



Unique Approach to Aboriginal Healing Awarded Women of Distinction

Ottawa, June 28, 2010 – With support from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) and the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF), YWCA Saskatoon Women of Distinction Awards were presented to Colleen Dell, Research Chair in Substance Abuse & Associate Professor at the U of S Department of Sociology & School of Public Health, and Sharon Acoose, Assistant Professor at the First Nations University of Canada School of Indian Social Work, for their unique approach to translating the findings of a study that examined the healing journeys of Aboriginal women from drug abuse.

In February 2009, in collaboration with singer/songwriter Violet Naytowhow, Dell, Acoose and 30 addiction workers, research participants, Elders and treatment providers composed a song—based on research findings—portraying the journey of women’s healing experiences. In November of the same year, working alongside Mae Star Productions in Saskatchewan, an accompanying music video was released at the CCSA Issues of Substance Conference.

“We wanted to explore the possibilities of sharing women’s voices of healing through music and create a video that can strengthen capacity in understanding Aboriginal women’s treatment needs,” said Dell. “I am proud to be part of this collaborative project and honoured to be working with those that know firsthand the difficulties of women recovering from drug abuse and the healing journey.”

From Stilettoes to Moccasins, the community-based song and music video, gives voice to First Nations, Métis and Inuit women healing from drug abuse, addictions and difficulties with the law. This video is part of a larger research initiative that is designed to create additional tools and solutions for substance abuse prevention and treatment. The study took a participatory approach to exploring solutions to substance abuse and addictions of criminalized Aboriginal women. The research investigated the role that identity and stigma have in the healing journey for those in treatment at drug abuse centres across Canada, and found that understanding the intersection between the negative impacts of stigma and the resilient benefits of cultural identity is central to women’s healing.

“This was an inspiring project to give back to my community and Aboriginal women who have and are still struggling with drug abuse and addiction,” said Acoose. “We are celebrating the voices of women’s experiences and the survival techniques needed in dealing with the pain that has been deeply embedded by abuse and trauma.”

“The objective was to inform the research affecting current policies and practice by sharing lived experiences and developing appropriate mediums to engage those most vulnerable in the recovery process,” said Michel Perron, CCSA’s Chief Executive Officer.

**Background:**

The 29th Annual YWCA Saskatoon Women of Distinction Awards presented on May 27, 2010, recognized achievements and activities from nominated women in a variety of fields who contributed to the health and future of community.

Support for the *From Stilettos to Moccasins* project was made possible through Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), and contributions from a number of groups, including CCSA, U of S and NNAPF. This partnership allowed for in-kind funding, staff contributions, advertising and an overall commitment to better awareness and understanding in an under-researched area. Both MoUs will be renewed during 2010. The study was initially funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

From Stilettos to Moccasins, originally released November 17, 2009 at the national conference of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QRb8wA2iHs>. An excerpt from the YWCA Saskatoon Women of Distinction Awards ceremony can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCPziRNe1q8>.

The wider scope of the overall research project is grounded in a community-based participatory approach to research and Aboriginal methodology. Interviews were conducted with more than 100 First Nations, Inuit and Métis women in treatment for illicit drug use. Detailed background information on the project is available at <http://www.addictionresearchchair.com/creating-knowledge/national/cihr-research-project>.

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About CCSA:

With a legislated mandate to reduce alcohol- and other drug-related harms, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) provides leadership on national priorities, fosters knowledge translation within the field and creates sustainable partnerships that maximize collective efforts. CCSA receives funding support from Health Canada.

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