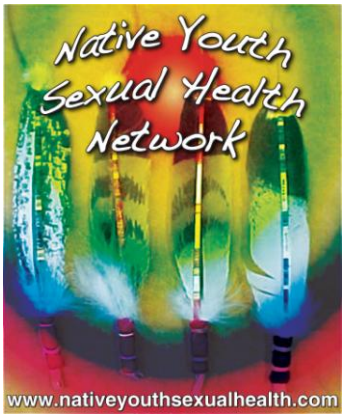
WALKING WITH Our SISTERS



WWOS Youth Engagement & Leadership

Erin Marie Konsmo, Youth Coordinator & Media Contact, Walking With Our Sisters
Media Arts Justice & Projects Coordinator, Native Youth Sexual Health Network (partner organization)

Why Youth?

Youth involvement and engagement within Walking With Our Sisters is a key aspect to the healing and ceremony of this bundle as it travels. A part of what makes WWOS ceremonial for youth is that it provides a combination of remembering, honouring, building connections to culture, and opportunities for justice for youth NOW. Our Indigenous nations are unique and following local protocol throughout the time that WWOS is in community is a time where knowledge among young people can be built (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous).

Young people have been involved since the beginning of this project in making vamps, sharing the word on social media, having conversations about where violence comes from in their lives and how they've been impacted by the loss of family members or friends. When we also involve young people in local organizing in meaningful ways as the bundle travels, we will start to rebuild and reclaim positions of youth leadership. When young people are given meaningful opportunities to engage in community based initiatives like WWOS, they also create opportunities for change in our lives.

By centering youth throughout WWOS and supporting them in leadership positions we are not only engaged in active violence prevention, but also honoring them now by building them within our nations.

Experiencing WWOS as Youth

As the Youth Coordinator, I've heard some of the ways that this project has already transformed young people's lives and allowed for a space directed by culture and ceremony to heal from colonial legacies of violence. It's transformed my life, and given me new family. Being able to sit in ceremony with youth, walk beside each other as we go through the lodge, and care for one another are the spaces many Indigenous youth are looking for.

Young Indigenous women, girls, LGBTTQQIA*, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming youth are disproportionately affected by gender based violence and represented among the rates of missing and murdered. Having young people involved in WWOS is not only a way to honor and remember those young people, but to also work for justice for our young people now and for our future generations.

Tips for youth engagement:

-Engage young people early on, when conversations begin (ie. Young people on local organizing committees, community conversations, planning events and installation).
-Support youth specific spaces, events, or organizing throughout WWOS in community to highlight ongoing work or issues regarding violence that young Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit youth face (ie. Youth talking/sharing circles, youth art spaces, etc).
-Build opportunities for mentorship and learning about ceremony and the role of the lodge, keeper, medicines and protocol (ie. Build youth into ceremony, learning about the protocol of the exhibit, local medicines used, or mentoring as a keeper with an older keeper).
-Have youth lead the social media (ie. Posting pictures to Twitter, Facebook, video of community stories, speakers corners, and/or podcast, etc) to document and share community and youth experiences with WWOS.

For more information or support you can skype/call with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, or go on our website at www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com to see more ideas for youth engagement and leadership.

For more information about how to build youth involvement into WWOS while it is in your community, contact:

Erin Marie Konsmo Walking With Our Sisters - Youth Coordinator & Media Contact, Native Youth Sexual Health Network - Media Arts Justice & Projects Coordinator
ekonsmo@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

*LGBTTQQIA is an commonly used acronym used to describe Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans gender, Trans sexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and Asexual identifying people.

Youth Sharing Circle – Edmonton, Alberta (October 9, 2013)