



ENVIRONMENTAL / LAND JUSTICE FOR

MÉTIS WOMEN AND YOUTH AS HIV PREVENTION

BUFFALO LAKE MÉTIS SETTLEMENT, ALBERTA & SUDBURY, ONTARIO



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ABOUT US

This community based research project used art as a way to talk about the connections between Métis women, youth and communities' relationships to land and health.

It was led by a Métis youth, Erin Marie Konsmo, as part of her completing her Masters of Environmental Studies at York University. The project was a partnership between the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement.

It was funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research.

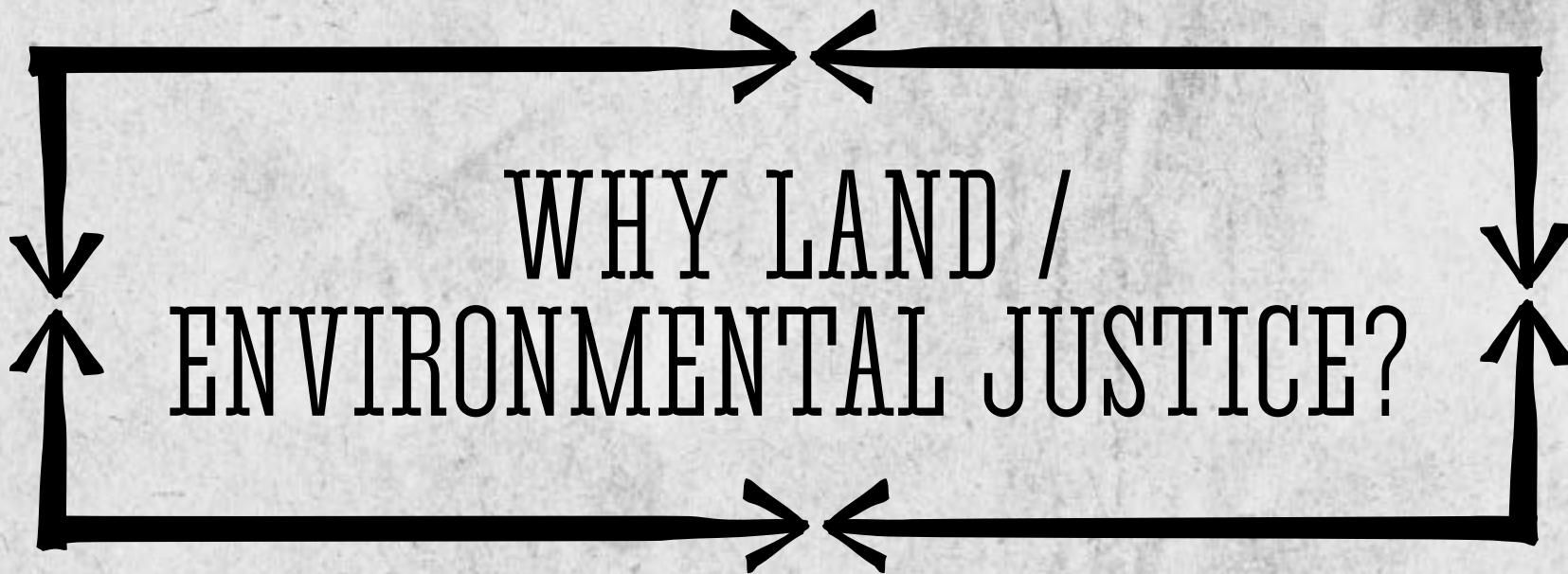
RESEARCH QUESTION



As Métis women and youth, how does our environment (e.g. relationship to land and place) impact our sexual and reproductive health (e.g. HIV)?

What are some ways we can talk about these issues?

- Look at local historical struggles and connections Métis communities have had to land.
- Use traditional knowledge within your Métis community that talk about relationships between 'health' and 'land'.
- Create space to talk about community experiences of Métis identities.
- Talk with others about what's happening to the land in the area that you live (e.g. Is there industry—oil, gas, mining, logging, nuclear?)
- Use art to draw, paint, or create the ways that your body interacts with the land.



WHY LAND / ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

Land is a fundamental component of Indigenous identity. For many, any disturbance in that relationship can falter health, how we understand ourselves, our relationships to others, and our own identity.

“While land may be a complicated issue for Métis, since many do not have a legal land base, it is still a very important consideration. Even though many Métis live in urban centres, nearly all feel a deep connection to the land, one that may be interpreted as a relationship of stewardship over ownership. Such importance to the population cannot be overlooked when examining well-being.”¹

1. National Aboriginal Health Organization. (2009). Social Determinants of Métis Health. Ottawa, ON.

Environmental Justice refers to understanding and seeking justice for the environmental racism that disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples and communities. This racism has a variety of impacts on Indigenous women and future generations including increased rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI's). Rates of STI's increase near sites of resource extraction (oil, gas, mining, logging) with often related to higher rates of violence and transience.

BACKGROUND



HIV rates are an increasing concern for Indigenous Peoples, including Métis women, youth and communities. HIV among Indigenous Peoples in Canada happens at a younger age than in non-Indigenous Peoples and also affect a higher number of women.

While it is important for all members of the Métis community to have HIV prevention projects, the Indigenous HIV movement has historically lacked a focus on Aboriginal youth and women. So we decided to focus our attention on those groups.

The “pan-Aboriginal approach” widely used in the HIV movement often ignores Métis specific health needs that look at our unique identities and history.

We were interested in learning more about the issues that were specific to Métis communities and wanted to create resources, education materials, and supports that speak back to those issues.

**WE WORKED WITH TWO COMMUNITIES:
BUFFALO LAKE MÉTIS SETTLEMENT, ALBERTA
& SUDBURY, ONTARIO**



Environmental/Land Justice for Metis Women and Youth HIV Prevention Project

May 15th – May 17th

DOOR PRIZES May 15th Community Feast – Everyone Welcome **FOOD**

Where: Buffalo Lake Recreation Centre
When: 12:00pm – 1:30pm

<p>YOUTH ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Where: Buffalo Lake Recreation Centre</p> <p>When: FOOD</p> <p>Wednesday, May 16th 10:00am – 2:30pm</p> <p>Thursday, May 17th 10:00am – 2:30pm</p>	<p>WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Where: Buffalo Lake Recreation Centre</p> <p>When:</p> <p>Wednesday, May 16th 3:00pm – 5:00pm</p> <p>Thursday, May 17th DOOR PRIZES 3:00pm – 5:00pm</p>
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ART EXHIBIT & COMMUNITY FEEDBACK
Where: Buffalo Lake Recreation Centre
Thursday May 17th 5:00pm – 7:00pm
Everyone Welcome

For More Information Contact Tina Reid – 1-780-689-2275
Erin Kosmo ekosmo@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

Environmental/Land Justice for
MÉTIS WOMEN AND YOUTH
as HIV Prevention



Families & Community Welcome!

Free Food & Door Prizes

**Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel
50 Brady Street, Sudbury**

5:00 - 8:00 pm, Monday, June 11
Dinner followed by meet and greet and explanation of the project

10:00 am - 6:00 pm, Tuesday, June 12
Participant Activities

10:00 am - 9:00 pm, Wednesday, June 13
*Participant Activities (10:00 am - 5:00 pm)
Feast & Art Exhibit (6:00 - 9:00 pm)*

For more information:
Deenaye Taylor
deenaye@metisnation.org
705-671-9255
260 Alder Street (Upstairs)

Erin Kosmo
ekosmo@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com



A decorative frame with a scalloped border and floral motifs at the top and bottom center. The text "WHAT DID WE DO?" is centered within the frame in a bold, serif font.

WHAT DID WE DO?

In both communities, over the course of three days we:

- Held a community feast to talk about the project
- Provided interactive and fun sexual health education workshops on HIV and AIDS
- Facilitated arts-based activities (belly casting, land tours, and spirit painting)
- Hosted an exhibition of art work created in order to start a conversation with the whole community.

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

These workshops were highly participatory and fun (based on the innovative work of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network). They focused on education around HIV and AIDS and environmental justice.



Here you see an Elder from Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement interacting with dental dams in our sexual health education workshops.



Here you see an Elder from Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement interacting with dental dams in our sexual health education workshops.



WHO PARTICIPATED?



23 SELF IDENTIFIED MÉTIS WOMEN AND YOUTH
LOCAL MÉTIS ELDERS
LOCAL MÉTIS COMMUNITY LEADERS AND FAMILIES



WOMEN AS THE FIRST ENVIRONMENT



Katsi Cook, Mohawk Midwife and environmental justice advocate, has written about the idea of “Woman as the First Environment.” We used this key idea to spark conversations about the connections between our bodies as Métis women and youth to the environment.

Workshop participants were asked to write down on post-it notes:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MOTHER?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MÉTIS AND RAISE MÉTIS CHILDREN?





WE ASKED WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS...
**WHAT DOES ENVIRONMENT
MEAN TO YOU?**



“My own environment and what I see here, it’s what surrounds me whether it’s the land, whether it’s the animals, whether it’s the people around here”

“If we’re not living in harmony or peacefully or understand each other that could cause deterioration of the social structure of the community that we live in”



Workshop participants were asked to write down on post-it notes:

WHAT DOES ENVIRONMENT MEAN?

AND HOW IS IT CONNECTED TO YOUR BODY?





BELLY CASTING

We invited pregnant and non-pregnant self identified Métis women to create their own belly casts. In the first session, women created their moulds.

In the second session, they painted and decorated them to explore the idea of the woman as the 'first environment'. Each woman would then get the chance to explain her sculpture in relation to the connections between environmental justice, reproductive justice and HIV prevention.

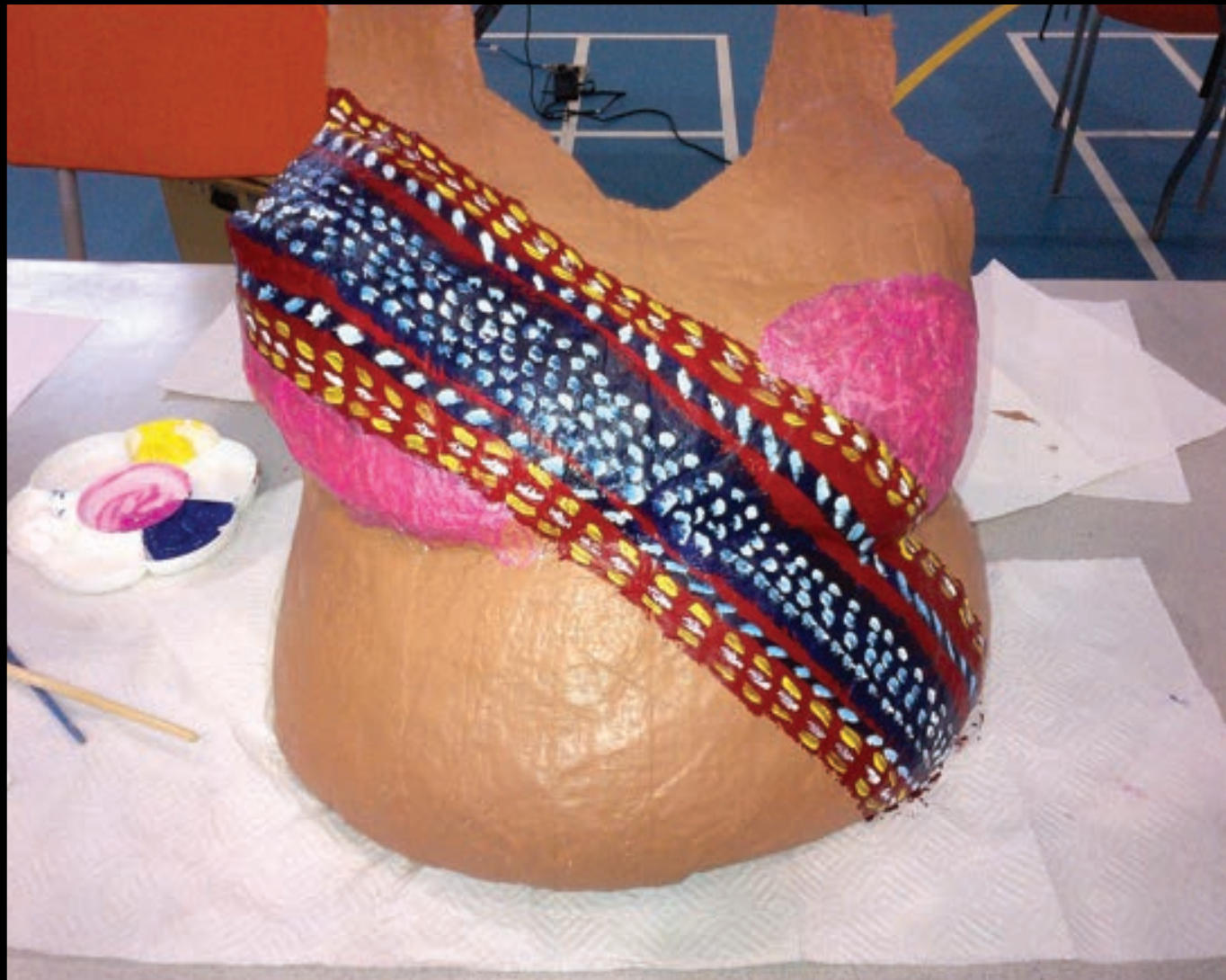
BELLY CASTS FROM

BUFFALO LAKE

MÉTIS SETTLEMENT



Beginning stage of belly casts. Belly casts drying before the process of being painted.



“If we don’t know who we are, and where we came from then there’s that piece missing in our being.”

— 2012 workshop participant



“To respect your body more with a body cast and to show people that you’re not shy of your body and where life really comes from as a woman. And the breast part is, we help the child develop life and not go hungry in the world...where the milk comes from is where our breast is and I’m glad God made us woman because—there wouldn’t be life without a woman”

— 2012 workshop participant







“I guess when you are talking about the environment, its mostly the social environment in this community, the lack of education, the lack of jobs and the lack of parenting and skills and the lack of higher educational levels—just lack of socialization because of the animosity.”

— 2012 workshop participant



Métis Family and community participants modeling finished belly casts.

BELLY CASTS FROM

SUDBURY, ON



Belly casts made by participants from Sudbury, Ontario on display for the community art exhibit and feast.



“For my artwork we did a lot of talk about environment and one of the main environments we talked about is our human body. And that got to me so I incorporated the sun into my picture because without the sun there’s no life and without a womb there’s no life. These three moons represent the three stages a woman goes through the maiden the mother and the crone. I put the scales because as a woman you have to find the balance between what you want to do and what you have to do, and I put this cause I’m from the bear clan and I can’t draw bears (Joyful laughter). And these three colours represent the Earth—Earth-grass-sky—”

— 2012 workshop participant





"I chose to do the wolf as the main pick because I myself am Wolf Clan... I did my cast to show nature and humanity living beside one another and to show how we are ruining Mother Earth."

— 2012 workshop participant





“It is not the same wheat as our ancestors ate and the article was written by a doctor Davis. It says that as long as we eat especially for those with problems of obesity you are not going to lose weight. I know since a month I’ve cut it out completely from my diet and the weight is coming off. It didn’t matter what I tried before nothing was working, so you can look up wheat belly on the internet and there’s information there. I wrote Wheat-belly on the cast of my belly and I put the Native colours around it and kind of the Métis colours in the middle which is blue and white so I would like to make people aware of the modified foods that we eat and the worst one of all is wheat.”

— 2012 workshop participant



SPIRIT PAINTING

“Spirit painting is broken up into three parts and it starts out with the frame... relates to nature so it can be animal, or a tree. And then you have the spiritual self on the inside of the frame... something that has to do with how what we are connected to and it is in the centre of the painting. And each painting has a pinwheel and the pinwheel represents how it all connects together even though it might not touch the rest of the of spirit painting it still connects in and out throughout life. We also connect what the mind, the spirit, the body, and the emotions and how our emotions control our choices in life and how are bodies are connected and how we think and how we perceive things and how our spiritual self is connected to the world.”

— MNO SUDBURY STAFF



“So I did the flower and it’s a carnation, I am not artistic but each petal represents a person we have connected to in some way-shape-or form and then the flowers or the leaves connect into the root and into the earth and it our roots. So it also has to do with... with the HIV and we did this interesting workshop where only one person was positive and we all ended up connected and we all ended up positive in the room, so each petal could represent that as well.”

— 2012 workshop participant





“Well I did a bear because it stands for strength and throughout everything that I’ve been through my whole entire life like being involved with CAS and also growing up with my mother who has HIV—I did a bear because it stands for strength—and I did a medicine wheel because I feel it connects with the culture.”

— 2012 workshop participant





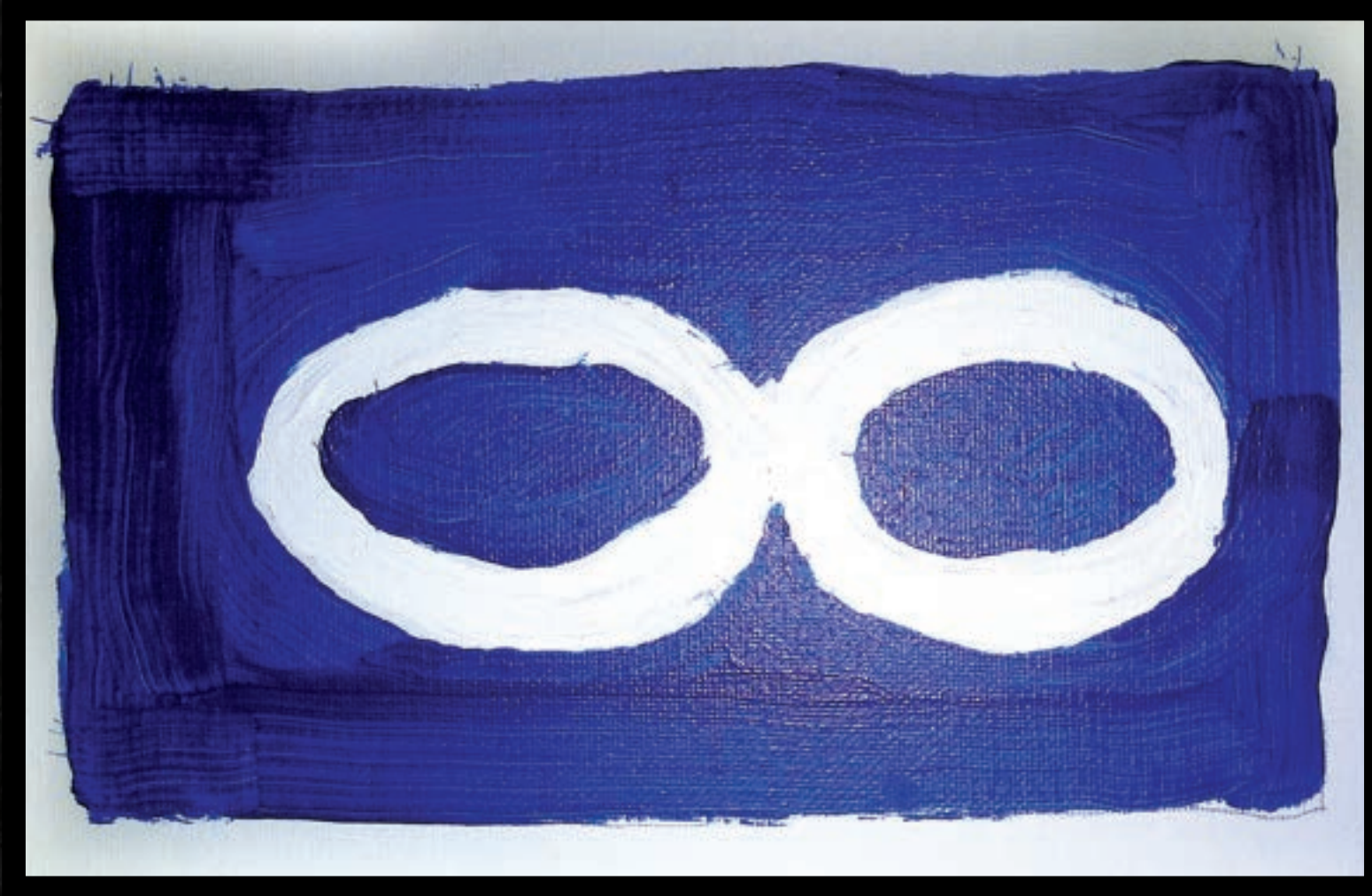
“And I did the other one because that’s what my mom used to draw on every letter that I got in Ottawa, so it kind of reminded me of her. I wrote her name it there and I put some words in their to describe so it’s kind of sentimental to me...”

— 2012 workshop participant



“I did the feathers because in my line of work feathers are very important and very sacred. Also, I have my home down here. The home is very important to me—my home—my family—and that is why I incorporated it into my picture with my feather so it’s nothing really deep but this is what I came up with.”

— 2012 workshop participant



“This is the Métis flag it was not painted by me this was painted by our lovely and talented elder Florence and she wanted me to come up and explain what the Métis flag means. It’s the infinity symbol, it is the joining of two cultures together and we have come together to join land and HIV knowledge— together—into one body which is what the infinity symbol represents. It also is a symbol that we are strong people and we will be around forever.”


— 2012 workshop participant




LAND TOUR IN SUDBURY, ON

We engaged local elders to lead guided walking tours that explored relationships to land. Using photography and audio/video recordings, participants documented their stories and relationship to land and how these impacted sexual and reproductive health, especially HIV.

The following photos include pictures taken by participants in a 'natural' and 'urban' environment in Sudbury, Ontario.



CAPTAIN OF THE HUNT MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO



The Captains of the Hunt (COTH) play an integral role in the management of Métis rights. One COTH is assigned to each of the Traditional Harvest Territories within Ontario and is mandated by the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) to have full authority over the Métis harvest in their respective region.

The COTH act as a direct line of communication between Harvesters and the MNO and MNR. They help manage the annual harvest in concert with the province of Ontario, support the implementation of the Interim Harvesting Policy and determine the appropriate management of the harvest in their respective regions. COTH also act as the liaison between harvesters and the MNO in situations where charges have been filed.

The duties of the COTH include:

- Travel throughout their region and into MNO communities in their region to work with Councils on Harvester's Certificates issues
- Assist Harvesters in the completion of applications for Harvester's Certificates
- Review and sign Harvester applications prior to sending them to Registry Branch for processing and final approval
- Verify that Harvesters can properly and safely employ firearms
- Answer inquiries from Métis citizens regarding harvesting rights and criteria surrounding harvesting
- Investigate complaints and charges; act as liaison between the MNO and Harvester
- Act as point of contact for MNR Field Officers in their region
- Prepare incident reports
- Ensure Harvester's are in compliance with the MNO Harvesting Policy
- Participate in the MNO/MNR Working Table as a source of "on the ground" information
- Source of information on the Métis Way of Life Framework and Traditional Knowledge



As taken directly for The Métis Nation of Ontario website:
<http://www.metisnation.org/harvesting/captains-of-the-hunt->

Richard Sarrazin, our region's Captain of the Hunt, was happy to participate in this event. Richard gave a very interesting and informative talk. He explained his duties as Captain of the Hunt. He also talked about land use in the area—traditionally and today.

He gave many examples of the changes he has witnessed over the years, and the impacts of industry on the land. The overall message of Richard's presentation was clear: what we do (both positive and negative) leaves a long and lasting impression on the land. It impacts not only the health of people in the area, but the health of animals, plants and water ways. For this generation, and generations to come.



“This is the first picture I chose to talk about... to me the beauty of the flower is just striking and you have all elements—water—the air—and nature—and in the background of this picture there are dead falls and it’s the dead falls that bringing nutrients to this plant.”

— 2012 workshop participant



“The other one, the other one I took because it’s Florence International Environment (crowd laughs). She’s a proud strong women and it just looks so natural to take that picture of her in the bush area and she’s just so beautiful and she radiates life and I think capturing the trees behind her was a good tribute to that.”

— 2012 workshop participant





“...We were looking at the rock we were thinking of the woman womb and when we think about giving birth and environment, and this is one of the things we were taught this weekend that it starts in the environment so life begins in... our environment, in the woman’s womb and that’s where we begin. And of course it’s surrounded by water so the child is surrounded by water as well and...anyways, it’s just such a beautiful picture I just thought ‘That’s beautiful’.”

— 2012 workshop participant



“...when I was looking at it I was thinking of nature and how we tend to leave things behind and how we pollute the Earth. Juliette had a different meaning and I can't recall what she had said, OH! I know what it was 'Sometimes things in life get dark in our lives but at the same time we can come out of it, you know we can grow' I guess with the grass around and stuff like that something to do with life.”

— 2012 workshop participant



“...we came across these pipes and we were in the conservation area but at the same time whatever’s coming out of those pipes is not very healthy because the ground was all... it almost looked like a gas, you know when you pour gas into water, well that’s what it seemed to resemble—gas and water or something—but if you think about it when things like this happen it has a huge impact on us as well and not only us, the animals. So anything that’s in that water is being affected by whatever’s being spilt there coming through these pipes, so it just goes again to show how nature... how it can, you know like, how we can take care of nature or we can do thing to destroy nature and it can cause harm to us human beings and it can cause harm to our unborn children and stuff like that, and anyone as a matter of fact”

— 2012 workshop participant



“While I was walking along at the Ecological center, yeah that’s right, I came across this tree that had fallen and one of the things that came to me was the thought of how women sometimes we fall down but although the tree was fallen it was not completely dead. So at times we fall down in our life but it doesn’t mean we’re out of it we’re just down during that time.”

— 2012 workshop participant




“When we came into the city to downtown as we came shortly off the bus, as we we’re walking towards this area I came across this gate and what struck me, it was interesting, I really enjoyed the conversation that was happened for a period when I saw this photo for the first time because people started sharing how for people with HIV sometimes they can feel like their closed in, their look from the outside in or from the outside out at the world, and being how the gate is strong. And for me when I saw that gate as a barrier and at the same time I saw the peace symbol that was in the framework of this so that for some people their peace is right in the city and even through all this chaos and all this closure we could still find ways to find peace amongst that.”

— 2012 workshop participant



“What caught my eye was the nice container of the ever-toxic stuff they were using to spray, and that just got me thinking a little bit about what Richard was sharing with us at the lake of how they use these sprays to kill all of the wildlife around the hydro lines so nothing grows to encroach on the lines, so maybe just thing of the chemicals that we are putting on mother Earth—one day she’s going to kick us all off.”

— 2012 workshop participant



A decorative frame consisting of a central horizontal flourish at the top and bottom, and two vertical wavy lines on the left and right sides. The word "CONCLUSIONS" is centered within this frame in a bold, black, serif font.

CONCLUSIONS

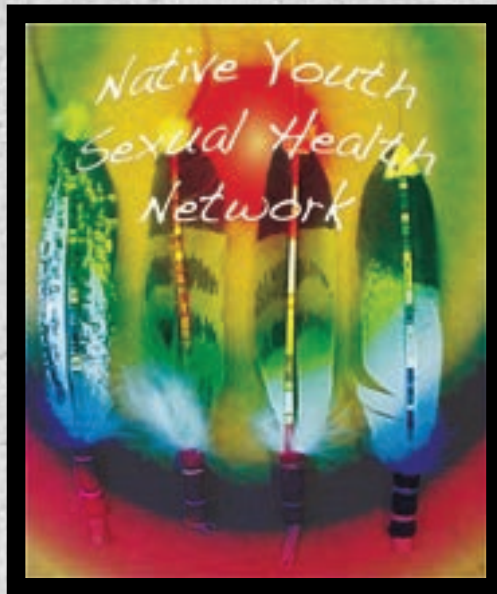


Using painting, belly casting and land tours was an effective way to begin conversations about the connections between land and health.

Many of our participants connected with the idea of the woman as the first environment and understood how wombs were related to wider natural, historical and social environments.

Contextualizing HIV within these other areas may be a good strategy for continuing the conversations about culturally safe prevention and supports.



NATIVE YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK



NYSHN works with Indigenous peoples across the United States and Canada to advocate for, and build strong, comprehensive, and culturally safe sexuality and reproductive health, rights, and justice initiatives in their own communities.

For more information on the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, please visit our website: www.nativeyouthsexualhealthnetwork.com



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank all the children, youth, women, men and Elders from Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, Alberta and Sudbury, Ontario who participated in our workshops and generously shared their time and stories. We also want to thank the Métis Nation of Ontario Sudbury for their important feedback on earlier drafts of these documents.

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Graphic Design by Janet Cordahi.

For more information about this project and to download an electronic version of this photobook please visit:

<http://nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/metisvoicehivhealthandplaceproject.html>