

## NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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



### 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.



## April 2020 President's Report

Dear friends,

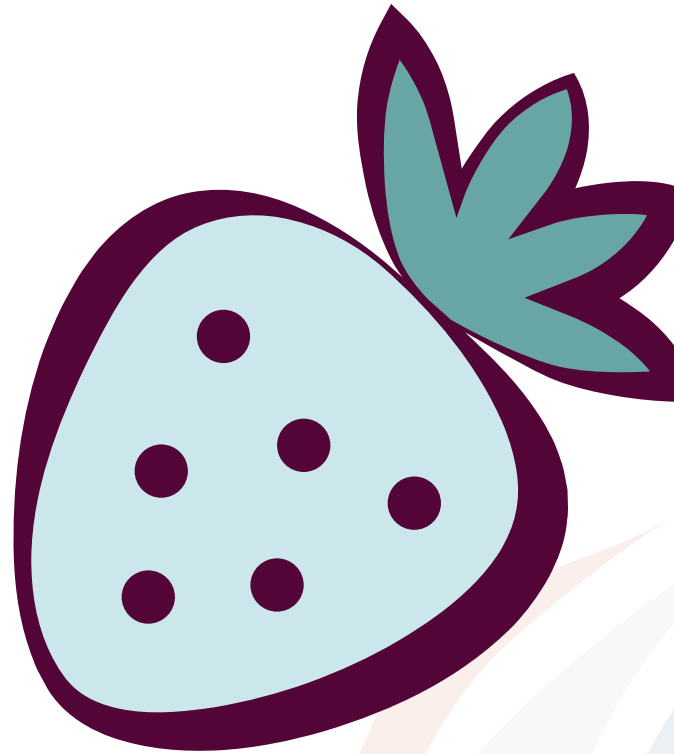
We are all living in a new environment—isolated from friends, family, and work colleagues; trying to stay healthy, physically, mentally, and spiritually. But while COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down, it has also created new opportunities to build bridges and engage with people in new ways.

At home now 24/7, we have more time to spend with the people we live with; to be creative; and to tackle all those things that interest us but never had time to do.

My weekly Sunday prayer and drumming activity is just a small example of how I am connecting with Indigenous people across Canada. Through [Facebook Live](#), over 3,000 people are joining me to celebrate our culture and heritage—and to stay connected and healthy through COVID-19. Prayers of unity and inspiration generate positive energy, which is important now more than ever. Being mentally healthy will help us all get through this, together.

Changing one's routine and doing some of my favourite activities, such as gardening and crafting, are how I manage to stay positive. I practised my own powwow yoga for the first time this month, which was a lot of fun!

These are examples of how I am taking care of myself. Notably, I kicked off NWAC's self-care campaign on April 20 with a video describing how I stay mentally healthy during COVID-19.



This month, Nova Scotians have had to come to terms with two tragedies: the senseless shootings on April 18 and 19 of 22 people, including RCMP Constable Heidi Stevenson, who served a number of Indigenous communities; and the downing of a RCMP Cyclone helicopter with six onboard in the Mediterranean Sea. Our prayers and thoughts go out to all the people of Nova Scotia.

These tragedies have united Canadians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—much like COVID-19 has.

Building bridges and engaging with others is a form of unity. I focused a lot of my time this month to doing just that—with government representatives, organizations, and other stakeholders. These calls were an opportunity to reach many people about NWAC and the important work we are doing to help Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people heal and build resilience. Some of the topics I covered in these calls were our new Resiliency Lodge, family and domestic violence, and funding support for the work we do.

Thank you, Wela'lin



President Lorraine Whitman

## NWAC Outreach and Engagement

### High-Level Talks

I held very productive discussions with three Cabinet Ministers, a Senator, the interim leader of the Green Party, and the federal ombudsman for Justice Canada. Top of mind during our discussions was the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and rising domestic violence rates. The huge rise in domestic and family violence is especially acute among Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

NWAC has been tracking this increase. We conducted a series of nation-wide, grassroots consultations with our provincial and territorial member offices (PTMAs) and with Indigenous women to determine how COVID-19 has been affecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women in Canada. The spike in the number of Indigenous women who say they are facing more violent incidents since the pandemic began is disturbing.

During my phone discussions, I also took the opportunity to promote the new, one-of-a-kind Resiliency Lodge—and its potential to serve as a model for similar centres across Canada. Supporting Indigenous women entrepreneurs and businesses was also discussed.

I had separate phone meetings with **Senator Lillian Dyck**, Canada's first female First Nations senator and Canadian-born senator of Chinese descent (April 8); the **Honourable Maryam Monsef**, **Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development** (April 17); the **Honourable Carolyn Bennett**, **Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations** (April 24); **Heidi Illingworth**, **Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime**, and **Nadia Ferrara**, **Executive Director, Justice Canada** (April 24); **Cindy Blackstock**, **Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada** (April 27); and **Fannie Lafontaine**, lawyer, professor at the **Faculty of Law at Laval University**, and **Canada Research Chair in International Criminal Justice and Fundamental Rights** (April 28). The focus of these discussions were the increased rates of domestic violence occurring among Indigenous families. Even before the pandemic began, Indigenous women in Canada were facing higher levels of violence and abuse—a stark reality laid bare in the **National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**. The need for a national action plan is more critical than ever. I raised concerns about whether the pandemic could delay the promised June delivery of a national action plan on

missing and murdered Indigenous women. I emphasized that this was one of the Calls for Justice issued by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

I also used these phone meetings to promote the work of NWAC, as well as economic and entrepreneurship opportunities that could be explored for Indigenous women living in rural and remote communities (for example, beading).

My phone call with **Jo-Ann Roberts, Interim Leader of the Green Party of Canada**, was an opportunity to introduce myself and NWAC. The Green Party's platform pillars include reconciliation with Indigenous people and pursuing partnerships to address the climate crisis, as well as gender and racial equality.

Again on April 24, I reached out to the **Honourable Deb Schulte, Minister of Seniors**, to inform her of the work that NWAC is doing around dementia and cannabis, as well as the financial issues impacting Indigenous seniors as a result of COVID-19. We explored possible partnership opportunities.





## Other Outreach and Engagement Activities

In other phone meetings held this month, my goal was to talk about the ground-breaking work that NWAC is doing, particularly around the Resiliency Lodge. We explored potential partnerships; talked about the kinds of support that might be available to NWAC; touched on diversity and inclusion; and explored entrepreneurship opportunities. Phone meetings were held with the following high-level individuals:

- **Hassan Yussuff, President, Canadian Labour Congress**—The CLC is the largest labour organization in Canada, bringing together dozens of national and international unions, provincial and territorial federations of labour and community-based labour councils to represent more than 3 million workers across the country. One of its core focus areas is discrimination.
- **Don Cleary, President of Marriott Hotels Canada**—The hotel chain supports the Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council and provides a scholarship for Indigenous people through Guelph University.
- **Terry Goodtrack, AFOA Canada (formerly Aboriginal Financial Officers of Canada)**—AFOA provides finance and leadership training to Indigenous people across Canada.
- **Nadiaska Castillo, Maria Tres Sala, and Maria Noel Vaaza, Red de Mujeres empresarias indigenas**—The Network is a meeting place for women's groups that lead solidarity economic ventures and for organizations that support the economic empowerment of women in Latin American and the Caribbean.
- **Maya Roy, President of YWCA Canada**—YWCA Canada is a leading voice for women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people. It fights gender-based violence, builds affordable housing, and advocates for workplace equity.
- **Jewelless Smith, Chairperson, Council of Canadians with Disabilities**—The Council is a social justice organization of people with all disabilities that champions the voices of people with disabilities, advocating an inclusive and accessible Canada.
- **Ray Wanuch, Executive Director, Cando**—Cando (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers) focuses on education and professional development for economic development officers working in Aboriginal communities or organizations.



- **Lise Martin, Executive Director, Women's Shelters Canada—**WSC is a network of 14 provincial and territorial shelter networks representing over 400 shelters across Canada. It works as a unified voice to collaborate, educate, and innovate for systemic change that ends violence against women, making Canada a model for safety in the world.
- **Marc Laliberté, President, Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario—**ISWO's mandate is to develop and deliver opportunities for participation in sport and cultural activities, which promote wellness and positive lifestyles for Indigenous peoples across Ontario.
- **Dustin O'Leary, Communications Manager, Atlantic Gold Corporation—**Atlantic Gold works with communities to reduce its environmental impact, while creating responsible and sustainable economic opportunity from its mining activity.



## The Moose Hide Campaign

One of the highlights this month was reaching out to the founder of the Moose Hide Campaign. This is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are standing up against violence towards women and children.

The campaign's roots go back to 2011. An Indigenous man named Paul Lacerte and his daughter Raven were hunting moose near the Highway of Tears, between Prince George and Prince Rupert, B.C. They had brought down a moose that would help feed the family for the winter and provide a moose hide for cultural purposes. As the daughter was skinning the moose, her father started thinking about the highway that has brought so much sorrow to nearby communities, and about his young daughter, who deserved a life free of violence. To inspire men to become involved in the movement to end violence towards women and children, he and his daughter, together with family and friends, cut up the moose hide into small squares and started the Moose Hide Campaign.

The campaign has spread to communities and organizations across Canada.

I had a long conversation through Zoom with Mr. Lacerte on April 13. The Moose Hide Campaign is developing online workshops around the theme of violence. We talked about the ways we can work together to promote and engage Indigenous women and gender-diverse people through these workshops for men and women.





## COVID-19: Self-Care and Mask-Making

When I wasn't holding teleconference and Zoom meetings with high-level individuals across the country, I was on the ground, helping to spread messages of self-care and involved in mask-making work.

NWAC purchased mask-making material to distribute to Indigenous communities and women who have volunteered to make masks, including to Joan Foster, President of Glooscap First Nation's women's chapter, and Karen Pictou, Executive Director of the Nova Scotia PTMA. With a sewing machine on loan from Glooscap, I set to work making masks.







I also found time to take care of myself—which is so important during COVID-9. On April 20, I kicked off NWAC's self-care campaign by producing a [video](#) for our social media channels. In the video, I talk about how I stay mentally healthy. This includes doing some of my favourite things: walking every day, gardening, crafting, and taking time to really enjoy my morning cup of coffee.

I even tried powwow yoga. Not just a way to keep fit, it also helped me stay connected with my culture.

And, I was joined on April 26, for my Sunday online prayer and drumming session by Keptin (Captain) Leonard "Larry" Peters of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council of Glooscap First Nation and Chief Sidney Peters of Glooscap First Nation, also co-chair of the Nova Scotia Assembly of First Nations' Mi'kmaw Chiefs.

What a great way to end the month!





Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

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