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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.

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