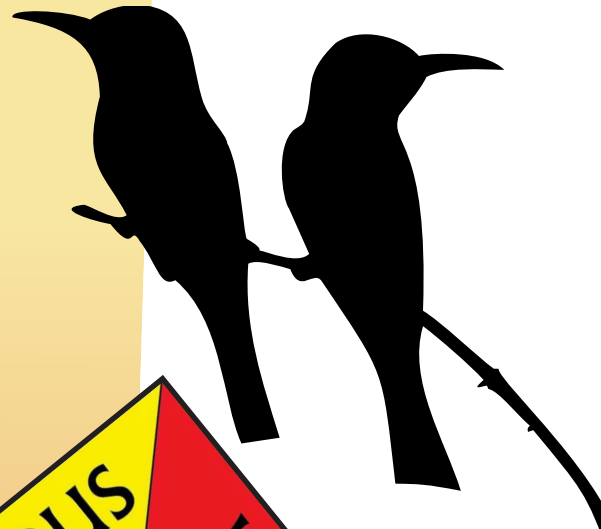
In addition to gender-based violence, the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous communities highlights the health inequities, employment and skill development challenges, education gaps, and lack of access to basic necessities such as water, food, housing, and health care.

To this end, I took part in a podcast called *Unmasking COVID* on **July 31**.





Lorraine with Karen Bernard,
Director of the Jane Paul Indigenous Women's
Resource Centre.



Vulnerable Indigenous women and girls turn to shelters and women's centres for support when they can. I travelled to the **Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre** on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, on July 15 and 16. The centre opened its doors in December 2015 under the name of the Mi'kmaw Women's Resource Centre. It provides supports and services to Indigenous women who have experienced violence, are homeless, poor, have addiction or mental health issues, and/or have come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Policing in Canada

In June, following the deaths of Chantel Moore and Rodney Levi, and the brutal attacks on Chief Allan Adam and an Inuk man in Nunavut, I immediately contacted RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki to discuss the need for police reform. That outreach has met with positive and timely action by the RCMP, which has indicated it will address systemic racism and its influence on policing in Canada. [I also issued a statement on July 16 applauding the decision by Statistics Canada and Canadian police chiefs to enhance the collection of race-based crime statistics.](#)

My follow-up letter of **July 20 to Commissioner Lucki** reiterated the need for evidence-based analysis, proactive disclosure, and partnerships with Indigenous organizations, including NWAC. We issued four immediate calls for action to Ms. Lucki in June: body cameras for all RCMP officers; a revision of the broad ‘shoot to kill’ orders where Indigenous People appear to be posing a threat to themselves or others but can be subdued by other means; the attendance of health professionals when an Indigenous person is suffering from mental health or addiction issues; and the formation of a task force to chart a better road ahead.



Lorraine with members of Chantel Moore's family.

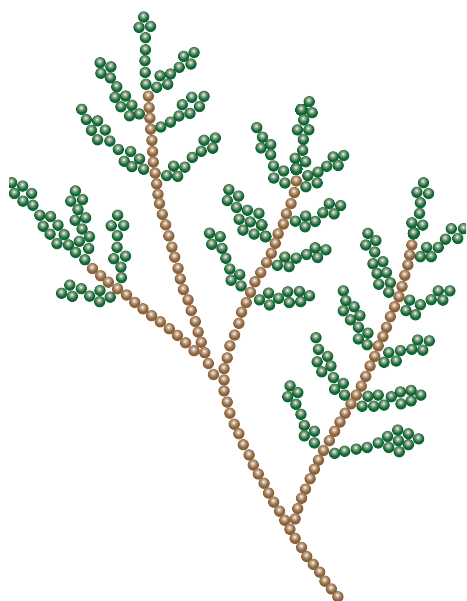
Previous page: A red dress was hung on a telephone pole in Fredericton to mark the killing of Chantel Moore.

On **July 22**, I travelled to New Brunswick to meet with members of Chantel Moore's family. There I offered my personal condolence to **Marsha, Chantel's mother**. On [July 29, our association echoed the Moore family's call for a public inquiry to determine the circumstances of her death.](#)

Healing lodges such as the new Resiliency Lodge in New Brunswick—and our own national one-of-a-kind lodge in Chelsea, Quebec—will serve as important healing centres for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people marked by trauma, violence, and discrimination. I was honoured and pleased to visit the new lodge in New Brunswick, accompanied by Elder Alma Brooks.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The need for reform and justice took centre stage in an interview podcast I held on **July 13** with **Jessica McDiarmid**, author of *Highway of Tears: A True Story of Racism, Indifference and the Pursuit of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. Jessica explores the systemic racism affecting communities along the Highway of Tears, and connects this history to the thousands of other cases across Canada.



Media Interviews

I conducted media interviews this month with the Winnipeg Free Press, CTV, APTN, as well as with:

- **Marieta Osezua**, from the Carleton University newspaper, *The Charlantan*, on how the university can enhance the lives of Indigenous students (July 14)
- **Palak Mangat**, *The Hill Times* on Stats Canada and the Canadian chiefs of police decision to collect race-based data (July 21)

Other

When it comes to learning, Elder Alma Brooks is a role model. At the age of 77, Alma graduated from St. Thomas University with a bachelor's degree. In Alma's words: "If I can accomplish this at the age of 77, anyone can." I travelled to the ceremony on July 20 with a cake and flowers, featuring an eagle feather, moccasins, a shell, and sage. Congratulations, Alma!

I also attended the board meeting of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association on July 3 and 4.



Elder Alma Brooks from St. Mary's First Nation, right, with Annie Daisley, President of the PTMA Nova Scotia Native Women's Association (NSNWA)



Lorraine with members of the board of NSNWA: President Annie Daisley and Karina Matthews-Denny (back); Third Vice-President Annie Stevens, Lorraine, and board member Sarah McDonald (front).



Native Women's
Association of Canada



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