

Community Leadership in ACTION!”



Indigenous Young Women - Speaking Our Truths,
Building Our Strengths: The Making of Community
Actions across Canada



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1. Introduction



“Convening a project for Indigenous young women has been a dream of mine for quite some time. My vision is to have a project in which many young Indigenous women can participate to share their experiences, stories, voices, and just to be there in unity and spirit of togetherness. I would also like our Elders to participate, as the generational gap between us is ever shifting, and we need our Elders to guide us and support us as young Indigenous women today.”

- Native Youth Sexual Health Network

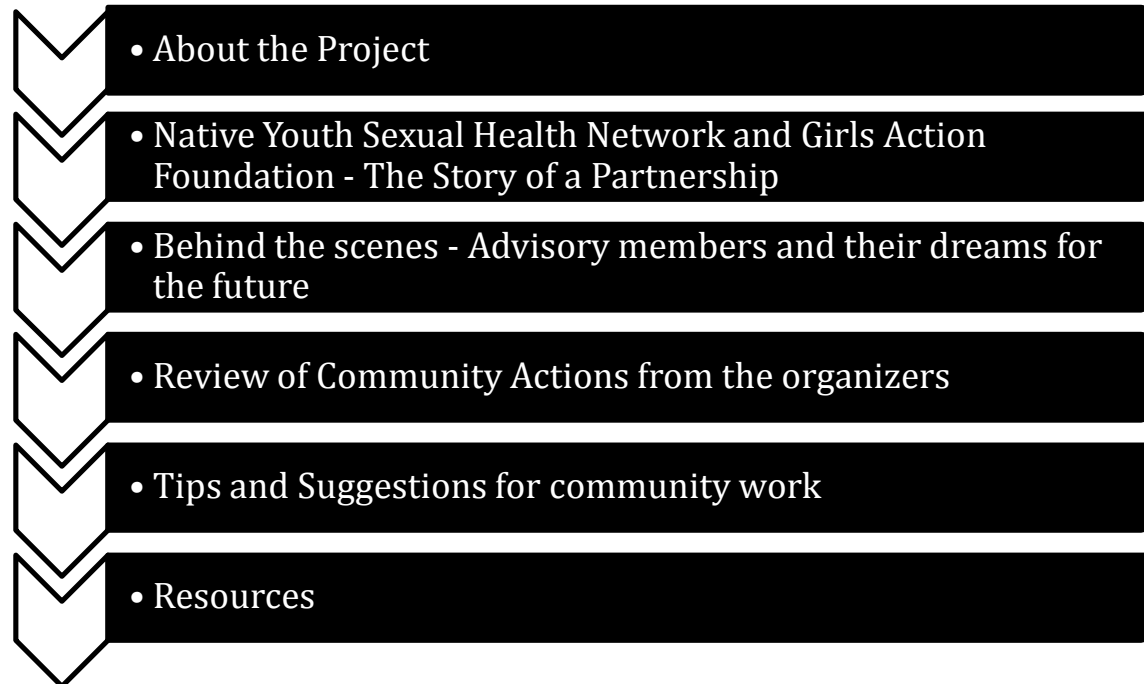


The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is in partnership with Girls Action Foundation for the Indigenous Young Women - Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths national project. Led by a peer Advisory made up of 10 Indigenous young women, coordinated by NYSHN directly, this project focuses on Indigenous young women's leadership, empowerment, solidarity-building, and ending violence. This project seeks to meet young women where they are at; emphasizing the reality that youth ideas matter and that youth are experts in their own right! Indigenous women's strength has always existed in Indigenous communities, and it continues to grow. Elders, teachers, and mentors play a key role in this project, which is otherwise by and for self-identified young Indigenous women between the ages of 16-25, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, status or non-status, beneficiary or non-beneficiary. The project is also open to participants who identify as women, Trans, Two Spirit, or gender non-conforming.

Intention and purpose of the National Project

The objectives set out for the project included organizing a first-ever national gathering of Indigenous young women, supporting peer-led **Community Actions**, and producing three tools on leadership and community organizing. This report-turned-community-resource will focus on the Community Actions which were an integral part of the national project. Not only does this publication celebrate the accomplishments of Community Action organizers, we also hope it will act as a guide for future work. Both the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Girls Action Foundation know how important it is to share the knowledge and skills gained through such projects, which is why this report is for everyone!

Featured here are details of the Community Actions, from visioning to planning to implementing, from the voices of the Advisory, staff and participants.

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- About the Project
 - Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Girls Action Foundation - The Story of a Partnership
 - Behind the scenes - Advisory members and their dreams for the future
 - Review of Community Actions from the organizers
 - Tips and Suggestions for community work
 - Resources

This report is also one of three tools developed in the context of this National Project. Please check out and share the two zines “Indigenous Young Women LEAD!” and “Start something Fierce!”, listed in the “Resources” section of the report. Both are publications designed by and for young women about taking action in the many communities we live, work and participate in.

Why Community Actions?

Part of this national project was a gathering in November of 2011 of some 100 Indigenous young women, Elders and mentors in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory. The four-day gathering covered leadership and empowerment building through skill-sharing workshops, culturally based activities, and the sharing of strategies to end the many types of violence we face as Indigenous young women. All activities were peer-led with themes ranging from sexual health, photography, to suicide prevention and also

included collective art projects, teachings from Elders and Mentors and even a concert performance night!

The Advisory knew this had to be more than a one-time gathering for a select number of people. The words 'growth', 'sustainability' and 'community involvement' kept coming up at Advisory meetings and from feedback about the project. If Indigenous young women were to truly 'Build our strengths' as part of this project, that meant real world opportunities to practice skills learned in Community Action projects!

"This is part of the plan to make this a larger movement, not just a gathering or an action but nourishing each other's work as it continues to grow. Our hope is that through the skills and knowledge exchange that happened as part of the project, Indigenous young women will continue to be the catalyst for change within their own communities. With the skills shared and conversations continuing through Community Actions, the stories will continue to be written."

- Erin Konsmo, The Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Main themes of the project:

These themes informed the Community Actions. With the financial support of a small grant, participants had an opportunity to take what they learned and organize a project to implement in their communities. The goal was to keep the gathering sustainable, and allow the ripple effects of our learning to continue through peer education and knowledge sharing.

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- Indigenous young women's leadership
 - Empowerment
 - Solidarity building
 - Reclaiming knowledge and traditions
 - Ending racism and violence
 - Arts for social change
 - Skill-sharing and peer facilitation

On the very first evening of the gathering in November, participants were asked what issues, problems or ideas they carried with them, and were reminded to keep those in mind when it came time to apply for Community Actions. One of the main activities was a large group-facilitated Zine-making session. The activity focused on brainstorming how to take action on issues that participants were passionate about, or that they wanted to work on at the gathering. At the closing circle, the Advisory specifically asked participants what kind of process should be used for selecting Actions, emphasizing values of fairness and representation. This meant that anyone who applied to participate in the gathering was eligible for funding, regardless of acceptance or attendance. Even those who did not apply could team up with eligible applicants to access funding.

It is these actions, the gathering, and its' participants, Elders, mentors and staff of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Girls Action Foundation that made this project so much more than a one-time gathering. This was, and is, movement building in action.

2. About the project and partnership

“Girls Action Foundation is proud to be a partner in this important project because it invests in the strength and knowledge of Indigenous young women, who must be leading efforts for change.” - Tatiana Fraser, Former

Executive Director of Girls Action Foundation

When the Native Youth Sexual Health Network approached Girls Action Foundation to suggest a partnership to make this happen, it became a long term relationship filled with negotiation, compromise, and most of all, mutual respect. Relationships with non-Indigenous ‘ally’ organizations can be tough and what was appreciated most, was knowing that it was the leadership of the National Indigenous Youth Advisory who ultimately made the decisions of the project. Natasha Latter and Sophie-Claude Miller, both talented young Indigenous women, were hired by NYSHN and Girls Action as part of this national partnership both to make the Advisory’s dreams come true, and ensure that everything was indeed led by and for Indigenous young women. Community Actions were always part of the original vision of this project even before funding was secured. The leadership experience of the Advisory had

seen and participated in one-time gatherings and knew that to effectively create change, there had to be a longer-term vision and action plan.

About the Native Youth Sexual Health Network:

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is an organization by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice throughout the United States and Canada. The reclamation and revitalization of traditional knowledge about people's fundamental human rights over their bodies and spaces, intersected with present-day realities is fundamental to our work. We work within the full spectrum of reproductive and sexual health for Indigenous peoples.

About Girls Action:

Girls Action Foundation is a national charitable organization. We lead and seed girls' programs across Canada. We build girls' and young women's skills and confidence and inspire action to change the world. Through our innovative programs, research, and support to a network of over 300 partnering organizations and projects, Girls Action reaches over 60,000 girls and young women. We reach remote, marginalized and urban communities, including those in the North.

“Being involved with this project was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me. I was at the first meeting with Tatiana Fraser when they were discussing what the Native Youth Sexual Health Network wanted to accomplish and what the collaboration could look like. I was also involved in supporting various aspects: fundraising, logistics, coordinating evaluation etc. I consider myself fortunate to have been in that position; it was a rare opportunity to see some important concepts made tangible: peer-to-peer mentorship, and youth-led, consensus decision-making. The Community Actions represent something really special, the young women taking the lead in their communities. The subjects and actions are diverse, but each action responds to a need identified by the young women themselves and involves radiating positive energy in these communities. These actions demonstrate that solutions and answers do reside first and foremost in the communities themselves.”

- Fabienne Pierre-Jacques, Former Program Director at Girls Action Foundation

Importance of local and grassroots organizing

For a lot of Indigenous communities, cultural protocol tells us that we are guests anywhere that is not our traditional homeland or territory.

For the Gathering, the Advisory identified this as a central organizing principle, ensuring we had the support of local Indigenous peoples to host the Gathering in their territory. This meant that the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation and local Two-Spirit representatives led our opening ceremonies and welcomed us to their land. And even though this project was by and for self-identified Indigenous young women, we balanced it with the role that men can play in women's leadership. To help us connect with each other and with local tradition, local men and women worked together to create a terrific traditional Cree feast and round dance, which was a highlight of the gathering for all.

For the Community Actions, working at a grassroots level meant encouraging applicants to involve their local community leadership in some way. Many organizers did this by involving local families, community youth and women's groups, local or campus associations. Some of the Community Actions also included intergenerational and multi-gendered participation.

3. National Indigenous Youth Advisory Committee

As a project by and for young Indigenous women, the Native Youth Sexual Health Network put together a peer Advisory committee of 10 Indigenous young women from across Canada who led the project through all the stages, from visioning the project prior to its inception, coming up with ideas on how to make it culturally relevant, facilitating the workshops at the gathering, to selecting Community Actions. This important process is part of how NYSHN does its work, ensuring that peer-led work is representative of the community.

National Indigenous Youth Advisory Committee Members and Staff

Jasmine Redfern - Iqaluit, Nunavut

Theresa Lightfoot - Makkovik, Labrador

Kari-Dawn Wuttunee - Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Brittany Jones - Ottawa, Ontario

Erin Konsmo - Innisfail, Alberta
Krysta Williams - Toronto, Ontario
Jocelyn Formsma - Ottawa, Ontario
Marie Holeiter - Goose Bay, Labrador
Amanda Darroch-Mudry - Whitehorse, Yukon
Janice Grey - Aupaluk, Nunavik **Natasha**
Latter - Montreal, Quebec **Sophie-Claude**
Miller - Montreal, Quebec

We asked Advisory member, Jocelyn Formsma, about what this project means to her, and its significance. We wanted to know how the project title, “Indigenous Young Women’s Gathering - Speaking Our Truths: Building Our Strengths” related to her role on the Advisory.

Jocelyn responded:

The title "Indigenous Young Women - Speaking our Truths: Building our Strengths" came about from our discussions as an Advisory about the kind of energy we wanted this project to have. I believe that Indigenous young women are already aware of what is needed in their communities. They have the ideas, the solutions and have the potential to enact the solutions if they had the support, the resources and the skills to do so. The first part "speaking our truths" speaks to the importance of making space for these young women to speak for themselves instead of having other people speak for them, and also creating solutions for them based on their own thoughts of their issues. The second part "building our strengths" speaks to the inherent abilities these young women already have. We just need to build on what they already possess. It's not about giving them something they don't have or "us" giving it to "them". It's about supporting them to enact their own solutions.

We also asked her, “What was the significance of this project being led by and for Indigenous young women?”

Indigenous young people are portrayed in the media and everywhere as marginalized, at the bottom of every socio-economic indicator and maybe even

helpless. This project showed us that this is just not true. From planning, to implementing the plan, fundraising, doing the workshops, ceremony, cultural protocols, etc., Indigenous young women did it all! As far as we know, this is the first time that something like this on this scale has taken place. Indigenous young women are fully capable, we know this as Indigenous young women, but now it's time to promote this idea as the norm, not the exception. Being a part of this Advisory was powerful, inspiring and empowering. I felt like a better person after leaving those meetings and I felt like a wiser person after leaving the gathering.

Hopes and Dreams for the Future!

We asked the Advisory what they hoped for the future of this project and their work together as young Indigenous women. Members overwhelmingly expressed hope that all aspects of the project would continue - the Advisory itself, the national gathering, and of course more support for further work on the Community Actions! Each action organizer has more in mind on how to continue their work and the Advisory very much wants to see that happen!

“My hope is that this project continues, and that it continues to be run by and for Indigenous young women. We need to continue this good work for the coming generations. In the technologically advanced world we live in today, it can be difficult for youth to find mentors, or to develop meaningful face-to-face relationships; this was a forum for both. It has been an honour to witness the strength of this project and the young women involved in it. It will be a further honour to pass this to the next group of Indigenous young women wishing to take the reins, as the desire of our communities to continue this work shows that we have done something good, something needed.

Having said that, I would LOVE to stay on the Advisory group, I think it needs some level of stability in the still infant stages of the project, so I would hope that we can continue the work we are doing, and work to strengthen our relationships as well.”

- Amanda Darroch-Mudry

“The Indigenous Young Women's project remains not only a time to meet, but for all Indigenous Women to have company and support in the nations and communities they want to paint. It is an opportunity for empowerment at nation-to-nation levels - recalling strong ancestral voices to move shivers in the changes of our generations - into a force that creates nothing short of the colours we all dream of.”

- Erin Konsmo

“My hope for the project is that it becomes an annual event reaching more Young Indigenous Women across Canada every year! I would love to see more hype about the gathering and Community Actions in the media and throughout “Indian Country”. The gathering was an amazing experience and I believe it is an experience that all Indigenous women should be a part of! I would like to see the Advisory group continue to communicate and together find ways to keep this project going. It would also be nice to expand our reach and find other women who may be interested in the project at an advisory level.” - Brittany Jones

“I personally hope the project continues on and that there is another chance for Community Actions as well as another national gathering. I feel like it was a great learning opportunity and that there was a great network formed between participants and IYW Advisory; it is important for this to keep going.” - TJ Lightfoot

“I am so thankful for the time and connection I was able to share with the women of the Indigenous Young Women's Advisory. It's easy to go about our busy lives trying so desperately to find or make space among the general population or our communities, that we can forget the importance and power of coming together as young women.

It is my hope that this network created by the gathering, actions and Advisory can live and breathe and endure. I certainly hope to keep my connection with the women of the Advisory, and most of all, hope that we will see another opportunity for a gathering where young women can come together to teach and learn and inspire even more Community Actions and activities. Thank you.” - Jasmine Redfern

Kari-Dawn Wuttunee listed her hopes for:

- The project to continue first of all!
- Increased funding to increase number of participants and actions.
- More public knowledge about the project and that Indigenous young women are taking a hold of their own future, and in what that means for our respective territories.
- Workshops based on best practice for building self-esteem, growth and acknowledging our bodies.
- Acknowledging how culture shapes our opinions and how different we can be from each other, and how it also unifies us.
- The creation of a solid network between participants, Advisory and other young women involved in making this a success; acknowledging that we are stronger together and should build together.

4. Community Actions

Jump-starting Community Actions to support Indigenous young women to go back to their communities and take action was an integral part of the original vision of this project. Lots of applications were received; however, funding was only available for 10 specific actions. As a result, many partnerships, relationships, and collaborations were formed which went beyond a single event, action or person. Each of these actions, some of which comprised multiple events, was a spark that ignited passion and planning for future work.

What kind of ‘community’ could apply?

In the application forms, it was very clear that applicants could self-identify what community meant to them, so long as the leadership stayed with Indigenous young women. Below, you will read about a variety of communities, based on specific places or geographic locations, family connections, or peers with similar life experiences. The fewer restrictions put on what youth organizing looks like, the more action is possible!

What kind of ‘actions’ could be organized?

The same philosophy applies to what is considered an ‘action’. Indigenous communities have so much diversity when it comes to abilities, access and education, and applicants surprised us with their imagination and creativity!

“The sky is the limit as long it’s an issue that is important to you, well-rooted in your reality and is linked to your community.”

- Excerpt from our Community Action application

Community Actions take shape

This section outlines and highlights the very inspiring work of the Community Action organizers and participants. They talk about who they are, why they did their action and give some advice on how other Indigenous young women can take action themselves!

Megan Whyte and Tsiehente Herne

I am Megan Kanerahtenha:wi Whyte, a 21 year old artist and art educator from the Mohawk Nation of Kahnawake. I am entering my fourth year of the Art Education Specialization with a minor in Psychology at Concordia University. The purpose of my studies is to culminate a growing curriculum, consisting of multimedia visual art and exploratory media to address issues of Indigenous rights, cultural traditions, and hybrid identities.

Tsiehente Herne is currently an intern for the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. She is 22 years old from the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation. Growing up loving sports and being happy, she did a lot of community work in and around Akwesasne. She is a graduate of the Akwesasne Freedom School where she also works part-time today. Her first job was working at the Onontohken Treatment Center. She has worked with children and youth in different capacities including Youth Forums and daycare; she found she had a passion for teaching young children when she returned to Akwesasne Freedom School to teach Pre-K in the language and culture of the Mohawk people. She decided to pursue early childhood education as a career path and is now a graduate of Algonquin College with a diploma in Aboriginal Studies and Child and Youth Work. She looks forward to continuing to work with initiatives that support youth and community empowerment.

Megan and Tsiehente teamed up to make the first ever youth journal about Mohawk Identity! The question posed in the call out was "What does Mohawk

mean to you?". Megan as the Kahnawake representative, and Tsiehente as the Akwesasne representative, they worked together to start a journal in order to share the youth perspective in political, social and traditional issues. The purpose of this journal is to bridge the gap between generations and communities.

"The youth in both the Kahnawake and Askwesasne communities need a voice to speak our languages, truths, and our strengths. We are all working to fight for the same rights and for the same dreams, so why not work together?" - Megan Whyte



We asked Megan...

What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

I was inspired to take on a Community Action because not many youth in my community do. The basis of this action began with a self-reflection—what does being part of a community mean? What does being part of a Mohawk community mean? In various conversations with the youth in Kahnawake, I quickly realized that the young people in the community had important knowledge and ideas to

share with each other—but most of them did not have a venue to do so. We talk about giving youth the power to speak, yet we so readily forget that it takes courage to share our voices with the masses. In response, I wanted to create a forum for the youth to share their ideas with each other and the surrounding communities in a less confrontational approach than speaking. Through visual and written submissions, I wanted to create a collection of youth ideas on issues that matter between Akwesasne and Kahnawake—because our voice matters regardless of what language we speak.

What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

I am proud of the variety of submissions that I received for the journal. The theme—“what does Mohawk mean to you?”— was broad enough to encompass the scope of people’s experiences, studies and beliefs. The contributors had much to share about what it meant to be part of the community and I am proud of every single one of them. I definitely see this journal as the beginning of something greater for our people, as many adults were interested in submitting. The journal is the first step to bridging our communities and our thoughts together. I believe that the journal is important documentation for all members of both communities to read and learn about the realities our youth face as future leaders.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?

- Tip** Make contact with all the social media in your community and talk about your action - most will take you on.
- Tip** Find supporters - doing the project on your own is difficult.
- Tip** Keep in contact with and update your participants - keep them involved in every step of the project.

What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

I hope for all of our communities to one day be connected—we have a bigger fight to fight and we’ll be stronger if we learn to stand together. To achieve this goal, I believe we have to start at the foundation—our voices and our hearts. Through more venues like the journal, we can give power and resonance to all the types of voices that are found amongst our youth—musical, theatrical, verbal, written, visual etc. Together, we can make change.

We say “Community Action” and you say...

Youth independence and empowerment.

Paula Johnson

My name is Paula Johnson; I am the oldest of four daughters, university graduate, girl guide leader, chef and youth programmer of 13 diverse programs in our community. I’m a proud Cree woman.

Paula hosted a youth action day called “Say NO to Lateral Violence” which was an opportunity for young women and youth in the community to voice the ways they are affected by lateral violence.

Lateral means ‘to the side’ so this violence comes from each other as Indigenous people, our families and communities.



We learn it from the violence we experience through racism, stereotypes and discrimination now and throughout history.

We asked Paula...
What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?
The work that I do through youth programming.



What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

Seeing young women stand up with a microphone to be heard.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?

Tip

Any idea you have, believe in it!

Tip

You too can be the voice in your community! Such as having an event like this.

What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

To be stronger; our culture is beautiful and should be shared with the world.

We say “Community Action” and you say..

Giving a voice to the people!!! Young people, young women to be exact.

Lauren McComber

Lauren McComber is a Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) woman of the Bear Clan studying broadcast journalism and First Peoples studies at Concordia University. She is the founder of Kahnawake's women's group Carrying Our Roots to Empowerment (CORE), established in 2012.

Lauren and CORE hosted a workshop together on traditional forms of healing for survivors of sexual abuse and how to bring those back into community on a grassroots level. Participants are interested in learning more about traditional Indigenous forms of healing including sweats, moon ceremonies, cedar baths and puberty rights ceremonies.

We asked Lauren...

What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

I was inspired by a research project I did for one of my First Peoples studies courses, 'research strategies', on traditional forms of healing for survivors of sexual abuse. I was so inspired by what I discovered- a traditional Indigenous form of healing for survivors of sexual abuse - that I wanted to share it with my community! I figured that I would also include other presentations on forms of traditional Indigenous healing, et voila! My women's group - Carrying Our Roots to Empowerment (CORE)- had its first workshop, "Traditional Healing for Women: Taking Back our Power", sponsored by Girls Action Foundation. I really wanted to empower our women with our traditional ways. I believe a crucial part to healing is knowing oneself, and as Indigenous people, we need to know our culture in order to know ourselves. They just go hand in hand.

What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of the fact that my Community Action drew together women of all ages (18-60) from Kahnawake who sincerely wanted to learn traditional forms of healing to put to use in their jobs, at home or within the community. Their enthusiasm was very rewarding.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?

Tip

Know exactly what you want to accomplish with your community action.

Tip

List the actions you need to take to reach that goal.

Tip

Follow the steps/actions you need to reach your goal.

Tip

Reach out to your community through the media, social networks, and word of mouth. Never doubt the power of word of mouth.

Tip

Be prepared for changes in plans due to temperamental weather, events and people; do not allow this to deter you from your original goal.

Tip

Trust that everything will turn out as it should.

What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

My hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities are for them to begin grassroots movements towards reclaiming their traditional knowledge, customs and languages. Without these, we cannot call ourselves Indigenous. Also, within our traditional knowledge systems, customs and languages are effective solutions to everyday issues we face - we just need to take the time to find them and properly utilize them.

We say “Community Action”, and you say.....

Reclaiming our power as Indigenous people!

Alissa Derrick

My name is Alissa Derrick; I am an Aboriginal Criminology Major at Simon Fraser University. I grew up in a small town, Prince Rupert, BC and moved to Vancouver BC to pursue my passion of sports. During that time, I participated in the North American Indigenous Games, High School Provincials, and three Canadian Nationals. I am currently on a mission to help urban Aboriginal people living in Vancouver. I am heavily involved with the Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association (KAYA) and the First Nations Student Association (FNSA) board at Simon Fraser University.

Alissa hosted a mental health and wellness workshop “Caring from the Inside Out” which focused on self, well-being and positive talk. About 30 Simon Fraser University staff, students, single moms and international students participated. Plans are underway for another event that would focus on a younger women’s audience and needs.

We asked Alissa...

What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

The ability to grow a strong network for young women and mothers at Simon Fraser University.

What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

I was able to host this event, organize, and completely plan it independently. I am proud that I had the resources to find someone that was culturally appropriate for the Indigenous women at Simon Fraser University.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?

- Tip** Keep receipts at home and not in your purse, agenda etc. This ensures you don't lose them.
- Tip** Be open to suggestions from the resources that you use.
- Tip** Advertise, advertise, and advertise more! I found it effective to send out an email three weeks before, with posters, and flyers.
- Tip** I then sent out another set of emails, with the help of the Indigenous Student Association.

What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

To become strong leaders and fight against strong biases and stereotypes that Aboriginal people face. To learn balance: to include spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health. To learn the importance of healthy food! To use their voices when entering the post-secondary world. This is very important to me, and is something I heavily practice while I am in post-secondary as a Criminology Major, and with the understanding that there is a high representation of both male and female Aboriginal people in all areas of the criminal justice system.

We say "Community Action", and you say.....

The right to make a difference and promote change in a culturally appropriate way.

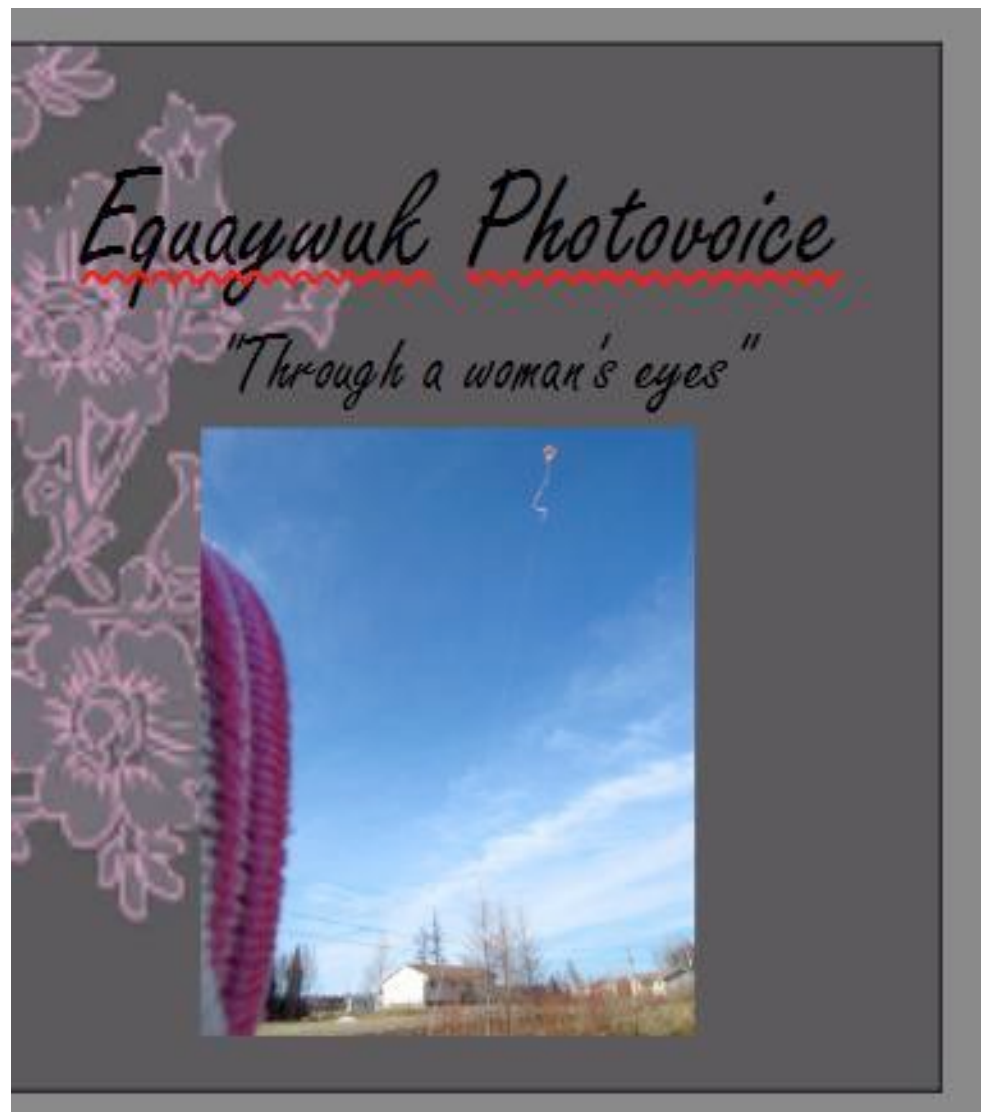
Ardelle Sagutcheway

My name is Ardelle Sagutcheway and I am from Fort Hope, Ontario. I am a single mother to a beautiful seven-year-old girl. I have lived in my community for most of my life. I am also an established writer who wants to be a nurse.

Ardelle facilitated a collaborative photovoice project to focus on the lives of Aboriginal women living on reserves. Plans are underway for another photovoice project for LGBTQ young people.

“We learned how to deal with issues that came our way with leading a project. It also gave us confidence in our leadership abilities.”

- Ardelle



We asked Ardelle...

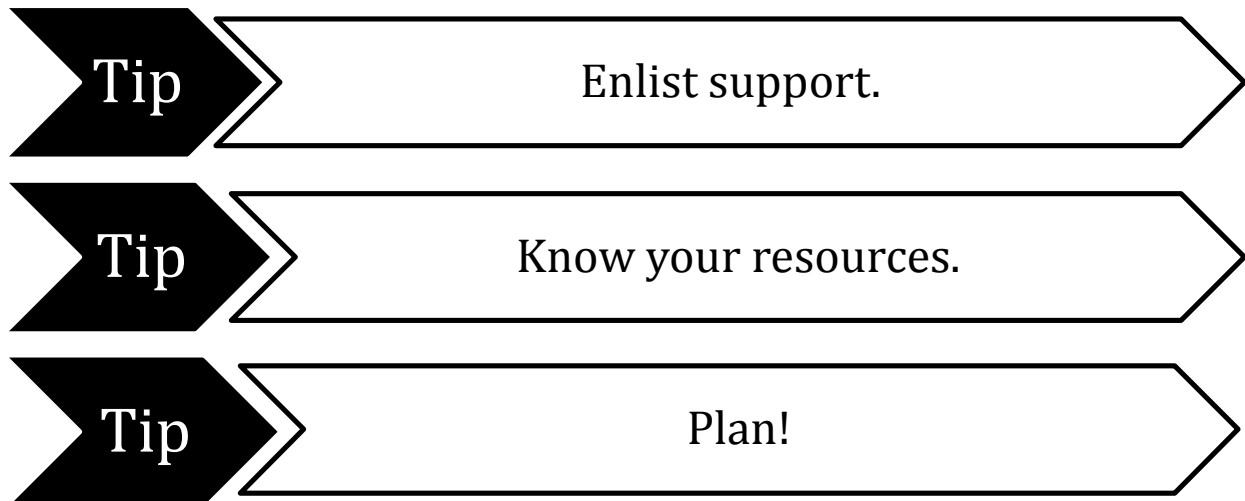
What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

I wanted to see change in my community. I also saw that nothing is being done for young women and I decided to do something for them.

What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

I am proud of the fact that we were able to provide a space for young women to feel inspired and empowered.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?



What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

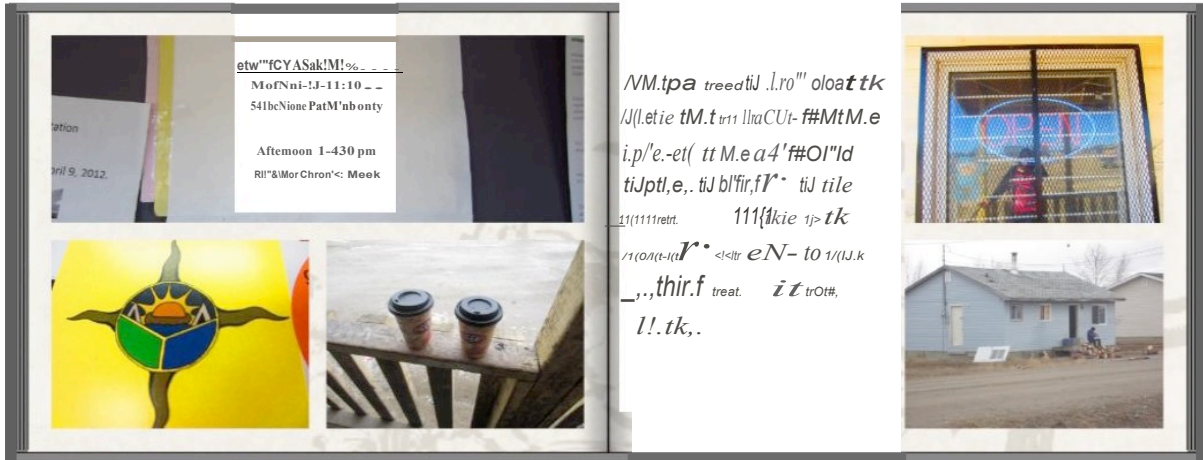
I want Indigenous communities to be healthy, free of drugs. I want there to be better jobs and better education. I also hope that the future generation will be able to learn to respect the land and their home.

We say “Community Action”, and you say.....

Change

Opportunity

-Excerpt from Ardelle's photovoice project-



Helen Knott

I am a Dane Zaa and Cree woman from Northeastern BC who is working towards her Social Work degree (Bachelors) and believes that if something you would like to see in your community is missing then you should create it!

Helen and 28 women, ages 8-45 worked together to create a video called "Your eyes they curve around me" that addresses violence and stereotypes against Indigenous women. There are plans for a future campaign project called "SEE ME" to portray Indigenous women in a positive light.

"Raven's hair and heritage does not sound alarm bells, does not stir you to look, because you've never really seen ME."

"Never am I seen as strong, as proud, as resilient. Never as I am."

-Excerpt from 'Your Eyes They Curve Around Me' video-

We asked Helen...

What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

I wanted to help create a space where healthy and healing intergenerational dialogue could take place. Issues that impact us as Indigenous women could be addressed and we could feel like WE could do something to help change it.

What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

The women who were shy or near to this issue (violence) stepped forward, volunteered and spoke. I was proud that women who were otherwise silent had a chance to use their voice.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?

Tip

Ask before taking action.

Tip

Ask organizations/people who may have a similar mandate/goal to help with resources (venue, food, etc.).

Tip

Advertise properly.

Tip

Think about the role of media.

Tip

If doing a project with a group, ensure involvement to avoid a workload increase.

What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

For Indigenous communities to recreate the warrior and embody the spirit needed to create healthy balanced nations. To return to their roots and a strong grounding in spirituality.

We say “Community Action”, and you say.....

There is no better way than the grassroots. It allows something to evolve organically within a group setting and harness the passion. If there is enough heart and it is done for something good then what you need will find you.

Naomi Sayers

Naomi is a Three Fires First Nations woman from the Garden River First Nation. She is actively involved within the Western University and greater London, Ontario community. As a brain injury survivor, she is able to be a peer mentor to other brain injury survivors and/or their family and friends across Ontario. Currently, she is attending Western University as a criminology student with dreams to go on to graduate school.

Naomi hosted a Stigma Education Workshop focusing on the questions: What is stigma? Why is it important to do stigma education? What can we do as a group and individuals? The main issue was stigma in the post-secondary classroom. For example, the constant focus on Indigenous issues by professors or institutions with inadequate/limited education or prep work, and the limited discussion within the classroom by students on such issues. This type of environment can be taxing on an Indigenous student. During the Stigma Education Workshop, three speakers presented their own work and knowledge of the issues that Indigenous students may face. Two-spirited community was also incorporated as both are culturally intertwined. Plans are underway to continue these workshops throughout the school year.

We asked Naomi...

What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

The thing that inspired me to do this type of work was the people that I have met at the university. We all share similar experiences and similar backgrounds, yet come from different life experiences. I wanted to bring together Indigenous young women to create a safe and supportive environment where we can all empower each other.

What aspect of your Community Action are you most proud of?

The aspect that I am most proud of is having everyone involved and having everyone come together even when everything wasn't going as planned. I credit the helpful and understanding participants and the speakers for much of the success of the Community Action.

Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?

Tip Just do it!

Tip Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Tip Be inclusive.

What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

My hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities are for them to realize the potential for their young people, especially young women. There is a lot of great work being done by individuals both within and outside communities; however, community leaders need to realize that young people, especially women, are important and essential to Indigenous communities' future!

We say "Community Action", and you say.....

EMPOWERMENT and SHARING!

Rebekah Rego

I am in Grade 12, my mother is from Lac Seul First Nation and is a social worker. I have learned from her the importance of having a voice and having the power to make change. I believe that as Aboriginal women we can make a difference and be heard. I love hockey, photography, music, travel and art. I plan to be a lawyer who works with youth so their voices are heard.

Rebekah worked collaboratively with a number of Aboriginal community organizations to host a focus group for young Aboriginal women in High School in Sudbury, Ontario. Together, these women created a culturally appropriate response to cyber bullying, and are planning to share this resource tool across the province. Plans are underway to expand their scope to social media sites, generate more discussions at all grade levels and even hold national and international conferences and gatherings.

“This project and the focus group provided an opportunity for sharing personal experiences of cyber bullying with other young women. I also had an opportunity to take a situation that was not handled in the most positive way and make it a learning opportunity, to take the lesson from the experience and give it a voice so that others could learn.” - Rebekah Rego

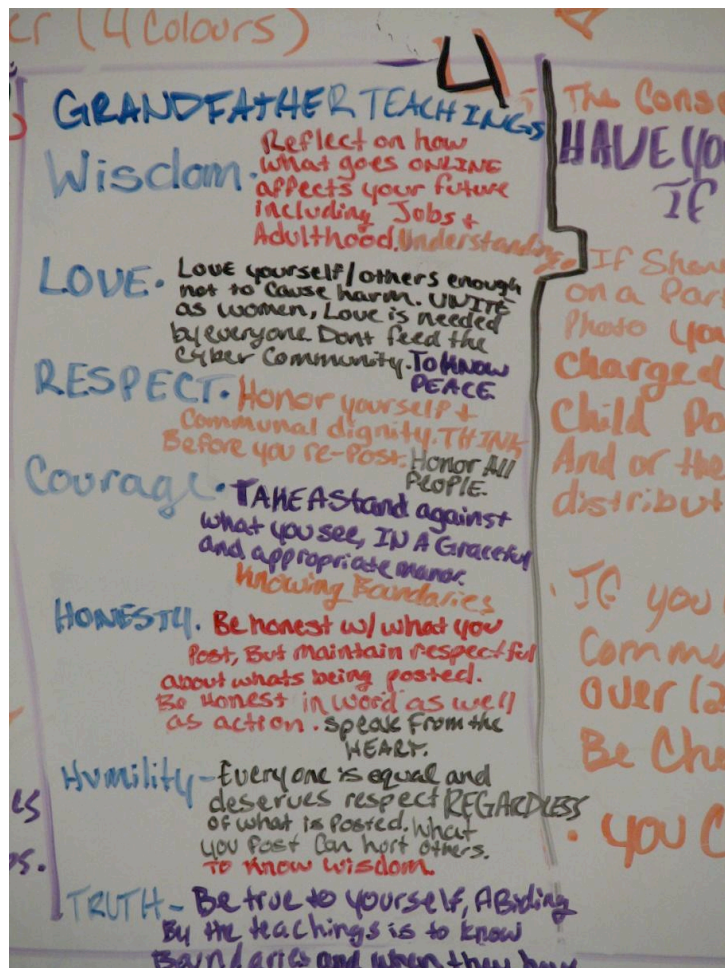
We asked Rebekah...

What inspired you to apply to do a Community Action?

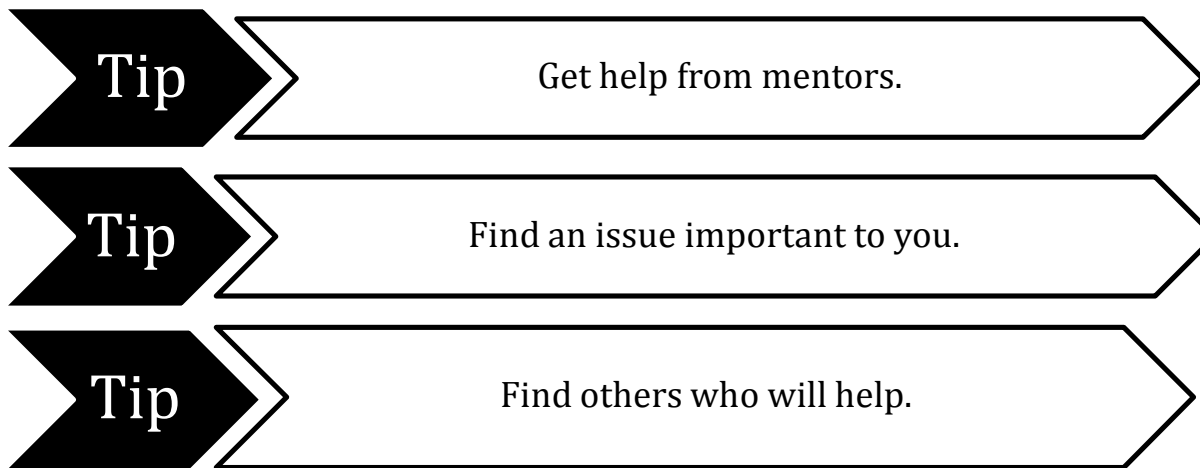
My own experience with cyber bullying and the inappropriate response by the school to protect me.

What aspects of your Community Action are you most proud of?

The pamphlet and Facebook site - Cyber Circle.



Do you have any suggestions or tips for others who want to take action in their community?



What are your hopes and dreams for Indigenous communities?

To be healthy and strong.

We say “Community Action” and you say...

Power!

How did you and other young women increase your ability to organize or lead projects?

“I learned organization, facilitation, presentation and creative skills from working on this project. I learned how to successfully write a proposal for a project where the community could benefit from the experience. I learned how to hold a focus group and how to develop questions and a plan for the day. I learned how to run a group and how to build consensus around the project, and what information went into the tool. I also had the opportunity to build a network with the other young Aboriginal women and learn how to develop a social media site for the project. All of these experiences created a positive learning opportunity to build organization and leadership skills.”

Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing

Rebecca organized an event series promoting Anishinabe knowledge of land and wellness, based out of Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig (University) in Sault Ste. Marie, also engaging the local First Nations of Garden River and Batchewana.

Rebecca says...

The initial intention of the Community Action was to host workshops on **maple syrup, tobacco planting and food planting**. In leading this project, it grew substantially: the maple syrup collection became its own initiative; the garden project garnered significant support and has also taken a life of its own; and an additional project, the building of a 60 foot traditional teaching lodge to host events and classes, has been launched.

“This involves knowing the skills that at one time, we all knew. With these skills, we took care of our families in harmony with each other and the rest of Creation.” - Rebecca

Maple Syrup:

Participants were led in all the steps of collecting sap, from setting up trees to spending hours a day collecting and boiling sap. All of their work was recognized and celebrated at a pancake breakfast that engaged the campus and broader community.

Tobacco Planting:

Rebecca and four of her peers, with the support of an Elder, provided materials and donated seeds to plant almost 200 tobacco plants! The planting involved prayer, a water ceremony, the actual planting, and sharing of a tobacco song to be sung daily to the growing plants. Some plants were taken home by participants and others were planted at the University with the intention of having that medicine available to students year-round.

“The tobacco planting workshop was unique in that I led the workshop with four other young Indigenous people. This was a great learning experience, as we followed the teaching we have been given - ‘young

people teaching young people'. We have spent years learning prayers and songs and through this event we were able to take it on and teach others. It was an honour to have the space to do it".

- Rebecca

5. Tips and suggestions for community work

As you read through this report, we hope you were inspired with ideas for actions or work that you'd like to see happen in your community. "Community" comes in many forms and it's really up to you to decide what community looks like. It could mean you and a few close friends or family, classmates in a particular class or grade, maybe a youth group or program you participate in or belong to. Or, it could mean more formal organizations involving your local government such as Aboriginal youth councils within First Nations Bands, Métis Locals or Inuit Regions. Whatever your community - and there are probably more examples not listed here - there are always opportunities for change and growth! Here are tips and suggestions on how to build ideas for community work or actions.

Community Mapping

When we think about what change we want to see in community, sometimes we over focus on the so-called 'bad' stuff - violence, alcohol and drug use, lack of education, or illness and disease - so here's an exercise to put those things into perspective and remember that we have a lot going for us!

In the small circle, write down some things that you don't like that are going on in your community - things that you'd like to see change.

Draw a larger circle around those problems or issues. In that space, think about all the people, activities and spaces in your community that you feel good about. It could be anything! Recreation centres with an activity or sport you really like, traditional or cultural activities that you enjoy, or want to learn more about (dancing, hunting, fishing, camping, beading, crafts, songs, music, etc.), and people that you go to for support or whom you respect.



Now think of all the skills and qualities that are required to do all that cool stuff that we are calling 'Community Strengths'. Hunting takes patience and knowledge of the land. Dance requires time to learn and practice. Learning songs and planning events takes team work.

How can you apply those skills and knowledge to the 'Individual Issues' to start making positive changes, and support that change?

We have more power than we think! A lot of the skills and knowledge it took to do the Community Actions in this report came from INSIDE a community! That means most of what we need is already within us and our communities, we just need to see it.

Do this exercise with yourself, your family or in a group - it will turn out differently every time, giving you lots of ideas of how you can take action in your community and the strength we already have!

Strength Based Approach

The exercise above highlights something we call a "Strength Based Approach" - meaning we look at what's good and awesome first! Once we know the things that we're good at, we can start strengthening those skills, building on them and eventually using them to make change in our communities.

For example - Indigenous communities tend to have lots of talented artists - in everything from painting to carving to drawing to movie-making! Maybe you like to draw and have been told you're pretty good at it. Instead of keeping those drawing skills hidden, learn more about it! Practice drawing different things, give yourself challenges and if there's someone you can learn new techniques from, ask them to teach and share with you. Starting showing other people what you've learned, and invite those that are interested to learn with

you. Soon enough you've got a community of artists who are skilled at their craft!

Now maybe you do the "Community Mapping" exercise above with your drawing friends and decide you'd like to use those drawing skills to talk about the bullying that's happening at school - because it's not just happening to you, but also to your little brothers, sisters and cousins. These are the beginnings of a great Community Action!

Arts for Social Change

As you can see in the Community Actions listed earlier, art was a very popular method! Ranging from videos to poetry, to visual art of all kinds - art can be a powerful tool for social change.

Community Action organizers and participants found that art was able to do things that just conversations or words might not be able to accomplish. Art can be fun and participatory instead of boring and instructional (someone telling you something) - we get to share our knowledge and skills with each other while learning something new. And when it comes to topics that are difficult to talk about - art can communicate thoughts that we may not have words for. Having something visual also helps us remember what we've learned, and makes an idea easier to share and explain.

So whatever your art form, you don't have to be an expert! Making or learning art together with community is a great way to start building the change we want to see.

Conclusion - It's just the beginning!

It is the hope that all of this work is part of a larger empowerment movement that has young people at its core. The original vision of the Advisory has grown with the support and integrity of all those who participated, making this a truly peer-led and participant informed process. Elders', mentors' and teachers' roles were reclaimed in so many different ways, offering advice, support and guidance while respecting the leadership of Indigenous young women. This continuous, ever-growing, coast-to-coast project is an example of what sustainability looks like as an Indigenous concept and enacted by communities on their own terms. The sheer passion of Indigenous young

women is the driving force behind this project and we are extremely excited to see what comes next!

6. Resources

The following list is a suggestion of where to start looking for support and resources to do your own Community Action! There are many more opportunities out there!

The following list is a suggestion of where to start looking...

Get in touch with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network to create your own opportunities in your community!

www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

Keep up to date with Girls Action Foundation for exciting new opportunities!

www.girlsactionfoundation.ca

Check with your local Friendship Centre to set up a partnership for you to start your own project or programming! A full listing of Friendship Centres across Canada can be found here: www.nafc.ca

Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth (CCAY) provides funding for community-based, youth-led activities! More information can be found on the NAFC website listed above.

Check out these publications for ideas and inspiration:

Indigenous Young Women LEAD! Our stories, our strengths, our truths

Edited by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Download here: <http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/resources/zines-0>

Start something Fierce! A young woman's guide to grassroots organizing

2nd edition – Edited by Girls Action Foundation

Download here: <http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/resources/zines-0>

Power of Youth: Youth and community-led activism in Canada

Edited by Brigette DePape, Chapter on the Indigenous Young Women's Project!

<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/ourschools-ourselves/>

For Artists! Canada Council for the Arts offers diverse funding opportunities for a range of arts based programs throughout the year! Check if your province or community has an arts fund you can apply to. Some funders have Aboriginal specific grants as well!

Canada Council
www.canadacouncil.ca

Ontario Arts Council
www.arts.on.ca

Quebec Arts Council
www.conseildesarts.org

BC Arts Council
www.bcartscouncil.ca

Alberta Foundation for the Arts
www.affta.ab.ca

Saskatchewan Arts Board
www.artsboard.sk.ca

Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture,
Cultural Services Branch Arts Section
www.tc.gov.yk.ca

Manitoba Arts Council
www.artscouncil.mb.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council
www.nlac.ca

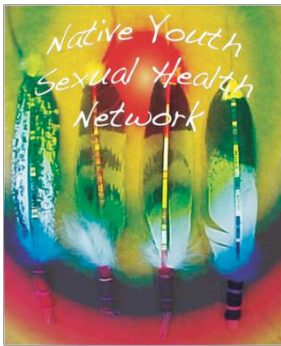
The Nova Scotia Arts and Culture Council
www.nsacpc.com

The New Brunswick Arts Board
www.artsnb.ca

The Prince Edward Island Council of the Arts
www.peiartscouncil.com

Northwest Territories Arts Council
www.pwnhc.ca

Nunavut Arts Council
www.cley.gov.nu.ca



This report was written in partnership with staff from the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Girls Action Foundation.