Aboriginal Women Drug Users in Conflict with the Law: A Study of the Role of Self-Identity in the Healing Journey

SUMMARY REPORT: Song & DVD Development Workshop

CEDAR LODGE EVENT CENTRE
February 15, 16 & 17, 2009
Dundurn, Saskatchewan
CANADA

Reported by: Colleen Anne Dell & Tara Lyons
Illicit drug use amongst criminalized Aboriginal women is a serious health concern in Canada. Little is understood about how women’s healing is impacted by their view of themselves as a drug user, involved in crime, and an Aboriginal woman in Canadian society, and the stigma associated with each of these identities. In 2005, our team was awarded a Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health, research grant to examine the role of stigma and identity reconstitution in the healing journeys of criminalized Aboriginal women from illicit drug use. (SEE Appendix A for listing of initial research and community advisory team members).

This collaborative multi-year project was spearheaded by the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF), the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) and Carleton University. NNAPF steers the First Nations and Inuit addictions system in Canada towards wholistic, culturally-relevant seamless addictions services and CCSA is Canada’s national, non-governmental addictions agency. The University of Saskatchewan joined as a principal investigator in 2007. Together, these organizations have committed to conducting a research study whose goal is to contribute original knowledge to the treatment field that can assist in improving the burden of ill health experienced by Aboriginal women in Canada.

Grounded in a community-based participatory approach to research, and Aboriginal and feminist methodologies, interviews were conducted with First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in treatment for illicit drug use at National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) treatment centres across Canada. The research process followed the OCAP principles (ownership, control, access, possession) and the later released CIHR Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People. The research starts with an understanding of women’s drug use as a form of self-harm, a technique of coping with and surviving the emotional pain and distress rooted in experiences of abuse and violence. The study also examines how treatment workers view their roles in the women’s construction and re-construction of their identity and its impact on their healing.

The methodology of this qualitative, exploratory research is not constructed on hypotheses, but rather on the following guiding statements drawn from the academic literature, experience and practice that served to initiate the research direction.

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The lived experiences of adult Aboriginal female illicit drug users in conflict with the law are intimately tied to the constitution of their self-identity. Self-identity influences the women’s healing prior to, during and following drug treatment. Explored are the effects of the women’s multiple identities and associated role expectations and stigma on their healing.

Drug use is a form of coping and survival rooted in experiences of abuse and violence. Explored is the relation between women’s drug use and the constitution and reconstitution of their self-identity.

The influence of treatment workers on the lives of women who use illicit drugs, as they undergo treatment, affects women’s healing outcomes. Explored is the role of the treatment worker in assisting women in the (re)constitution of their self-identity and its relation to healing.

The specific research question is:

What are the experiential paths of Aboriginal women in conflict with the law in the constitution and reconstitution of their self-identity, accounting for associated role expectations and stigma, prior to, during and following treatment for illicit drug use (defined as the healing journey)? And how do treatment program workers influence women’s constitution and reconstitution of their self-identity and what is the relation to their healing?

The theoretical framework of the study is drawn from sociological and population health perspectives.

A total of 123 interviews were conducted with 65 women in treatment at 6 NNADAP treatment centres across Canada and 20 women who completed treatment. In addition, 38 interviews were conducted with treatment providers. The large majority of individuals interviewed were First Nations.
With the initial CIHR funding for the project completed, our team received additional funding from the Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch–Health Canada, and the Research Chair in Substance Abuse, University of Saskatchewan (funded by a grant from the Ministry of Health). The funding was used to gather our team members, the women and staff we interviewed, as well as decision makers, to continue our team's innovative and balanced community-based approach to the research process, with a focus on integrating women’s experiential voices into our data analysis. (SEE Appendix B for a listing of the gathering participants). The gathering built upon the initial project findings.

**Staff Findings:** A summary report of the initial staff findings is based on a sample of 10 staff interviews. The transcripts were reviewed by multiple people to identify key themes. The people who analyzed the transcripts represented a variety of backgrounds: experiential, social worker, cultural understanding, outsider, interviewer, transcriber and researcher. Each of the analyses was read alongside the transcripts by the same person, and overarching themes were identified. These themes were verified with those who did the initial analyses. They were also taken back (via telephone conferencing) to where interviews were originally held in order to: (1) validate them (confirm that the themes make sense) and (2) contextualize them (better understand the themes). It is interesting how different people saw different things in the transcripts, yet there was strong commonality on key issues. What differed was how individuals contextualized what they saw. This supports our team-focused approach to analyzing the data we collected. The summary report was also distributed among all team members for feedback.

An initial finding from the staff interviews was turned into a fact sheet. A group of team members worked on the draft of the fact sheet and it was then distributed to all team members for input. (See Appendix C for the turtle finding fact sheet).

**Women:** A summary report of the initial findings for the women in residential treatment for illicit drug use is based on a sample of 14 women (86% First Nation Status, 14 % Métis), complemented by a review of a 51 interviews with women (82% First Nation Status, 10% First Nation non-Status, 4% Métis, 2% Inuit, 2% not identified) at 6 NNADAP treatment centres across Canada. An initial review of 20 women (45% First Nation Status, 10% First Nation non-Status, 15% Métis, 25% Inuit, 5% not identified) who have completed treatment at NNADAP (20%) and other (80%) treatment centres was also conducted.

Similar to the staff interviews, multiple people reviewed the transcripts to identify key themes. Each of the analyses was read alongside the transcripts by the same person, and overarching themes were identified. These themes were verified with those who did the initial analyses, and then taken back to where the interviews were originally held. The findings were not, at that time, taken back to a sample of the original women interviewed. However, a sample of the women interviewed attended our gathering, and reviewing the initial findings with this sample was an identified aim of our gathering. The findings were also shared among all team members for feedback. Similar to the analysis process with the staff interviews, each reviewer identified different themes in the
transcripts, however there was commonality in their interpretations of key issues. This again supports the philosophy underlying our team approach to analyzing the data we collected. Note that the turtle fact sheet findings were supported in review of the women’s data.

Based on these initial findings, this summary report speaks to the first stage of our team’s strategies of knowledge transference and dissemination to inform understanding and practice. Highlighted is the development of a DVD that documents our research process and the creation of a song that relays the key overarching findings. We attempted both of these activities in a workshop format on February 15-17, 2009 in Dundurn, Saskatchewan. Integral to our gathering was celebrating the work that we have accomplished together as a team.

Aim of gathering

The aim of the gathering was to review where our team has been (i.e., data collection), where we are at (i.e., findings), and where we are going (i.e., further analysis, knowledge translation and dissemination) (SEE Appendix D for the gathering agenda). The three days of our gathering mirrored each of these themes.

Integral to our project is the understanding that everything and everyone is interconnected—from the stages of the research process through to the relationships between the women who were interviewed and shared their stories, and the women doing the interviewing. In standard methodological practice, this project followed a linear process. For example, the literature was reviewed and then the interview questions were developed. From a holistic and integrated understanding, however, we also
incorporated women’s lived experiences into the development of the interview questions. No single form of knowledge was prioritized over another in this project. Everyone involved was identified as contributing equally important and legitimate understandings.

FIGURE 1 below relays the interlocking ideas that flow from each component of this project. Hope and respect was anchored at the centre of the process.

**Sunday Evening, February 15: Where we have been**

We gathered in a circle at Cedar Lodge on Sunday evening. Ice fishing huts dotted the frozen lake as Elder Joyce Paul from Eel Ground, New Brunswick opened our gathering with a prayer followed by smudging. Sheila Grantham and Jenny Gardipy reviewed the agenda for our team’s time together. Colleen Anne Dell introduced Marcel Petit, Angela Edmunds and Ian Roach who were filming the meeting to create a DVD of our research process to date. She also introduced Violet Naytowhow, who would be helping the team create a song the next day based on our project findings. The intention was to create diverse ways to disseminate to various audiences the research process and findings.

After nourishing ourselves with rice, chicken and vegetables, a review of the research process and findings were presented by Colleen Dell, Sharon Acoose, Tara Lyons, Cathy Fillmore, Sheila Grantham and Jenny Gardipy.
Presentation Highlights:

- Hope and respect were identified in our team’s initial meeting in 2005. Hope and respect were also identified as central themes by the women in treatment, women who completed treatment and treatment staff. The women emphasized others being non-judgmental in their understanding and practice of respect.
- Balance has been a central component of the research process from the start of the project. What everyone ‘brings to the table’ is equal. Part of the research process has been about recognizing and attending to removing the hierarchies between those who ‘do research’, those who are ‘researched’, and the various members of our team.
- Our team’s balanced approach has benefited the research project, the research team, and the research participants. For example, Sharon Acoose spoke of how sharing her story of healing and participating in this project has taught her further about who she is, has given her courage and hope and has helped her to learn about research. Writing her story at the start of the research process was a powerful experience for her.
- Sheila spoke of the offerings that were given to the women during the interview process as being a source of hope and comfort. Sheila made medicine bundles and blankets were offered to the women who were interviewed as comfort and warmth. Valerie Desjarlais and Sharon Accose’s personal stories were also offered to the women interviewed along with pearls and Herb Nabigon’s story of the pearl. Two women at the gathering were wearing the pearl that they received.
- Sheila reviewed the evaluations of the interviews. Overall women said it was a positive experience to tell their stories.
- Elder Joyce Paul shared that the women interviewed felt validated and grateful for the gifts of the blanket and the pearl. She felt it was an honour to participate.
- Sheila shared that they tried to create a gender balance with men in the program as well. Val shared how a male Elder, Dexter Asapace, participated in her interview process to attempt for gender balance.
- The prism analogy was described to outline the data analysis and findings process. People with diverse lenses (experiences and expertise) reviewed the data for themes.

Colleen highlighted initial findings from the project. The findings were compiled into two documents, one specific to women interviewed and one specific to treatment providers (see p. 3). Each was discussed, with an emphasis on the women’s interview findings.

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Findings Highlights:

- The overarching themes were very apparent from the multiple lenses (individuals) who reviewed the data.
- Staff understood women as feeling lost, and needing to understand the past and colonization in order to move forward in their healing journeys. The women relayed this understanding as well. Individuals need hope to move forward (“once an addict does not mean you are always an addict”-the is a significant degree of stigma attached to the identity).
- The healing journey is a long process and everyone is on their own journey and heals differently. It is about finding connection (e.g., balance, medicine wheel, self, land).
- Specific to the staff interviews (i.e., turtle fact sheet), eight treatment provider characteristics were identified as important to help women in their healing. The fact sheet incorporates the 7 grandfather teachings. The women’s interviews verified these themes.
- In response to the question of “Who am I?” the women generally claim not to know. Culture is central to building a healthy self. Identity transformation + cultural understanding = healing. Women need to re-claim their identity as Aboriginal women.
- Women use alcohol and drugs not only to cope and punish themselves, but also to feel in a positive way (e.g., to be able to laugh).
- It is difficult for the women interviewed to separate the impacts of alcohol from illicit drugs in their lives, just as it is near impossible to separate physical from mental health.
- Women spoke about feeling lost and having a wounded spirit. A wounded spirit is a wounded identity - it is who you are.
- The longer the women stay in treatment the more they identify with the positive aspects of being Aboriginal.
- Other women in the women’s lives are important in their healing.
- It is important for the treatment providers to have lived experience. It’s not only the counselor, but also the cook, the caretaker and others at the centre who support the women.
- It is necessary to contextualize the findings within their social contexts (e.g., impact of colonization). For example, violence is at both the interpersonal as well as the structural (e.g., residential schooling) levels.
- Women’s criminalization is largely linked to their illicit drug use. There is a strong need to separate the individual from their behavior (e.g., prostitution).
- There is conflict surrounding the caretaker/motherhood role—Aboriginal women are central to a healthy family, yet they feel they let them down (e.g., child in care). It is necessary women understand the historical roots of where they are today (e.g., impact of colonization).
- Drug use understanding among women begins as a disease model and shifts to a cultural model of understanding.
• There is a strong linkage with childhood trauma. Aboriginal identity is hidden by the women as children. They need to learn about who they are as Aboriginal women and people.
• Fear is great for the women: as children (violence in home and school), growing up (fear for self and children and cannot provide for them), entering treatment (will not be able to change), leaving treatment (will not receive necessary support when released).
• Aftercare is critical in the views of the women and staff.

Elder Dexter Asapace closed the day with some reflections on the evening. He spoke of the importance of people feeling comfortable and having trust with service providers. He also spoke to the lack of aftercare by using the analogy of people being released into the wilderness and asking how are they going to survive with no support. He asked the Creator to give our group strength and health in our time together. He noted the importance of how an individual has to be healthy to help another person. It is also important, and difficult sometimes, to be humble.

The evening ended with Violet playing music as folks curled up on the couches with their blankets.

Monday, February 16: Where we are at

Elder Joyce Paul opened with a prayer and asked everyone to pray for the youth in her community who have committed or are contemplating suicide, and for people who are incarcerated.
Sharon Clarke welcomed us to the day. Sheila spoke about the significance of the pearl as a symbol of overcoming obstacles in one’s life and turning them into something positive. She made pearl bracelets for everyone on behalf of the project and handed them out.

Marcel, Ian and Angela conducted interviews in a separate room—asking our team members who they are, their role in the project, and how they became involved. The focus was to document the research process. (SEE Appendix E for a copy of the DVD).

**UPDATE SINCE THE MEETING:** The rough cut of the video was distributed to all team members (including those not at the gathering) for their feedback before it was finalized. It is now being turned into a training session and will be released as such on YouTube.

Violet introduced us briefly to the process of song writing; sometimes it takes minutes and sometimes it takes significantly longer.

Doug Purcell led our team in guided imagery and relaxation. He is on a quest to restore himself and people to their beings. He is a journey practitioner, which looks at the traumas individuals store in their bodies that hold them back from being who they are. The exercise centred on the question ‘Who are you?’ and ‘Who are you really?’. The goal was for team members to get close to themselves (and put aside other ‘baggage’) to write the song.

Our team had the gift of a young girl, Summer Lily, joining us. She inspired women during the meditation and during the day with her energy and spirit.

Violet taught the group about writing a song; it is a story. We also listened to different genres of songs to give us ideas of melody.

Tala Tootoosis did a hip hop exercise with the group to get them to further ‘let go’ of their baggage and just be. Tala also spoke about coming back to her culture, and her recovery. She shared a sun dance cape that has been in her family since the 1800s. She explained that the culture is not lost or gone, people are still dancing and ceremonies are still being held. It has always been here, as has love and laughter. The most important part of recovery is forgiveness because under forgiveness is love.
Our team divided into four groups to brainstorm lyrics for the song. The stages of one form of song development coincide with the stages we centred our gathering around: where have we been; where we are now; where are we going. The fourth group focused on the bridge/chorus. The focus was on the high level themes of the summary reports, as well as individual’s contributions from their own perspectives/lenses.

Violet reviewed with our team the lyrics each of the four groups had composed, including the chorus/bridge. Violet facilitated as the team worked together on the song and the chorus. We talked about beginning the song with drumming and a child saying the words on the turtle findings and ending with an Elder repeating the words. Violet took the song to add a melody. **UPDATE SINCE THE MEETING:** The draft of the song with a melody was distributed to all team members (including those not at the gathering) for feedback prior to it being officially release on May 13, 2009 (SEE Appendix F for a news article and Appendix G for a copy of the song). A CBC Morning Edition interview with Violet and Colleen is available at:

http://www.cbc.ca/morningedition/2009/05/from_stilletos_to_moccasins.html?playlistId=022365a5d20f6c9d226c5607d000c207d5274401&videoid=5012952

Val closed the day with reflections. A lasting comment was her fear that the last generation of Elders who have lived the traditions and know the languages are departing. She called up Summer Lily and Sheila, followed by everyone else, to form a circle and then she opened the ends and we all walked through. It was beautiful.

We had a delicious turkey dinner and then cake to celebrate. Two women who were interviewed blew out the candles and we sang a celebration song.
Then it was fun time! Tara taught people to knit, Madagascar was playing on the screen, folks played Jenga, and there was more food (including wild salmon Joyce brought from the East Coast!)

**Tuesday Morning, February 17 Where we are going**

Elder Joyce Paul opened the day with a prayer.

Elva expressed CCSA’s gratitude for being a part of the project and gave a welcome to the day. Colleen gave a welcome to the day on behalf of Greg Graves and First Nations and Inuit Health Branch. Colleen spoke of how difficult it is to get different institutions on board and sitting at the same table. She used the press release for this gathering as an example of how impressive this project is in bringing together large organizations. (SEE Appendix H for the press release).

Colleen explained the hats on the tables, how they can represent identity and how they can be used to engage audiences at presentations of the project. For example, the audience can be asked ‘What hats do you wear?’ to get them to think about identity and then transition into the project findings. It is an example of how we can potentially engage people we are speaking to, as well as the need for creativity and ‘thinking outside the box’ when we speak to knowledge translation and dissemination with our project. Colleen also spoke to the importance of having people feel in order to convey an impactful and lasting message.

Valerie highlighted the critical importance of not following a linear path in the dissemination of the findings; no one finding is more important than another. The team spoke about the importance of how to further give back and engage the women and staff who participated in the interviews. It is also important that our team does not release its findings until it is clear that we have reached that point; all has to be in order. This is why a work plan is important, and was the focus of our team’s 3rd day together.

There are 6 *interrelated* ways of relaying the findings identified by our team. Each has the potential to reach various audiences.
Our team divided into three groups to brainstorm creative ways to begin to disseminate the findings of the research project. Key items are identified in each grouping below.

- indicates completed since the gathering

**GROUP 1: PUBLISHING**

**Fact sheets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Turtle finding (fact sheet #1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong></td>
<td>NNADAP treatment providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next step:</strong></td>
<td>✓ Disseminate to NNADAP treatment centres with a cover letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ NNAPF to turn fact sheet into a poster and distribute to NNADAP treatment centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Disseminate to staff interviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead:</strong></td>
<td>Sharon Clarke, Janay Brown (summer student) &amp; Colleen Dell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong></td>
<td>Who else could benefit? Health Stations on reserve, friendship centres, NWAC, band offices, drop in centres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Fact sheet on the relationship between hope, identity and healing. These were central themes in the interviews and guiding stories of Val, Deb and Sharon. (fact sheet #2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong></td>
<td>Women in treatment and who completed treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treatment providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next step:</strong></td>
<td>Review findings to create a fact sheet. Apply women’s words to convey the key message. Turn the fact sheet into a poster (translate to Aboriginal languages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on identity construction – past, present and future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead:</strong></td>
<td>Janay Brown &amp; Colleen Dell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong></td>
<td>Who else could benefit? Not all women can read so alternative formats are important (e.g., CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fact sheet should again be culturally specific (as turtle fact sheet is)</td>
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## Peer reviewed articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Aboriginal women and treatment article for the International Journal of Mental Health and Addictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Draft article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Colleen Dell &amp; Sharon Clarke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>Our participation was at the request of Alison Niccols at McMaster University, who is leading in authoring the article. It is tentatively titled “Treatment for Aboriginal Women with Substance Use Issues and Their Children”.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Turn turtle findings fact sheet into a journal article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Community based and academic - CES4Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Draft article (50% completed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Colleen Dell, Tara Lyons, Cathy Fillmore, Jen Kilty and Sheila Grantham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>Who else could benefit?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Journal of Prisoners on Prison</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Prisoners (current and past), academic, community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Submit a brief information article that highlights the song lyrics (50% completed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Valerie Desjarlais, Colleen Dell &amp; Jennifer Kilty</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Article</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>Review transcripts of women that completed treatment for the role of kinship and support systems in women’s healing (specific focus on support from other women) (and relationship to identity and stigma)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Jenny Gardipy</td>
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### Presentations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Issues of Substance conference, November 2009, Halifax, NS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Academic and practitioner community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Submit an abstract</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Colleen Dell and TBD (possibly Joyce Paul and Caroline Pauline Young)</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Native Mental Health Association of Canada</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Submit an abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Sheila Grantham, Anita Narvie, Jenny Gardipy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research Training and Annual General Meeting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Students and researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Request to offer 5 day training session and presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Sharon Acoose &amp; Colleen Dell</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Request to present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product:</th>
<th>Manitoba Justice Forum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Academic and practitioner community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Next step:</td>
<td>✓ Poster and DVD presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead:</td>
<td>Cathy Fillmore and Serena Ehrmantraut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GROUP 2: PRODUCTS

DVD

**Product:** DVD of the research process – *Sharing Our Research Journey*

**Audience:** Treatment centres
University classrooms to train students

**Next step:** Develop a training manual to go alongside the DVD to distribute to NNADAP treatment centres
Develop a dissemination plan
Place on You-tube (with space for feedback)
Send to National Film Board, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
Use in presentations
Media release
Empirically test its impact/evaluation
Place on Facebook page

**Lead:** Janay Brown – is currently reviewing the literature to draft the training manual

Song

**Product:** Create a CD – *From Stilettos to Moccasins*

**Audience:** Women in treatment
Treatment providers
General public

**Next step:**
- Send CD to women we interviewed (those that noted they would like to be contacted) Asked if they would like any role in the project as it moves forward now that we are at the findings stage
- Send the song to treatment providers we interviewed
- Send song link to NNADAP treatment centres
- Place song and lyrics on NNAPF website
- Link NNAPF website to CCSA website
- Public release of the song at the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan Rebels Fundraising event (see Appendix I)
- Placement on CBC Morning Edition website
- Created a Facebook page
- Place on MySpace (Violet Naytowhow’s page)
- Mass distribution – general audience (in process) (see Appendix J)
- Develop a webpage (in process)
Mass distribution –focused: women’s organizations, prisons
Create a video
Distribute to radio stations
Create a teaching tool to go with song and video
Empirically test teaching tool’s impact/evaluation
Inform others on how they too could create a song (maybe could create a CD from several treatment centres)

**Lead:** Janay Brown & Colleen Dell  
**Other:** How do we get the message to women still suffering? How do we get the message to the streets?

### MEDIA/DISTRIBUTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Product:</strong></th>
<th>Newsletter advertisements about the song / DVD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong></td>
<td>Varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next step:</strong></td>
<td><strong>SONG</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network AGM (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saskatoon Star Phoenix newspaper to place song link on website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NNAPF newsletter and NNAPF allotted advertising spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DVD</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lead:** Varied
GROUP 3: POLICY

NNADAP

Product: Treatment policy, guidelines and content
Audience: NNADAP, Child and Family Services, Corrections
Next step: Use fact sheets to inform
Lead: TBD
Other: Idea of rebuilding the whole family: “the ones I love the most I can’t seem to reach” (Joyce).

Addictions Field

Product: Create a booklet that describes the story of the pearl, background on the research project, information about how to create a song so others can create songs
Audience: Addictions field generally
Next step: TBD
Lead: TBD

A brief discussion surrounding funding also took place. For example, our CIHR application could be re-submitted when an applicable call for proposals is made.

For the closing, Val offered cedar and tobacco to everyone and spoke about healing and how it’s about comfort with yourself. She asked us to take a bath with the cedar and pray for loved ones.

We ended with an honest and grateful talking circle led by Joyce. And then many shared a lunch hour meal together.
APPENDIX A: Listing of Initial Research and Advisory Community Team Members

Marie Anderson, Hey-Way’-Noqu’ Healing Circle for Addictions Society & National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation
Freda Ahenakew, Cree Nations Treatment Haven
Debbie Blunderfield, Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba
Joan Breland, Sakwatamo Lodge
Sharon Clarke, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation
Colleen Anne Dell, Carleton University, University of Saskatchewan & Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Valerie Desjarlais, Kawacatoose First Nation
Catherine Fillmore, University of Winnipeg
Bertha Fontaine, Native Addictions Council of Manitoba
Claudette General, Native Horizons Treatment Centre
Cindy Ginnish, Rising Sun Rehabilitation Treatment Centre
Clarence Gould, Mi’kmaw Lodge Treatment Centre
Jennifer Kilty, University of Ottawa
Melvin Larocque, Nats’ejée K’eh Treatment Centre
Elder Joyce Paul, Rising Sun Rehabilitation Treatment Centre & National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation
Edith Reiger, Crossing Communities Art Project
Ellen Smith, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation
Pam Stellick, Mamisarvik Healing Centre
Jean Claude Therrien-Pinnette, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch & National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation

Research Coordinators
Jenny Gardipy, University of Saskatchewan
Sheila Grantham, Carleton University

Research Assistants
Whisper Chase, Carleton University
Kelly Chessie, University of Saskatchewan
Serena Ehrmantraut, University of Winnipeg & Crossing Communities Art Project
Tara Lyons, Carleton University
Sherri Pooyak, University of Victoria
Jessica Stepp, Hey-Way’-Noqu’ Healing Circle for Addictions Society
Thelma Woelke, Hey-Way’-Noqu’ Healing Circle for Addictions Society

Transcribers & Reflections
Kristen Harms, University of Saskatchewan
Phyllis Hartwick, Prince Albert
Christine Hillis, Saskatoon
Chantelle Johnson, Saskatoon
Natasha Matthews, University of Saskatchewan
Brooks McMullin, Prince Albert
Jori Thordarson, University of North Dakota

Expert Mentors
Richard Garlick, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Greg Graves, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch & Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Gary Roberts, Ottawa
Carol Hopkins, Nimkee NupiGawagan Healing Centre
APPENDIX B: Listing of Gathering Participants

Sharon Acoose, First Nations University of Canada
Freda Ahenakew, Cree Nations Treatment Haven
Elder Dexter Asapace, Kawacatoose First Nation
Joan Breland, Sakwatamo Lodge
Sharon Clarke, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation
Colleen Anne Dell, University of Saskatchewan
Valerie Desjarlais, Kawacatoose First Nation
Catherine Fillmore, University of Winnipeg
Jenny Gardipy, University of Saskatchewan
Cindy Ghostkeeper, Sakwatamo Lodge
Sheila Grantham, Carleton University
Greg Graves, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch
Elva Keip, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Bernice King, Native Addictions Council of Manitoba
Tara Lyons, Carleton University
Georgina Martin, Native Addictions Council of Manitoba
June Masuskapoe, Cree Nations Treatment Haven
Anita Narvey, Dalhousie, New Brunswick
Elder Joyce Paul, Rising Sun Rehabilitation Treatment Centre
Thelma Woelke, Hey-Way’-Noqu’ Healing Circle for Addictions Society
Caroline Pauline Young, Rising Sun Rehabilitation Treatment Centre

Song development team

Jonathon Couchman, Spruce Home, Saskatchewan
Violet Naytowhow, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan
Douglas Purcell, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
Tala Tootoosis, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan
APPENDIX C: Turtle Finding Fact Sheet

The role of the treatment provider in Aboriginal women's healing from illicit drug abuse

In 2005, a community-based collaborative research project was initiated by the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and the University of Saskatchewan. The project examined the role that identity and stigma have in the healing journeys of criminalized Aboriginal women in treatment for illicit drug abuse at National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program centres across the country.

FOCUS: This research examined the skills and traits that treatment providers found to be important in assisting women on their healing journeys. It is well-established in Canada that criminalized Aboriginal women who abuse drugs face stigma and discrimination and this has a serious impact on their health. The treatment staff spoke strongly about the need for women to RECLAIM their identity to ward off the negative effects of stigma and continue on their healing journey. For some women it is to CLAIM a healthy identity for the first time. The treatment providers spoke from their perspective as service providers as well as their own healing experiences (80% self-identified as having recovered from substance abuse). This sample provides unique insight and understanding—they believe that a shared personal experience with the women in treatment helps to establish trust, which is necessary to begin healing.

METHOD: The findings are based on a single treatment centre sample of 11 interviews, complemented with a review of 27 additional interviews at 5 centres and one community agency. The findings have been arrived at through a community-based, participatory approach to data analysis. You can learn more about the methodology of this study in the 2009 article, “Beginning with our voices: How the experiential stories of First Nations women are contributing to a national research project” by S. Acoose, C. Dell, V. Desjarlais and D. Blunderfield in the Journal of Aboriginal Health, at [http://www.aboriginalhealthjournal.ca](http://www.aboriginalhealthjournal.ca).

The data were analyzed from multiple standpoints (e.g., treatment worker, experiential woman) and the findings verified with all 6 treatment centres participating in the study. Fifty percent of respondents are female, 80% are First Nations, and the average age is 49 and the average number of years in current substance-related position is 10. The findings are intended to initiate discussion at the NNADAP treatment centres and do not at this point reflect the research literature.

MEANING: The Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers, drawn from the work of Edward Benton Thalen, The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway (Minnesota: Indian Country Press, 1979), frame the meaning of the findings of this study. It is important to note that each of the teachings were given to the first Elder to pass as a whole to one another. The main finding of this study, that Aboriginal women need to re-claim their identity, is symbolized by the turtle, which represents mother earth, and thus recognizes the importance and centrality of women’s role in life. The Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers enlircle the turtle and the findings of this project. Just as the Seven Teachings cannot be understood apart from one another, so too the findings of the study must be understood in conjunction with the Teachings. For example, respect must be understood by treatment providers in order to be able to recognize the impact of trauma in women’s healing.

NEXT STEPS: Our team plans this to be the first in a series of fact sheets that will focus on the staff findings as well as the findings from our interviews with women in treatment and women who have completed treatment. We also plan to use the findings to inform women-specific policy and programming at NNADAP treatment centres. This could include, for example, the design of handbooks for residents and staff.

CONTACTING US: For more information on our project, you can visit our website at [www.nnaau.ca/en/index.html](http://www.nnaau.ca/en/index.html). To learn more about the findings reviewed in this fact sheet or others, please contact Dr. Colleen Anne Dell at the University of Saskatchewan (colleen.dell@usask.ca) 306-966-5917 or Sharon Clarke at the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (sclarke@nnap.ca) 866-763-4714.
APPENDIX D: Gathering Agenda
Agenda

Sunday, February 15  Where we have been
4:30 ~ Opening prayer – Elder Joyce Paul
    ~ Welcome – Meeting organizing team: Sheila Grantham, Jenny Gardipy & Colleen Dell
    ~ Getting to know one another – Facilitated by Sharon Acoose
6:00 ~ Supper
    ~ Dessert - Violet Naytowhow to share her songs
7:00 ~ Where we have been – A review of the research process and findings: Colleen Dell, Sharon Acoose, Tara Lyons, Cathy Fillmore, Sheila Grantham, Jenny Gardipy
    ~ Group discussion
9:00 ~ Closing/Reflection – Elder Dexter Asapace

Monday, February 16  Where we are at
8:00- 9:00 Breakfast
9:00 ~ Opening prayer – Elder Joyce Paul
    ~ Welcome to the day – Sharon Clarke, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation
    ~ The significance of the pearl to our project – Sheila Grantham
9:30 ~ Working with Violet
    ~ An exercise in relaxation led by Doug Purcell- guided imagery/mediation to relax & help the group focus on the day’s task
    ~ Setting the stage – Violet Naytowhow – what the day is about:
        1. What is a song – telling a story
        2. Identifying the key research themes
        3. Creating a song
12:00 ~ Lunch
1:00 ~ Resume work with Violet
5:00 ~ Closing/Reflection – Val Desjarlais
6:00 ~ Celebration supper
7:00 ~ Movies, chips, popcorn, games – and lots of fun and laughs!
Agenda

Tuesday, February 16

8:00-9:00  Breakfast

9:00  ~ Opening prayer – Elder Joyce Paul
     ~ Welcome to the day – Greg Graves, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch & Elva Kipp, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

9:30  ~ Where we are going – knowledge translation & next steps – Colleen Dell

11:00 ~ Talking circle & Closing – Elder Joyce Paul

12:00 ~ Lunch
APPENDIX E:     DVD
**APPENDIX F: “From Stilettos to Moccasins”, by Angela Hill, Prince Albert Daily Herald, May 13, 2009**

A song documenting aboriginal women’s journey with addictions will kick off the Elizabeth Fry Society’s Rebel With A Cause event today.

The song, titled “From Stilettos to Moccasins,” is the culmination of research by the University of Saskatchewan research chair in substance abuse, Colleen Dell.

She enlisted the help of Prince Albert singer-songwriter Violet Naytowhow and wrote the song with her research team.

“We had to be very clear in the message we want to get out,” Dell said.

Her research revolved around women who are healing from illicit drug abuse and problems with the law, as well as those people who are helping them to recover.

“The women that we spoke to (have) a silent voice and we know that … this song was able to share their voice,” Dell said.

“It really is about a journey and it’s about the healing process, the women’s healing journeys.”

The Rebel With A Cause event is a particularly fitting launch as a member of Dell’s team is receiving a “rebel” award for her contribution to her community.

Valerie Desjarlais was actively involved in Dell’s research — accompanying elders into treatment centres and communities to interview recovering women.

“I found (the research) really interesting and I found it to be really valuable,” Desjarlais said.

She is happy to be receiving the award and glad the song will be featured at the event.

“It is just so beautiful,” she said.

“I couldn’t imagine what it would be like when we first got together, but when I heard it the first time I cried.”

The song will be used as a way of teaching. Even the title was designed to stimulate conversation, said Dell.

“We’re going to create a video … then (use) the song and the video as a teaching tool within treatment centres and the general public,” she said.

The song will be available online after the launch at www.nnapf.org.

The research was conducted as a partnership with the National Addictions Partnership Foundation and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

The Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan works to meet the needs of women overcoming barriers such as poverty, violence and discrimination.
From Stilettos to Moccasins

I survived through the pain
Many emotions like waves
Laughing and crying again and again
Honesty, strength, friends and devotion
Showering gifts of hope to reclaim
Walking the streets dragging my heart
Wandering with my head held down in shame
When and how did my family fall apart
Who am I, what is my name?

BRIDGE:
Surviving the street lost and alone
I started a journey to find my way home

CHORUS:
From stilettos to moccasins
Our spirit dances within
On our way to resolution
We find our peace
And this is who I am

Broken barriers and new discoveries
My spirit I now reclaim
Coming home to who I am
Taking honour in my name
No longer a prisoner lost in this world
Look within my shell
To find that pearl

CHORUS:
From stilettos to moccasins
Our spirit dances within
On our way to resolution
We find our peace
And this is who I am

© Violet Naytowhow & the CIHR Project Research Team
APPENDIX G: “From Stilettos to Moccasins” song

I survived through the pain
Many emotions like waves
Laughing and crying again and again
Honesty, strength, friends and devotion
Showering gifts of hope to reclaim

Walking the streets dragging my heart
Wandering with my head held down in shame
When and how did my family fall apart
Who am I, what is my name?

BRIDGE:
Surviving the street lost and alone
I started a journey to find my way home

CHORUS:
From stilettos to moccasins
Our spirit dances within
On our way to resolution
We find our peace
And this is who I am
Broken barriers and new discoveries

My spirit I now reclaim

Coming home to who I am

Taking honour in my name

No longer a prisoner lost in this world

Look within my shell

To find that pearl

CHORUS:

From stilettos to moccasins

Our spirit dances within

On our way to resolution

We find our peace

And this is who I am
Appendix H: Cedar Lodge gathering press release

For Immediate Release: February 13, 2009

U of S Researcher Taking a Unique Approach to Addictions Treatment

A partnership among the University of Saskatchewan (U of S), the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), and the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF) is working to increase the substance abuse research capacity, strengthen the training of addiction workers, and increase the effective use of research resources in substance abuse prevention and treatment in a unique way – through song.

On Monday, February 16th at Cedar Lodge at Blackstrap Lake, a unique workshop will take place. U of S sociology researcher Colleen Dell and 30 addiction research workers, research participants, and treatment workers will work with Woodland Cree singer/songwriter and Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards nominee Violet Naytowhow of Prince Albert to create a song portraying the healing experiences of Aboriginal women who have struggled with drug abuse and addiction.

The song will be recorded and shared with treatment providers for later use in their addiction treatment programs.

“By creating participatory forums to foster addictions research, our capacity to explore solutions to substance abuse and addiction is enhanced,” says Research Chair Dell.

Dell and her team asked addiction treatment providers what skills and traits they find important in assisting Aboriginal women who abuse drugs and alcohol. These providers, the majority of whom are recovered drug abusers themselves, spoke strongly about respect and hope, and the need for women to reclaim their identity as Aboriginal women as they begin the healing process.

“Creating a song that recognizes and celebrates the voices of women’s experiences in healing from illicit drug abuse will help us spread the messages of those experiences in a meaningful way,” says Sharon Clarke, NNAPF Executive Director. “We will then merge those messages with academic literature and share this research with others, in the hope of ultimately achieving a greater impact on policy and practice of addictions treatment in Saskatchewan and across Canada.”
“A key part of how we deliver on our vision of a healthier future for all Canadians is ensuring that practice is informed by evidence and experience,” says Rita Notarandrea, CCSA Deputy Chief Executive Officer. “Capturing the unique experiences of Aboriginal women who have recovered from their addictions in song as a way of informing treatment practice is most inspiring.”

Dell’s project will also include development of a series of fact sheets to describe the research findings of treatment providers, women currently in treatment, and those who have completed treatment. A professional documentary will also be created and will include footage on the creation of the song and first-hand accounts of some of the experiences of the researchers and participants of this project. All the tools will be used to inform women-specific policy and programming for National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program treatment centres.

Dell, Naytowhow, and other workshop participants are available for media interviews on Monday. Please call Jenny Gardipy at (306) 227-2905 to arrange an interview time, or to enquire about participating in the workshop.

-30-

Leanne Nyirfa
U of S Research Communications
(306) 966-2427
APPENDIX I: News release

HONORING REBELS WITH A CAUSE IN SASKATCHEWAN

The Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan will host their seventh annual fundraising event “Rebels with A Cause” on Wednesday, May 13th, 2009 at the Odeon Events Centre. Every year this event honours ‘rebel’ women who have made significant contributions to their communities. These women are ‘rebels’ because of their feistiness, innovation, and determination to create change in their communities.

Tantoo Cardinal, widely acclaimed Canadian and award winning actress from theatre, television and film roles such as in Dances with Wolves, Legends of the Fall and North of 60, is this year’s special guest rebel. The 2009 local rebel honourees are Net Davenport, Valerie Desjarlais, Joanne Horsley, and Lynn Thompson.

Cocktails begin at 5:30pm with entertainment by renowned Saskatoon musician Skip Kutz. Dinner and a silent auction will follow at 6:30. The Rebels awards celebration will kick off at 8:00 with the premiere release of a song entitled "From Stilettos to Moccasins", sung by Violet Naytowhow. The song portrays the healing experiences of Aboriginal women who have struggled with drug abuse and addiction. In collaboration with Naytowhow, the song was written earlier this year by Aboriginal women who are healing from illicit drug abuse and problems with the law, and those who are helping them on their journey. The song is part of an addictions research project being conducted by the University of Saskatchewan, the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. To listen to the song on-line, visit: http://www.nnapf.org/.

Please join us on May 13 to celebrate our “Rebels with a Cause” and the tremendous contributions these women have made to the communities they serve.

With respect and compassion, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan advocates for the freedom of criminalized women through the provision of programs, supports and services. We strive for solutions to meet the needs of individual women in overcoming systemic barriers including poverty, violence and discrimination that can lead to criminalized behaviour.

For advanced tickets or more information on the Society, visit The Elizabeth Fry Society office, 201-165 3rd Avenue South, call 306-934-4606 or email: efry@sasktel.net.

Caroleen Wright, Executive Director

Phone: 306-934-4606, Fax: 306-652-2933, Email: cw.efry@sasktel.net
APPENDIX J: Mass Email

PLEASE HELP US SHARE OUR VOICE WITH THE WORLD BY PASSING THIS EMAIL ON TO YOUR FRIENDS & COLLEAGUES!

Each of us has a story to tell, and likely a song whose words inspire us. Music is a way to give voice to our life journeys. The song From Stilettos to Moccasins, sung by Violet Naytowhow, portrays the healing experiences of Aboriginal women in Canada who have struggled with drug abuse and come into conflict with the law. In collaboration with Naytowhow, the lyrics of the song were written earlier this year by Aboriginal women who are in the process of healing from illicit drug abuse and their experiences of criminalization, and by those who are helping them along their healing journey.

Please take a few minutes to listen to the song and help us to share our voice by passing this email forward to others, locally and afar. Any questions, comments, or feedback on the song is very welcome and can be emailed to fromstilettostomoccasins@live.com You can also visit our Facebook group – From Stilettos to Moccasins – for more information on the project or our project webpage: http://www.arts.usask.ca/sociology/SociologyContent/FacultyDetail.php?bioid=1165 If the attachment for the song did not come through with this email, you can also access it at: http://www.nnafp.org/stilettos-moccasins-song-violet-naytowhow-and-unique-group-aboriginal-women

From Stilettos to Moccasins is part of a CIHR funded addictions research project being conducted by the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, the University of Saskatchewan and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. The project examines the role that identity and stigma have in the healing journeys of criminalized Aboriginal women in treatment for drug abuse at centres across Canada. The words in this song are based on the project findings and were developed in collaboration with women who shared their stories with the project. A workshop and video based on the song for women currently accessing treatment is in the planning stage and will be available in the Fall of 2009.
APPENDIX K: Funders

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch

Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan

National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation

Research Chair in Substance Abuse, University of Saskatchewan, funded through a grant provided by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health
Migwetch, Kitatamihin, Mikwec, thank you ... to the Creator and all others who have guided and walked alongside us on our ‘research journey’. We had the honour to speak and share in the lives of women in treatment centres, treatment staff, and women who had completed treatment programs across Canada. The women who shared their stories highlighted the importance for them to share their experiences so others could benefit from them. Your courage, strength and commitment have been our inspiration. Through tools like those discussed in this report, your voice will continue to inform and inspire many others on their healing paths from criminalization and drug abuse and those working with them.