



The RED Path project aims to develop sustainable, evidence-based, and culturally safe HIV and HCV interventions for Indigenous women in federal correctional institutions.

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Braiding Inner Guidance:

Reclaim, Embrace, Dream

A RED Path Educational Resource



Opening the Walking the RED Path Photobook

Wai ... my name is Sheila A. Nyman, my spirit name given to me after my 6th fast is “Stands Strong like a Rock Bear Woman,” I am Syilx Metis from the lower Similkameen in what is now known as the Okanagan of British Columbia. My maternal family has lived on these territories since time immemorial. My paternal family came to Turtle Island from Sweden. I am a mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. I hold a master’s degree in social work as a trauma therapist and have been taught and nurtured in the ways of traditional ceremonies and healing practises. I have earned the responsibility and been given permission to practise them. My Elder and teacher is Aline LaFlamme, “Many Buffalo Running,” I have also received teachings and been initiated into the ways by a number of other traditional knowledge holders who I can name if asked.

It is an honour for me to be asked to write the introduction and closing of the Red Path Stories. I have direct lived experience along with the fact that I carry historical blood memory of colonization and its impact on our people, the First People of this land. With the memory of these impacts I also embody the knowledge of how to heal, too often we forget that along with our tragic history we also carry the knowledge of how to overcome it. On my first fast I experienced the visions of Grandmother Moon, this gift sent me onto a path of working with, leading and witnessing women on their own healing journey.

I had direct contact with the grandmother which led me to becoming a MoonLodge Keeper and teacher of Moontime. As women we are the Lifegivers, we are in a time of returning to the power gifted to us as lifegivers. Women lead the healing, where the women are, the children are, and where

the women and the children are, the men will follow. It is time to take our place of honour and stand in the power gifted to us. When we sit together and “remember” how to harness the power during our moontime we will have all the power we need to heal and lead our families, our communities, and our lands. In the times of the Old Ones, we had Moonlodges, every nation had a place where the women would gather to cleanse, renew, and recharge. They were taken care of during this time because the tribe knew that the connection to grandmother moon was open and direct when women were on their “time.” When women were given the space to connect to the grandmother the power could be brought directly to the people for the benefit of all. Moontime knowledge is teachings for another time I encourage you to seek Moontime teachings and reconnect with her.

When the colonizers arrived, they saw how our women were revered and this was shocking to them. Their way was to barely recognize that their women were human; they were definitely not seen as equal. It is my opinion and the opinion of many, that this became the basis of their plan to weaken and ultimately attempt to destroy our people. Our strength lay at the core of our community and family, every decision was developed by looking seven generations ahead. Our women were leaders and revered for their wisdom and power to see the future wellbeing for all. The plan to “kill the Indian in the child” was born. They thought our destruction lay in interrupting our ability to care for our children and future generations. The women who lived these stories are women who are waking up from the deep sleep caused by residential school impacts, the 60’s Scoop and the continued mass apprehension of our children. In one way or another we have all been impacted from this and from it “we rise” in power.

Make no mistake our women are powerful, as you will witness as you read the lived stories, they have generously shared with us. The strength and resilience carried within, based on our ability to survive is power in and of itself. There are no victims here, only powerful surviving warriors.

A Nation is Not Conquered

*A nation is not conquered until the
hearts of its women are on the ground.
Then it’s finished; no matter how brave
its warriors or how strong their weapons.*

Cheyenne Proverb,
Author Unknown

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Native Women's Association of Canada

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is a national Indigenous organization representing the political voice of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people in Canada. Incorporated in 1974, NWAC works to advance the well-being and equality of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people through advocacy, education, research, and policy. An aggregate of thirteen Indigenous women's organizations, NWAC was founded on the collective goal to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian societies.

NWACs Mission Statement: Advocate for and inspire women and families of many Indigenous nations.

NWACs Vision Statement: We envision an inclusive world that understands and respects the diversity and uniqueness of all Indigenous women and families.



NWAC Policy Recommendations

1. Canada must act to address the over-incarceration of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in Canada's criminal justice system.
2. Canada must ensure that incarcerated Indigenous women & gender-diverse people have access to culturally safe programming & alternatives to traditional incarceration.
3. Implement all Calls for Justice from the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
4. Canada must act upon all Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, with particular attention paid to Calls 30-38.
5. Canada and the Provinces must act upon recommendations outlined in the Standing Committee on "A Call to Action: Reconciliation with Indigenous Women in the Federal Justice and Correctional Systems".

Walking the RED Path with Incarcerated Indigenous Women

RED stands for **Re-forging** connections, **Empowering** Indigenous women to heal, and **Driving** change for a healthy future.

The *RED Path Project* is a five-year Public Health Agency of Canada-funded project that aims to connect with, and empower, federally incarcerated Indigenous women with information about Healthcare and Patient Rights. The goal is to provide access to information so they can make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Indigenous women in Canada are incarcerated at a higher rate than any other population in Canada, now accounting for 50% of the federal female inmate population in Canada

and 65% of women sentenced to maximum security, according to Public Safety Canada (March 2023). Indigenous Women make up 5% of the general population.

Federally incarcerated Indigenous women have the highest rates of HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) compared to any other group in Canada. With unique needs, culture, and experiences of colonization, this issue requires a response rooted in the strength and culture of those who are impacted.

This is where the RED Path Project comes in. We aim to improve knowledge of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) in a setting that focuses their strength and empowers their resilience, while connecting them to cultural practices and knowledge in the same breath.

Currently, RED Path works with Indigenous women in federal institutions and Section 81s (Healing Lodges) to deliver workshops designed by, and for, incarcerated Indigenous women and Primary Workers. Through these workshops and other activities, RED Path has been successful in increasing knowledge and empowering Indigenous women to prevent HIV, while fighting stigma and promoting a connection to culture.

Through this project, we have been able to grow and learn alongside Indigenous Women from all walks of life, but especially those who have gifted us their teachings while being incarcerated, we truly thank and appreciate you. Through the process, we have made many powerful connections and continue to make more each day.

Miigwetch,

**The Red Path Team
& NWAC Health Unit**

Sources (Overrepresentation):

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/oip-cjs/p3.html>

<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/trnsprnc/brfng-mtrls/prlmntry-bndrs/20230720/12-en.aspx#:~:text=Background,security%20custodial%20centres%20across%20Canada.>

Dedications

About this Book

**Braiding Inner Guidance - Reclaim. Embrace. Dream:
Building Our Own Knowledge (BIG RED BOOK)**

This transformative resource is designed to empower Indigenous women to heal, reclaim their identities, and dream boldly for their futures. It is a guide to personal and cultural growth, weaving together the knowledge of our ancestors with the tools needed to thrive today.

This HIV, HCV and STBBI activity book provides a sacred space for reflection, creativity, and empowerment, offering a wide range of activities that explore healthcare knowledge, sexual health, and health rights. With accessible and culturally grounded exercises, it equips participants to understand their health, advocate for themselves, and embrace autonomy in navigating healthcare systems.

Through journaling prompts, storytelling, creative expression, and teachings on cultural practices, the **BIG RED BOOK** nurtures healing in the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual realms. It invites participants to reconnect with their roots, rediscover the power of traditional knowledge, and build a foundation of confidence & resilience.

Each page allows you to reclaim your identity, embrace the strength within, and dream of a future where Indigenous Women are free from oppression. With tools for learning about healthy sexuality & cultural connection, The **BIG RED BOOK** is a companion for your journey to empowerment, healing, and transformation.

[Walking the RED Path Photobook](#)

About the Language

A NOTE ON THE USE OF WOMEN & WOMXN

In this book, the term *women* is used inclusively to encompass Two-Spirit, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse peoples. The word *womxn* is sometimes used to challenge exclusionary ideas of gender and to recognize the diversity of experiences among transgender women, nonbinary individuals, and other gender-diverse people.

We acknowledge and honor the many ways people may identify and hope this book feels welcoming, respectful, and supportive for all who engage with its content. This resource is for anyone seeking to navigate health, healing, and empowerment in their own healing journey, especially those who find themselves incarcerated.

Acronyms & Medical Terminology

1. **HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus):** The virus that attacks the immune system and, if untreated, can lead to AIDS.
2. **AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome):** The advanced stage of HIV where the immune system is severely weakened.
3. **HCV (Hepatitis C Virus):** A virus that affects the liver and can lead to long-term liver damage. HCV is preventable and treatable with proper medical care.
4. **PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis):** A daily medication that helps prevent HIV before exposure.
5. **PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis):** A 28-day treatment started within 72 hours after potential exposure to HIV.
6. **PIP (PEP in Pocket):** Emergency medication carried for immediate use after unexpected potential HIV exposure.
7. **Peri-Exposure Prophylaxis:** A prevention strategy involving medication taken before and after potential HIV exposure.
8. **ART - Antiretroviral Therapy:** Medication used to treat and manage HIV by suppressing the virus and reducing transmission risk.

9. **U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable):** A message that people with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load through effective treatment cannot transmit the virus to others.
10. **STI - Sexually Transmitted Infection:** Infections spread primarily through sexual contact, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis.
11. **MTCT - Mother-to-Child Transmission:** The passing of HIV from a mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.
12. **GBV - Gender-Based Violence:** Any harm, abuse, or violence directed at someone based on their gender. GBV includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence, as well as economic abuse and harmful practices like forced marriage or genital mutilation.
13. **IPV - Intimate Partner Violence:** A form of GBV that involves physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse by a current or former intimate partner. IPV can occur in any relationship and affects individuals across all genders and identities.

MORE IMPORTANT TERMS

14. **Two-Eyed Seeing:** A framework that combines Western science with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to create a more holistic approach to health and wellness.
15. **Culturally Safe Care:** Healthcare that respects and incorporates the values, beliefs, and needs of different cultural groups, particularly Indigenous peoples.
16. **Autonomy:** The ability to make decisions about one's own health and body without external control or pressure.
17. **Knowledge-Keepers:** Indigenous individuals who hold and share traditional knowledge, teachings, and stories within their communities.
18. **Empowerment:** The process of gaining confidence, control, and tools to make decisions about one's own life and health.

Photobook Background

The RED Path Project has been successful in increasing knowledge of STBBIs and building the capacity of incarcerated Indigenous women to prevent infection and improve health outcomes while reducing stigma and promoting cultural connectivity. One thing we have learned through discussions with incarcerated Indigenous women is that they need to see examples of people who have experienced similar challenges as them and are healing and living their lives in a positive way.

This photo book is one example of the strengths-based approach the project strives to embody. The goal of this photo book is to highlight stories of positive First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and gender diverse people to help de-stigmatize HIV and HCV and provide messages of hope, resilience and empowerment.

The impact of seeing your experience mirrored in the experiences of your peers cannot be understated. Contributors were encouraged to share their stories and experiences about what it meant to them to be an Indigenous person who is living their life in a positive way. They chose to talk about the challenges they've overcome, the supports they leaned on along the way, what the healing process has taught them, and so much more.

The Strong Women's Song

Whey hey ya Whey hey ya hey yo

Whey hey ya Whey hey ya hey yo

Whey hey ya way hiyo

Whey hey ya, Whey hey ya, Whey hey ya

Whey hiyo

Whey hey ya, Whey hey ya way hiyo

Whey hey ya, Whey hey ya, Whey hey ya

Whey hiyo

Repeat × 4

According to oral history, the Strong Women's song originated with Anishinaabe women, Anishinabe Kwewag and Zhoganosh Kwewag, who were in solitary confinement in a Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario in the 1970's³. Conditions in the prison were bleak and many women lost their lives. This song was sung as a way to ask the Creator for strength and power to move forward in their journey regardless of obstacles and also emerged as a way of staying alive and supporting one another. We sing this song to honour those women and all people who have suffered in solitary confinement, and to empower ourselves on our own path to empowerment and healing. The song is now sung to honour those women and all women and used for empowerment, healing and resiliency.⁴

³ Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (2017). Daughters, Sisters, Mothers and Wives: An Anishnaabe Reader [Internet]. Retrieved from: <https://onlc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Anishinaabe-Language-Wookbook.pdf>

⁴ Strong Women's Song (2021). [Internet]. Retrieved from: <https://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/strong-womens-song/>

Stories



Resiliency and Freedom

By Ulluria

I am one drink away from returning to my days of the revolving door. The sound of the metal door was all I needed to remind me of the isolation that awaited me. That one drink that took me out years ago. That one hit that brought my children and I a prolonged separation because I was too addicted to care for them. That was another revolving door that just couldn't stay shut. I tried to cry it out, shout it out, write it out, but nothing was working.

The pain and the agony that lived in me was unbearable. It brought me to a whole new level of escape, I did do a geographical change, I ran away at 17. That young Inuk from a small town in Nunavut, who was bright eyed and bushy tailed, seemingly dropped off in the Red-light district upon arrival to the big city. I enjoyed the attention or so I thought. I relished at the amount of so-called older friends. They protected me alright, I was in the "crowd" now. The swift ones, the tough ones, the friendly ones, you name it, I was in "it". I had never heard of pimps in my life, getting high was normal and okay. At the beginning stages of my addictions, little

did I know that it would takes its ugly arm and never let me go until I was at my lowest point, where I could no longer hide the pain from my own self.

In the eighties we were only starting to hear about HIV/AIDS, HCV etc. I never thought that I would stare at my diagnosis, with the doctor telling me that I now had a life-long disease (no cure at that time) and that it could one day lead to my death. Don't do this, don't do that, all these don'ts. I was too drunk or too stoned to comprehend, let alone give a damn. I was invincible in my mind's eye.

It hurt so much to relive my childhood traumas. I could not go there at that time. It caught up to me when I became a mother of two beautiful children. That is when I started to get serious about my disease of addictions, and my health. Maybe I can be a responsible parent, and a happy mother. It didn't take long though for that never ending revolving door of jails, treatment centers, and psychiatric institutions to show its ugly face. So, there I was, once again facing sentences, and conditions.

One day I got "lucky", and a judge sentenced me to a treatment center. I finally faced all the life-long hurts. I completed it and soon after completed a University program in Social Work. I went back to petition the court to have my children back in my care. One look at my accomplishments and the judge at that time asked me how to say congratulations in my language. I knew I had succeeded when the judge asked me how to say congratulations in Inuktitut. This was an experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life.

You see, when I was younger, not even in school yet I was sexually abused. I was the black sheep. I was very hyper as a little girl and a nickname was given to me that I hated for many of my teen years. There were happy memories of life on the land, playing with my friends, and being a child. Then Federal Day School happened. I had blocked a lot of memories from that, but I know what I know and have told my story which was painful to say the least.

Losing my kids to foster care, jails and other institutions are now memories of the past. I am a grandmother now. Although I had a relapse after almost 20 years of sobriety, I have to say nothing has been wasted. My kids are now young adults, and my sobriety is young. One is in jail as I write this, and one is doing well in the south. My grandson is living up north, and I am writing this at a recovery house. I attribute all my healing to my perseverance. I wanted it so bad, and I could not be stopped anymore. I went above and beyond to take back control of my rightful and inherent place in society as a proud Inuk woman.

I thought that the 'system' was always trying to target me. I was born Inuk, here on our vast land, east to west, coast to coast. But I took control by working my way through challenging times while healing. Hard work paid off. Today there is a cure for my disease. Not my addiction to drugs and alcohol, that is a lifetime recovery process which becomes a natural and a beautiful way of life. There is a cure for Hepatitis C. There are many treatment centers but not enough First Nations, Métis and Inuit centers which would allow many to heal in an environment that is natural for them. I would have loved to heal in my language, but it is what it is. I could no longer go back and live the life I was living. It was do or die by this time.

It is my hope and prayers that keep me going. My prayers to all who are affected by colonization and forceful mistreatment of Indigenous women in Canadas' prison system. Whenprison staff and administrators of all levels of government, allow for racism and homophobia in the compounds of the walls, good things are hard to see. I had to fight for myself, and advocate on my own behalf. It became so bad that I resorted to hiring a civil lawyer to report my experiences. The Warden eventually resigned, and to this day, I don't know if the investigation had anything to do with it; but it is what it is.

Ulluria

Life After Incarceration

By Marjorie D Schenkels

March 17, 2009, without going into too much detail, but March 17, 2009 was one of the absolute worst nights of my life. Forgetting the fact that this is the night that I got infected with HIV, that is not what made it the absolute worst night. I was sexually assaulted by my boyfriend. I didn't find out about I had the virus until November 2009. That would be a horrifying red flag to a two-year relationship that never should have happened.

My boyfriend of two weeks at the time, was already showing signs of violence and anger before being diagnosed with HIV. Two years later, I'm still alive, still working, and living in our 3rd home together. He had gotten crueler over the years. The last six to eight months of our relationship, I was in a very low place. I became suicidal, I wasn't dying quick enough for the man that is supposed to love me. I started drinking and doing pills. I slept with a man and didn't tell him my HIV status.

Fast forward to January 2012. I've hit rock bottom, but I am still alive. I left my abusive relationship and my toxic lifestyle and moved from the Interlake Region to the City of Winnipeg.

I started my climb, I still had lots of struggles, and I was still refusing medications for the virus infecting my body. At this point my sexual partner has learned that he is now infected and is soon going to press charges.

My first couple weeks in the city I was homeless, broke, and emotionally alone. I was staying with toxic friends until I could figure out some grounding. I eventually found my half-brother and his mom. They helped me with clothes, a bed and a roof over my head. I was able to leave the toxic friends and never speak or see them again. A few weeks with my so-called family would teach me my journey is not over yet.

My half-brother and his mom conned me into cashing some cheques for them and later got me charged with fraud. I find my aunt and her partner in the meantime, and they help me get away from my brother.

I found my faith while staying with my brother and have since been growing my faith to this very day. I began speaking to a Social Worker who specializes in HIV patients. Through her guidance

and support I was able to get EI (Unemployment Insurance) and then welfare. While not having to worry about work, all I needed was a home and a chance to truly find myself.

I was dealing with a theft charge and had no lawyer in April 2012. I had met an amazing person who was so much fun to be around and so comfortable, but I was still very afraid to tell him my "dark" secret. Shortly after my birthday, in April, I was charged with "Sexual Aggravated Assault". Through the name of the criminal charge itself, it should be changed to "Non-Disclosure of Status". It was a criminal charge over-time; I believe I did deserve.

I am now legally charged with Non-Disclosure to a sexual partner back in 2011. I needed to tell my partner the truth about myself; before disclosing my status, I tell him about the rape, the abuse and the suicide attempts. Since finding my faith and meeting him, I want to live. I believe my life has purpose now. I don't know yet what my purpose is, but I know my life has meaning. Everything happens for a reason. In the two to three weeks of being rightfully dumped by the love of my life, my Social Worker found me a lawyer. My lawyer

fought for me for five long years. Then the boyfriend that dumped me, calls me, and tells me that he misses me. Throughout the wait for trial, and during the trial, he stayed by my side. My boyfriend proposed to me before my trial officially began.

On all three charges I was found guilty, but that was okay. Theft over \$500, I am guilty of, and paid a restitution with one year probation. Fraud over \$5000, under duress circumstances; I am guilty and given 30 hours community service and one year probation. I accept my past transgressions and I have paid my dues.

I was found guilty at my original trial. At the time, I did not understand my charge and had pleaded not guilty. It was during the Gladue Report, that the Reporter explained my charge to me, and I was shocked. Like for real, I thought I was being charged for transmission, that was what kept coming up in Court. Yet it had nothing to do with transmission, but with disclosure of my HIV status. Well, geez, I wish someone had explained that better to me in the beginning. I know I am definitely guilty of not speaking up and that there is no real excuse. I was in a very bad place, but



the man I had consensual sex with, had the right to know what he was consenting to as well. A few months went by and I finally got sentenced. It was really sad and heartbreaking. My man cried hard. I froze, I was too busy trying to process the judge's words. She was not basing the sentence on my crime, but on much more violent crimes. She took into account all the work I did on myself, and all of the positive supports I had set up for myself before lock up.

In the three years it took for my trial and sentence, I was able to get counselling, and I sought help in programs such as REACT and whatever Nine Circles had to offer. I met a like-minded community that supported me and allowed me to feel. I knew in my heart that no matter what happened, I had a support system waiting for me, and that the Creator would never leave me on my own.

My lawyer had exhausted all appeals. He tried so hard to fight for a lost cause. The lost cause being I was the first Indigenous woman in Manitoba to be charged with non-disclosure of HIV. I needed to be made an example of. It sounds awful, yes, but I have learned to accept it. What happens in the courtroom is very different than what happens in jail. The judge sentenced me to two years less a day. I served seven months and finished my sentence on day parole.

I had amazing guards during my incarceration. I was eight months pregnant when I went into the correctional center. At first, I felt violated and invaded. After some time, we made it a joke that the guards were just doing their jobs. They helped me through my sentence, and they helped me move up the ladder to get me to the top. They wrote reference letters for me to get to my doctor when I needed someone I trusted. So much was done for me while incarcerated, my family came to visit me every weekend. When I got home, my family was there waiting for me.

My journey as an Indigenous woman living with HIV is not over. I have two beautiful babies who are both HIV negative and who are very healthy and extraordinarily happy. I have a husband who loves me, and who has been with me from the start of trial and waited for me to come home to him to build a life together.

There is life after HIV and there is life after incarceration. It is what you choose to do with your life that is in your hands.

Marjorie D Schenkels

Living My Fullest Life

By Lisa Patrick

My name is Lisa Patrick, and I have been living with HIV for 14 years. I am a proud mother of one who has graduated three times, once from grade 12, from makeup school and also fashion. Life has its ups and downs. I had a full-time job at Shell Canada for six years, which I had to quit for my health. My late father was by my side at the time of my appointments, medication reminders and even the food bank. Now I am living my fullest life as a person with HIV.

With 14 years of living with HIV and learning about the virus, I would like to thank a lot of people. My doctor's office and his staff nurses, social workers, pharmacist. My mom, late dad, sister, brother-in-law, nephews, niece, uncles, aunties and cousins. They helped me with home care for eight years and medication reminders. They all stepped up when I got sick and needed help. Nine Circles for teaching me what was happening inside my body, my psychiatrist for teaching me about mental health and stigma.

I am now confident in my abilities to help others. I ran into an acquaintance on the bus who knew I had HIV, and she herself had just been diagnosed and might be pregnant. We hugged and I told her it is not a life sentence, just another way of life to learn to live. My advice to her was to find a good doctor and stick close to them. I helped her gather stuff for the baby. The creator had brought us together to tackle HIV, and today she has a healthy one year old that she named after her dad who has gone to the spirit world about four years ago.

What brings me joy today is everyone—the new friends, everywhere, it does not stop. Flying all over Canada for conferences, meetings on Zoom, and small groups for people living with HIV. It gives me hope that the world is not ended, it has just begun.

Lisa Patrick

I Will Not Be Silent

By Ashley C.

My name is Ashley, I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba during the spring of 1983 and I am currently 37 years old. I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. The trauma got to the point where I felt my Spirit leave my body, and at the end of it all I was an empty shell.

I was abused physically for many years, and was witness to my mother's attempted murder by her ex-husband. My mother survived but spent close to a year in the hospital to recover. My grandmother took me in her care but was unable to care for my younger brother, who went to Child and Family Services.

I do not wish to reiterate the horrors that went on in that house and I drank most of my memories away. I became an alcoholic at the age of 7. My mother was a residential school survivor raising three children on her own and I was introduced to alcohol by my mother. I thought this was normal and started drinking outside with my friends.

We then moved, and I was becoming a woman. By the age of 16, I found myself in a violent relationship with a gang member. I wanted to finish school and hopefully set a good example for our

unborn child. I found myself in a domestic abusive relationship where I was getting beaten while I was pregnant. Even during the birth of our child, he was violent towards me, to the point where the nurse had to intervene. My first daughter was 8 lbs. 11 oz. He was finally arrested for domestic violence against me in my final grade twelve semester.

It took about four years to leave him, because he wasn't changing his ways and proceeded to roll with the gang. Meanwhile I was on my way to completing university. I found out he cheated when I went to see a doctor, when my daughter was three. I found out I had gonorrhea. I was horrified and disgusted. I was afraid that I would become HIV positive because technically once the blood test is done there is another agonizing six-month window of possible infection.

Fortunately, everything came back clear and at that point enough was enough. I left him, moved away, and started another relationship with a man older than me. We both hit it off and the things we both liked was to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes. We were codependent alcoholics. Around this time my Grandmother

passed away which in turn threw me further into my alcoholism. Somehow, I'd hid it since I was seven years of age. I managed to graduate University while being a functioning alcoholic. I graduated with my Bachelor of Arts in Sociology.

Shortly before I gave birth to my second child, I went through numerous miscarriages. I prayed to God to send me a baby. During my pregnancy, my eldest daughters' father was brutally murdered, which is still unsolved to this very day. I live in fear and it hurts to know that he died such a horrible death. My eldest daughter took it hard.

I left Winnipeg to live in Vancouver with my two daughters to get them away from all the bad memories that were in Winnipeg. I found myself with no friends and very isolated. I ended up going back to Winnipeg to have my mother take care of my daughters who were ages 4 and 14. It was the hardest thing I have had to do in my whole life, but I had to stop my drinking as it was ruining my life. I found myself with two consecutive back injuries from working at the hospital for five and a half years and was unable to afford rent, hydro, water, etc.

I had to heal myself and break this cycle. In 2017, I found God, or should I say He found me. I was introduced to a beautiful soul who lived in the same rental building as I. She was a Minister, and

she introduced me back to God by praying. Through prayer I felt myself moving upwards and going up towards heaven and had a spiritual experience like no other. I am alive and I survived so much, I am just so thankful and happy to be restored as a whole. I can now cry as I was unable to before. These ordeals affected my daily life, my appetite, my whole being but now I am happy and thankful to God for my journey.

I have since left Vancouver. I am still homeless due to my anxiety, depression and back injuries. I am a loyal blood donor and have since saved numerous lives. I want my body to be pure and I choose to live a single life after failed relationships. My eldest daughter will be 20 years old soon and my youngest is 11. She recently lost her daddy to COVID, so I ask those to please wear a mask, and continue to practice safe social distancing. Life is so short and precious; we are all on this journey called life and I am not ashamed to share my story.

I will not be silent.

Ashley C.

Finding Myself and Learning to Help Others

By Elsie S.

Hello, my name is Elsie, and I have been HIV positive since 2017. At that time, I was using hard drugs and binge drinking daily. I did not take care of myself. I didn't take my medications and eventually I fell into a depression. It wasn't until I started attending programs provided by OAHAS (Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy) and Elevate NWO, where I met other people who were also HIV positive which was comforting.

The programs had many different topics, but to be honest, in the beginning, I was going for the food, the twenty dollars and the bus ticket. As time went on, I got more involved and eventually started getting invited to conferences where I met more people and I really began to like myself again. I realized just how much people are there to help, encourage, and appreciate each other while never feeling judged. I also got really interested in learning more through OAHAS and Elevate NWO.

Before COVID-19, I was a peer support and outreach worker but then everything started shutting down. These days, I still try to be productive or active online with the people I've met along the way. I managed to regain more of my health and lately I have been

wanting to go back to school so that one day, I'll hold a position where I'm able to continue to try and help others who may feel the way I once felt.

I feel there's more to life and I don't want my HIV status to hold me down or make me feel ashamed. I sincerely want to continue learning and growing. Being HIV positive isn't the end. You can live a long healthy life, just try to keep your head up and surround yourself with supportive people and continue to educate yourself.

Elsie S.



My Healing Journey

By Rychele

While incarcerated I had the opportunity to connect with the culture, the Elders, and get involved in ceremony and drumming. This is where my healing journey began.

In the past, I never really felt like I fit in anywhere. Now, having culture in my life, and building a relationship with the Creator, I am connected to this part of my identity. I feel complete. It has changed my life and despite what I had to go through; I will forever be grateful.

I've learned to love myself, learned to forgive myself and learned who I am and what I stand for. I no longer feel like I am defined by the mistakes I've made. I can treat myself with kindness and compassion and I now know that I deserve a beautiful life!

It hasn't always been easy. There have been ups and downs, many tears shed, heartache, frustration and anger, and days where I just wanted to give up. But what I've been taught is that the Creator's plan for me is far greater than I will ever understand. Although His plan for me might not be what I want, it is what is best for me; it is what I need! I know that as long as I stay

connected to ceremony and reach out to my amazing support network of Elders, family and friends, I will be able to get through any obstacle that is put in my path.

Today, I am more than 3 years sober. I can use what I have learned, to help the young women I work with to connect with their culture, support them through their addictions, and be that positive role model for them.

I live each day guided by the 7 Sacred Teachings and I'm honoured to be able to set an example for other women, Indigenous or otherwise. Showing them that no matter what our stories are, no matter what we have been through, or where we come from, we are strong, we are brave, we are resilient, and we DO succeed.

Rychele



It's Never Too Late

By Pebbles

I'd like to introduce myself—My name is Pebbles, and I grew up in Saskatoon in an all-white neighbourhood where most were prejudiced so I didn't have many friends. I was called a squaw and I didn't even know what that meant. My parents drank and fought, and we ended up in foster homes where I survived terrible abuse. I didn't tell anyone because I was scared I would get in trouble, so I ran away but when I went home my mom wasn't there, and there were even more parties. I turned my first trick, had my first slam and starting drinking—and all of this happen by the time I was 13. That part makes me cry.

I wanted to fit in and be like everyone else, I was fixing way too much and turned me into an alcoholic. So now here's me, almost a pro at fixing myself and ripping off tricks and drinking like a fish so I don't have to look at these old men. The foster home caught up with me again and put me in a foster home out of town. I tried to be a good girl I went to school and didn't say much about anything. It didn't last, finally came the day when I turned 16 and I was so happy but found myself in a city and not knowing where to sleep, so I returned to Saskatoon.

Now I'm in Saskatoon I have no place to go except the street. I meet my sister and right away I'm told I can't hang around unless I work for my cousin. Over the years I ended up going to jail a few times and I was scared but at least I had more friends because most of us Native women bonded.

A few years pass and I ended up in Alberta where I met the father of my children. I prayed to have my three sons. We lived on this reserve for a while then moved to the city and that's when I started drinking and fixing, I left my boys and did what I wanted. I ended up so sick and had to go the hospital, finding out that I had HIV, Hepatitis C, bladder and kidney infections, pneumonia and a stroke that left me partially blind in one eye. To top it off, I also had tuberculosis. I didn't care, I wanted to die because I already lost my oldest son to gang violence.

So after a couple months in the hospital, they sent me to Sanctum Care Group, transitional care home for people living with HIV sanctum. There, I bonded with a nurse and told her everything about myself. She saw a caring person in me ... I didn't. She told me, "you could be a peer mentor here." I didn't believe her, and

I thought she was just being nice. After I was good to go from Sanctum, I went to my own home and started working on myself like exercising because I was so skinny and I could barely walk. A year later, Sanctum knocked on my door and asked if I wanted to be a peer mentor there. "Of course," I said, "Absolutely."

Right away, I took training courses through Prairie Harm Reduction here in Saskatoon and bonded with a worker there who I'll call Marli. I remember one time, she picked me up to go to one of the courses and I was telling her a story about myself and saying, "Well that's just how it is." And she said, "No Pebbles, it's not." Marli taught me how to be a peer mentor through Prairie Harm Reduction, and that I deserve to have a life at home, nice things and to stick up for myself. Before that, I thought I'm a squaw and a hoe who has HIV but I'm not that, I never was, it wasn't my fault the way I grew up. I am back a new woman, a 56-year-old Indigenous woman who's come to tell you that it's never too late.

P.S.: Through Marli, I went to yoga classes and got my driver's license! Marli helped me but I did the work—awesome ay!

Pebbles



Can You Relate?

by Ann Favel, otherwise known as Bubbles

My name is Ann Favel, I'm undetectable HIV positive. I've been living with HIV since 2008. I started doing drugs and skipping school at a very young age. I only went up to grade 7, and lived in a small town. I ended up running away when I was 13 because of the sexual abuse I was experiencing at home. I had run away frequently, ran away to Winnipeg and started getting involved in the downtown area and hanging out with older people drinking more. I've been living alone since I was around 15 years. I grew up living in the fast lane, sex, drugs, alcohol—you name it, I lived it right?

I fell in love with a guy and didn't know at the time that he shot up drugs, and because of my use way back then, I would cry seeing him putting a needle in his arm. Then he ended up turning me back on the needle and it just escalated from there. When I do stuff, I do it to the fullest, there's no holding back. I was on down, I turned to heroin, I couldn't get enough.

In 2008 I ended up in a prison in Ottawa, and me and my old man we had broken up already, they took me for blood work or something and then took me back to my cell. All of a sudden, the guard comes and she pulls me out and she says, turns me into a

small waiting room and says sit here for a minute. I was sitting there for about 15-20 minutes; she then comes back with 3 pieces of paper and says “Here. You’re HIV positive.” I didn’t ask them to test me for HIV. That was it. No follow up support. I could have got it from sex with my partner, I could have got it from using needles. We used to get boxes of needles from the truck that drove around, but you know sometimes we needed that hit and sometimes the truck didn’t come by.

I was selling drugs to support my habit, I got caught with a large amount of heroin and pills. They wanted me to do two years in federal, but my lawyer told me to try Drug Treatment Court (DTC). I phoned my sister out of the blue when I was in jail, I had not spoken to her for 13 years. When we spoke, she didn’t know who I was but when I said, “It’s your long-lost sister Bubbles”, she burst out crying. I was away from my family for 13 years with no contact and they did not know if I was alive or dead. My sister had done the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) walk for me and my name on a plaque at the court. They used to do the walk for me every year, and I did not even know.

I was dumbfounded. I didn’t know I was hurting them by me staying away, I thought I was protecting them. By not letting them see me and how I turned out, and meanwhile I was hurting them because they did not know if I was alive or dead. That woke me up, and I went to my cell after that call and cried and looked myself in the mirror and said, “You need your family.”

I gave my life to somebody else to take care of me when I finally tried Drug Treatment Court again. I think it was because of my sister’s tears and knowing that I was hurting my family. That’s what made me wake up and say this life isn’t for me. I ended up going to residential treatment, I started learning how to save my

money, and we had a stopover in Toronto. I looked out the bus window downtown and was shaking because I started thinking how easily I could find someone to get me drugs. All I have to do is walk out the door, no one will know, no one will come looking for me. I sat around a corner where I couldn’t see nobody and did my breathing exercises.

I went to residential treatment in Winnipeg, and I came back to Ottawa. I made a drum in there. Graduation from DTC was so beautiful, because I was free. When I graduated, all the different staff and I got them all a gift before I left. Many, if not all, of these staff were addicts themselves. They gave me back my roots, they gave me the strength to know that everybody is broken, and we don’t need to keep them in the closet. The one who had enough faith in me to see me blossom into beautiful meaning. Every gift I gave at my graduation had a meaning. It was a great relationship, we confided in each other, I was overwhelmed because I gave my life to these people. They got me home safe and sound.

When I finally got home, I had to tell my family that I was HIV+. They had a big banner there when I came home, a big yellow ribbon. We’re having breakfast at my sisters, so while we’re having breakfast I turn around say, “I must tell you something. I need to tell you because I just came from a program that is about honesty and trust. I have to trust that my family will understand, and if you don’t, so be it. I have to live with it.” When I told them I was living with HIV, they all hugged me, not knowing what HIV was. They accepted me. I educated them about HIV and told them I was safe because I’m taking my medications and that undetectable=untransmissible. You don’t have to be careful; you can’t get it. This is all new to them too. We learned together.

I’ve done talks on CBC Radio and I’ve been on TV. I went to HIV

Edmonton because I knew I needed some support. When I first started going there, I was nervous about being seen going in. That’s the shame and stigma working—I didn’t want to be judged. I fell in love with two outreach workers there who helped me introducing me to another awesome group of people. There are people living with this virus, there’s somebody out there that loves you because you have it.

I started really getting into it, every couple of weeks, they have a group of student nurses come in and they teach them about HIV. They’d have a person at the end tell their story. The more I got to talk, the more I got to do it, the more confident I start feeling. By telling my story to people, it does not matter which kind of crowd, just finding that one person who might get something out of it, who learned something from my trials in life, what happened to me and what I went through. My life just now seems to be taking flight and is slowly falling in place.

A few years ago, I went back to Ottawa. I was quite scared to go back there, I enrolled in a conference called “Women Behind Bars” through the Elizabeth Fry Society. Ottawa was where all my drug abuse started, so by going back there, they made sure that I was safe and allowed my sister to come along. It was just like a closing ceremony for me, to say goodbye to that lifestyle that I had, and it gave me comfort knowing that this is a chapter that I know is closing now.

My advice to those behind bars, newly diagnosed or not, is that you matter, you are human, there is life after this. You must be able to love yourself in order to grow. There is help out there, you are

not alone. You need to give up your old way of living in order to grow, there is more to life than what was offered to you when you were growing up. I’m thriving, sure it’s hard to get here, but you have to put work into it to grow. There’s so much that’s happened to me since I got sober, since I left the streets. You need to know yourself and know that you’re strong enough.

Bubbles



Words of Gratitude

To the Funder:

Thank you to the Public Health Agency of Canada for providing the funding that supported this important work. Your contribution has enabled the creation of resources and spaces that uplift communities and promote well-being. This project would not have been possible without your support, and its impact will be felt in the lives it touches and the generations it inspires.

For Indigenous Women Who Are, Or Have Been Incarcerated:

To the remarkable womxn who participated in this journey, who read the words, embraced the activities, and shared your light—thank you. Your courage to step into this space, to reflect, to grow, and to honor your truths, is a testament to your strength and resilience. Know that you are not alone, you are never alone.

You are part of a circle of power and healing, drawn together by Creator's love and the wisdom of your ancestors. You hold within you the ability to make profound changes—not just for yourselves, but for your families, your communities, and future generations. Every step you take, no matter how small, can spark change. The world is waiting for your light and your gifts, and we believe in the strength you hold to create something beautiful and lasting. You have the power to make change in the world, just believe in yourself.

Draw strength from the land, the water, the stars, and the cultural practices that are your birthright.

You are sacred, and your journey matters. Whether it's through small steps or bold movements, know that your actions are shaping a brighter path forward. The world is waiting for your light.

As you carry this experience with you, remember: You have the power to heal, to inspire, and to create a future that reflects the beauty of who you are. You are strong, you are resilient, and you are capable of great things.

Let the teachings and practices guide you, always. We honor you and the gifts you bring to this world. We thank you for your willingness to heal and allowing us to be a part of your journey.

**MIIGWETCH, THANK YOU, AND MAY YOU WALK FORWARD IN STRENGTH
WITH COMMUNITY AND LOVE. UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN!**

Thoughts

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Thoughts



Crisis and Support Lines

Indigenous-Specific Support Lines

INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SOCIETY CRISIS LINE (24-HOUR):

- Toll-Free Phone: 1-800-721-0066
- Phone: 604-985-4464
- Toll-Free Phone: 1-866-925-4419

HOPE FOR WELLNESS LINE:

- Languages: Inuktitut, Cree, Ojibway, English, French
- Phone: 1-855-242-3310
- Website: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

KUU-US CRISIS LINE SOCIETY (24-HOUR CRISIS LINE):

- Adult/Elder Crisis Line: 250-723-4050
- Child/Youth Crisis Line: 250-723-2040
- British Columbia Toll-Free Phone: 1-800-588-8717
- Métis Crisis Line, BC Toll-Free Phone: 1-833-638-4722

TSOW TUN LE LUM SOCIETY:

- Phone: 1-250-390-3123
- Toll-Free Phone: 1-888-403-3123

NATIVE YOUTH CRISIS HOTLINE (24-HOUR):

- Toll-Free Phone: 1-877-209-1266

TALK 4 HEALING (FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN ONTARIO):

- Toll-Free Phone: 1-855-554-4325

General Crisis Lines

KIDS HELP PHONE:

- Toll-Free Phone: 1-800-668-6868
- Texters may request to speak with an Indigenous crisis responder by texting:
 - ↳ For youth: Text FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, or METIS to 686868
 - ↳ For adults: Text FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, or METIS to 741741

NATIONAL OVERDOSE RESPONSE SERVICE (NORS):

- Phone: 1-888-688-6677 (1-888-688-NORS)
- Email: weloveyou@nors.ca
- Website: <https://www.nors.ca/>

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MMIWG SUPPORT LINE:

- Toll-Free Phone: 1-844-413-6649
- Website: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/contact/>

Health and Well-Being Resources

Mental Health Resources

HOPE FOR WELLNESS LINE:

- **Website:** <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>
- **App:** Available for 24/7 access, includes traditional language speakers

TALKING STICK APP:

- **Website and Chat:** <https://my.talkingstick.app/>
- **Poster:** <https://my.talkingstick.app/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/TS-POSTER-2024-Web.pdf>

ONTARIO SHORES MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES:

- **Website:** <https://www.ontarioshores.ca/resources-support/online-resources-and-tools>

CAMH APPS FOR MENTAL HEALTH:

- **Website:** <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19/information-for-professionals/apps-for-mental-health>

Sexual Health and STBBI Resources

ACTION CANADA FOR SEXUAL HEALTH & RIGHTS:

- **Toll-Free Phone:** 1-888-642-2725
- **Text:** 613-800-6757
- **Email:** access@actioncanadashr.org
- **Hours:** 9:00 AM – 9:00 PM EST, 7 days a week
- **Website:** <https://www.actioncanadashr.org/>

STBBI PATHWAYS (APPS AND TOOLS):

- **Website:** <https://stbbipathways.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/apps-links.pdf>

Community and Justice Support

Indigenous-Specific Supports

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES (MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS):

- **Website:** <https://nafc.ca/resources/mental-health>

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES (JUSTICE SUPPORTS):

- **Website:** <https://nafc.ca/resources/justice?lang=en>

TSOW TUN LE LUM SOCIETY:

- **Phone:** 1-250-390-3123
- **Toll-Free Phone:** 1-888-403-3123

Other Tools and Resources

KIDS HELP PHONE (YOUTH AND INDIGENOUS-SPECIFIC CRISIS SUPPORT):

- **Toll-Free Phone:** 1-800-668-6868
- **Text:** FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, or METIS to 686868 or 741741
Find Substance Use Services Near You

Community and Justice Support – *continued*

1. BRITISH COLUMBIA

- *Toward the Heart*
↳ **Website:** <https://towardtheheart.com/site-finder>
↳ **Email:** info@towardtheheart.com

2. ALBERTA

- *Alberta Health Services – Harm Reduction Services*
↳ **Website:** <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page15432.aspx>
↳ **Phone:** 1-888-342-2471

3. SASKATCHEWAN

- *Take Home Naloxone Program Sites*
↳ **Website:** <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/accessing-health-care-services/mental-health-and-addictions-support-services/alcohol-and-drug-support/opioids/take-home-naloxone-program-sites>
↳ **Phone:** 1-866-727-5829

4. MANITOBA

- *Take-Home Naloxone Distribution Program*
↳ **Website:** <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/naloxone.html>
↳ **Phone:** 1-855-662-6605

5. ONTARIO

- *Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program (OHRDP)*
↳ **Website:** <https://ohrdp.ca/find-supplies/>
↳ **Email:** info@ohrdp.ca

6. QUEBEC

- *CACTUS Montréal*
↳ **Website:** <https://cactusmontreal.org/>
↳ **Phone:** 514-847-0067

7. NEW BRUNSWICK

- *Addiction and Mental Health Services*
↳ **Website:** https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/health/Addiction_and_Substance_Use.html
↳ **Phone:** 1-866-552-1122

8. NOVA SCOTIA

- *Mainline Needle Exchange*
↳ **Website:** <https://mainlineneedleexchange.ca/>
↳ **Phone:** 902-423-9991

9. PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

- *PEERS Alliance*
↳ **Website:** <https://www.peersalliance.ca/>
↳ **Phone:** 902-566-2437

10. NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

- *Safe Works Access Program (SWAP)*
↳ **Website:** <https://acnl.net/swap/>
↳ **Phone:** 709-757-7927

11. YUKON

- *Blood Ties Four Directions Centre*
↳ **Website:** <https://bloodties.ca/>
↳ **Phone:** 867-633-2437

12. NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

- *Northwest Territories Health and Social Services*
↳ **Website:** <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/mental-health-and-addictions>
↳ **Phone:** 867-767-9061

13. NUNAVUT

- *Nunavut Department of Health – Mental Health and Addictions*
↳ **Website:** <https://www.gov.nu.ca/health/information/mental-health>
↳ **Phone:** 867-975-5700

Closing the Stories of the Red Path

I hope that you are moved as I have been by the power within the stories from the women warriors who have lived these journeys. Some may think that we should be pitied, however, I hope you do not dishonour us in this way. Our pain and struggle are our power and our strength to take us to the next level of our coming into being and being. We are waking up; we are remembering who we are and where we came from.

As a Moonlodge keeper I encourage each of us to take as much time as this modern world will allow and re-connect with grandmother moon when you are on your time. Open your mind to the full or new moon and connect, if your time is no more, use the cycles of the Moon from the calendar. On the New Moon or Full Moon say "hello Grandmother this is your grand-daughter" it's as simple as that. Allow her power to flow into you, cleanse and renew. You have all the power available to you to heal yourself, your family and your community. This is the gift of being a woman, a life giver, let us women remember together. Our lived pain has given us an advantage, an advance step into healing. My girls, my nieces, my grand daughters, you have never been alone. Your ancestors have always been with you and that is why you are still here, feel them, their energy is within you. We are still here.

All my relations,

Elder Sheila
Stands Strong like a Rock Bear Woman

Walking the RED Path Photobook

Not Vanishing

*In the scars of my knees you can see children torn
from their families bludgeoned into government schools*

*You can see through the pins in my bones
that we are prisoners of a long war*

My knee is so badly wounded no one will look at it

The pus of the past oozes from every pore

This infection has gone on for at least 300 years

*Our sacred beliefs have been made
into pencil names of cities gas stations*

My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly

Anger is my crutch I hold myself upright with it

My knee is wounded see how –

I Am Still Walking

Not Vanishing, Chrystos, 1988