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THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

KCI-NIWESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

Youth

INDIGENOUS YOUTH

MEET OUR CHANGE MAKERS



ISSUE 8

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LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



WELCOME TO THE EIGHTH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC).

This issue is dedicated to our youth. You'll find there is so much hope and resiliency resonating from these pages.

Young Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people are our future. But those we have profiled have not waited to make their mark.

You will read about Michelle Chubb, the hugely popular TikTok star who uses her social media platform to address the injustices facing her people—and has garnered modelling contracts with international companies in the process.

We tell you about Molly Swain and Chelsea Vowel, two young women whose Métis in Space podcast dissects science fiction through a decolonizing lens. It sounds terribly niche but it has attracted a big following.

Fifteen-year-old DeeDee Austin, whose recording career is taking off, tells us what it was like to play her poignant song about the horrors of the residential schools to groups of survivors. Spoiler alert: They loved it.

Annie Beach has painted Winnipeg pink (and blue and green and all other shades of the rainbow) with collaboratively created murals. Now the artist and social justice activist says it might be time to go solo.

We tell you about the amazing art created by young Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people from across Canada that will hang on the walls of NWAC's new Social and Economic Centre in downtown Gatineau, Que., thanks to a donation from TikTok.

Former Prime Minister Paul Martin will explain how his Martin Family Initiative placed its bets on Indigenous education—and is getting results.

And finally, you will read about First Nations journalism student Catriona Koenig about the isolation that Indigenous students can experience at Canadian universities and what Indigenous centres on campus should be doing to help.

We hope this magazine will, in future, showcase many other pieces by budding Indigenous reporters. It is time for First Nations, Métis, and Indigenous women to occupy their space in the national media.

So thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the eighth edition of *Kci-Niwesq*. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

MIIGWETCH.

MONTHLY MAGAZINE TO TELL OUR STORIES

DEEDEE AUSTIN'S MUSIC TAKES FLIGHT

WHILE SHE CONNECTS TO HER MI'KMAQ HERITAGE



THEY SCRUBBED OUR SKIN
WITH A WIRE BRUSH,
THEY BROKE THE BOUNDARIES
OF ALL TRUST, FORGET THE
LANGUAGE OUR PARENTS
TAUGHT US, 'CAUSE WHEN
THEY'RE DONE, YOU WON'T
RECOGNIZE YOURSELF.
THEY CUT OUR HAIR,
THEY SCARRED OUR SKIN,
THEY TRIED TO BREAK THE
CHILD WITHIN ...

These are the opening lines of Buried Truth, DeeDee Austin's haunting tribute to students of the former Indian residential schools.

It was not an easy song to write, says the 15-year-old singer from Fall River, N.S., who is Mi'Kmaq on her mother's side and was recently nominated for a Nova Scotia Music Award.

"My great-grandmother was a residential school survivor. I started writing that song two years ago just because I really wanted to tell our story. I wanted people to get a sense of what happened—because what happened in the residential schools happened to real physical human beings," she says. "But it was also very difficult to write because I have that connection with the residential schools. So it hits home pretty hard."

Buried Truth is also a difficult song to perform live because the emotions are so raw. But Ms. Austin says she has sung it on several occasions for audiences that included residential school survivors. One of those performances was at a ceremony for the first Truth and Reconciliation Day.

"To be completely honest, I was scared to perform it for them the first time," says Ms. Austin. "I didn't want my song to trigger them in any way and bring back those bad memories."

But, when it was done, the survivors told her they loved the song, and that it brought some healing.

There is much about Ms. Austin that suggests she is on the verge of becoming a well-known name on the Canadian music scene. The singer-songwriter and musician has been performing since she was 13 years old and, earlier this year, released her debut EP called Stepping Stones.

Not all of her songs have Indigenous themes. But Ms. Austin's Mi'Kmaq heritage is evident in many of her lyrics.

Her interest in music goes back to when she was a young child and developed a close friendship with her church organist, Maxine Hibbits, who taught her a few easy pieces on the piano.

"She just brought something out in me," says Ms. Austin. "Just her being herself and her having that connection to music, that was very inspiring to me."

When she was seven years old, Ms. Austin took singing and piano lessons. "But they tried to make me read music sheets and that did not work out for me," she says. "I just can't read music, still to this day. Don't put a music sheet in front of me because it's just gibberish."

"SOMETIMES I'LL START
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SOMETIMES, IF SOMETHING
IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD,
I WILL WRITE A SONG ABOUT
IT BECAUSE IT'S ALL ABOUT
HOW I FEEL. THAT'S HOW
I EXPRESS MYSELF AS A
PERSON."

Instead, she plays by ear and writes down the piano chords to a song as it comes to her. Then she writes the lyrics.

"Sometimes I'll start practising and then I'll sing something or have an idea and I'll be like, 'oh my gosh, this would make an incredible song.' And so I'll sit down and try to write it," says Ms. Austin. "Or sometimes, if something is going on in the world, I will write a song about it because it's all about how I feel. That's how I express myself as a person."

Ms. Austin was not raised on a reserve. She grew up disconnected with her Indigenous heritage, something she attributes to the multi-generational impact of the residential schools.

When she was younger, she says she was afraid to tell people about her Mi'Kmaq roots. "But then, as I got older, I was like, 'Look, I am who I am. And no matter how hard anybody tries, no matter how hard I try, I can't change who I am. So I might as well just embrace who I am instead of hiding that half of me.'"

Today she is finding her culture.

"I AM WHO I AM. AND NO MATTER HOW HARD ANYBODY TRIES, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY, I CAN'T CHANGE WHO I AM. SO I MIGHT AS WELL JUST EMBRACE WHO I AM INSTEAD OF HIDING THAT HALF OF ME."

"The other day I smudged for the first time," she says. "I've been teaching myself kind of how to speak a little bit of Mi'Kmaq with some help from other fluent Mi'Kmaq speakers."

And she will continue to write music about the Indigenous experience because "it's important, not only to me, but to my family as well."

Managing high school and a budding recording career is not always easy.

Sometimes she must study online for days on end just to fit her schoolwork into her musical obligations.

And there is not much time for hanging around with friends and doing the normal things a 15-year-old girl does on weekends. "My circle has gotten smaller due to music," says Ms. Austin. "I already have so many

things on my plate and I don't want to be overwhelmed."

Her age has also been a challenge.

"I have actually experienced situations where I have tried to reach out to other artists and they haven't given any conversation back because they don't think it's real. They don't think that I'm taking this seriously," she says. And the music business can be complicated by issues like copyrighting her songs and other behind-the-scenes considerations that take time and hard work.

But Ms. Austin says the moments she gets to be on stage make it all worthwhile.

"I feel nothing but freedom. I feel like myself. It's my happy place," she says.

"Every time I walk on stage, it's like any negative fear that I'm feeling lifts off my

shoulders. It's just an amazing feeling to be so intimate with my crowd and interacting with them. It just gives you such a big blast of joy."

To her fans, she says: "I will continue to keep creating and sharing my passion with the people who find my music enjoyable. And one of these days I hope to be able to continue to deliver my creativeness with all, in person, on a stage near you.

Wela'in, Thank you.

Fast Facts

DeeDee Austin's recorded songs include:

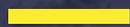
- BURIED TRUTH**
- A LITTLE PAST 9**
- DON'T LIVE A LIE**
- SMALL TOWN GIRL**
- WISHES**
- BROKEN**
- CHEVY**





Annie Beach's Murals

BRIGHTENING SOME OF WINNIPEG'S DARKEST CORNERS



Annie Beach

There is an autobody shop in a downtrodden part of Winnipeg surrounded by dumpsters, broken concrete, and a hotel that is perhaps better known for its homicides than its hospitality.

But the body shop is also adjacent to the Circle of Life Thunderbird House, a place of Indigenous spiritual gatherings. For that reason, it was decided in 2019 that the single-floor cinder-block autobody shop needed a facelift. And Annie Beach, who was then 22 years old, was the artist selected to do the work.

Ms. Beach, a registered member of Peguis First Nation, has curated, designed, and executed over a dozen mural projects throughout Winnipeg. She is an art instructor and works with a variety of youth, community arts, and cultural-based organizations to “engage and uplift others and to imagine a more vibrant, radiant, and tender world for the next seven generations.”

This is why, today, the exterior of the once nondescript garage is awash with brightly hued lady’s slipper flowers painted in green, yellow, and rose and strewn across a background of blush pink.

The mural is called Lady’s Slippers and Dakota Skippers. Ms. Beach explains that it is based on an Ojibwe legend about a little girl whose community was sick. “She knows there’s medicine a few communities over, so she needs to travel to go get it. And it’s cold, it’s winter, but she’s determined,” she says.

“She loses her moccasins when she’s walking in the snow. But she continues anyways throughout the night,” says Ms. Beach. “She gets the medicine, she returns home, and everyone gets better. And then, in the spring, when the snow melts, there were lady’s slippers blossoming in the places where her feet were walking without her moccasins. That was the origin of the lady’s slippers.”

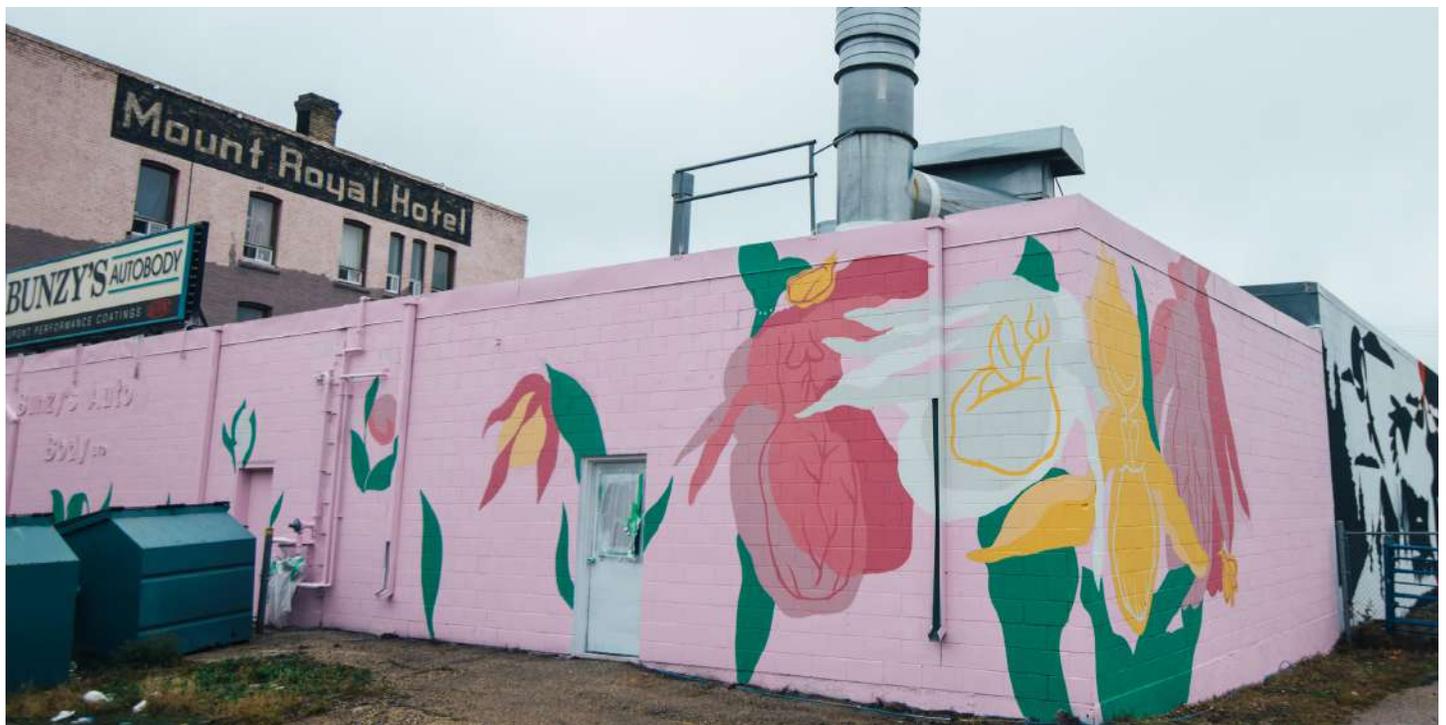
The mural, which was funded by the Winnipeg Foundation, is a gift of art to a neglected spot of our city, says Ms. Beach, who graduated last June with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree (Honours) from the University of Manitoba’s School of Art. She is one of three recipients of

the 2019 Hnatyshyn Foundation Emerging Artist prize, and is currently exhibiting a new commission for the exhibition *Atautchikun | wāhkōtamowin* at the Remai Modern Gallery in Saskatoon, SK.

Her culture is central to her art. But Ms. Beach did not grow up connected to her Indigenous roots. Although her mother is Cree and Saulteaux, Ms. Beach grew up in Winnipeg and lived with her Ukrainian father through her childhood years.

Her maternal grandmother, she says, was a residential school survivor and had much of her culture washed out of her during the years she spent in the institution. That meant her mother was not raised in a traditional household.

“I knew I was Native growing up, but I didn’t really know necessarily what that meant in the grand scheme of things,” says Ms. Beach.



Moccasin Slippers mural by Annie Beach Winnipeg, MB

'THE TITLE OF ARTIST AND THE TITLE OF SOCIAL ACTIVIST KIND OF BLEED A LITTLE BIT INTO EACH OTHER. I THINK THAT'S JUST BECAUSE THE ROLE OF AN ARTIST ENCOMPASSES THAT SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK.'

Annie Beach

Moccasin Slippers mural by Annie Beach Winnipeg, MB



"I remember telling my class 'Oh, I must be Métis' because we were learning that Métis people were this European settler kind of mixed relations," she says. "It wasn't until years later I was like, 'OK, no, I might have a Ukrainian dad but that doesn't mean that I am Métis. I'm actually status.'"

In her last years of high school, Ms. Beach began to seriously explore her roots.

As a 17-year-old, she joined a program in which she mentored Indigenous girls of age six or seven. "I got a chance to play my first hand drum and go to the divisional school powwow with these girls," she says. "So it was a chance to mentor young people but also to learn alongside them."

It was a "coming of age" moment, says Ms. Beach.

Then, when she went to university, she got involved in student politics, and discovered the power of working with other students on issues of human rights. She says she began unlearning the colonial tools of oppression.

Ms. Beach joined the Indigenous Student Association on campus. She went to her first sweat and attended her first Full Moon Ceremony as a university student.

"When you own that identity of being Indigenous, there's a lot of hardship that comes with it," says Ms. Beach. "And I guess that's why there's so many older generations that would hide that part of themselves, because it was just easier to not feel the trauma with it."

Ms. Beach says she has loved working on collaborative murals. But now it may be time for a change of pace.

"I think it's more of a time to reflect. I think of it like the cycles of seasons. Maybe that (the mural-creation period) was my season of summer. And then I was kind of into the fall slump over the past year," she says. "I am getting out of that and now maybe it's winter and I want to hibernate and just do some solo work. So, I might just paint and do my own work on projects right now."

Ms. Beach says she is looking into doing more "guerrilla-style, on the ground,

grassroots" kinds of projects. She has been bringing food to a group of people living in tents by the river, at least one of whom is an artist. "Maybe in my spare time when I'm just sketching at home by myself, I should go sketch with these folks."

She is also helping to run a studio space called the Take Home BIPOC Arts House, which opened in October 2020 with the help of CARFAC. She and teammates Hassaan Ashraf, Sappfyre Mcleod, and Brenden Gali have been challenging the traditional hierarchical structure of art spaces as they create a place for exhibitions and also where people can make art. Ms. Beach is hoping to start a youth council to give young people a final say in how the Art House is run.

And, on a completely different note, she is thinking about learning how to be an Indigenous doula and help new mothers as they give birth. But she says, no matter what happens, her art will remain the central part of her life.

"The title of artist and the title of social activist kind of bleed a little bit into each other. I think that's just because the role of an artist encompasses that social justice work."

"Basically, I am doing lots of reflecting lately with COVID this past year and what my role is as this artist and how I think I can contribute or help people," she says. The title of artist and the title of social activist "kind of bleed a little bit into each other. I think that's just because the role of an artist encompasses that social justice work."

Ms. Beach says she has also been thinking a lot about Elders and Knowledge Keepers and their experiences and teachings. She continually reminds herself that, despite her university degree, "I'm still really young and I want to make sure I don't get too lost in this idea that I am an expert on anything, because I'm not."

But she is also grateful for her artistry. "I am able to use this talent and this passion to communicate artistically what other people struggle to communicate."

Future Visions

Atautchikun | wâhkôtamowin

features new works that were commissioned from artists with connections to Inuk artists represented in the museum's collection. These familial conversations across time and space illustrate what Inuit art is and can be outside of colonial frameworks that focus on monetary gain.

In keeping with the exhibition's themes, the works by contemporary artists Kyle Natkusiak Aleekuk, Tony Anguhalluq, Annie Beach, Tenille Campbell, Tarralik Duffy, Amanda Strong, and Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory speak to Indigenous autonomy, contemporary experiences, and the artists' visions for the future.





FROM MICHELLE CHUBB TO

‘Indigenous Baddie’

A TIKTOK STAR IS BORN

Michelle Chubb, Photo by Jen Doerksen

Michelle Chubb

FROM MICHELLE CHUBB TO 'INDIGENOUS BADDIE': A TIKTOK STAR IS BORN

There were fewer jingle dancing videos on Michelle Chubb's TikTok feed in the fall of 2021. It's hard to dance with a belly full of baby.

Instead, her nearly 500,000 followers watched Ms. Chubb, who goes by the name of Indigenous Baddie, grow bigger and prepare—impatiently according to some of her posts—for the arrival of her first child.

At the age of 24, Michelle is a social media star and influencer. She is a member of Bunibonabee Cree Nation, nearly 600 kilometres north of Winnipeg, which is the city she has called home since she was a child.

She is startlingly beautiful. But it is her sass, her wit, and her willingness to share so much of herself, including her Cree culture and her thoughts about social justice issues, that has led to modelling contracts with companies like Sephora and BonLook.

"I WANTED TO SHOW THE WORLD WE WERE STILL HERE AND THAT NOT EVERY TRIBE AND CULTURE IS THE SAME AND, ACROSS NORTH AMERICA, ACROSS TURTLE ISLAND, WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT VALUES AND BELIEFS."

"I wanted people to know the issues that Indigenous people go through. Mainstream media never really talked about those topics until we, as Indigenous people, started to blow up," she said in a recent interview. "I wanted to help out the Indigenous communities by amplifying those issues."

Ms. Chubb has a few scattered memories of her early life on the reserve.

"I was always outside a lot, playing with my friends and stuff. I remember there was this one house-store where I would go to buy candy and pop," she says.

The transition to life in Winnipeg just before kindergarten was difficult.

"I remember being really shy," says Ms. Chubb. She would talk only to people who approached her first and, even then, she often did not know what to say. And the social rules for kids in the city were much different to those on the First Nation.

"I used to just go walk to my friends' houses on the Rez and knock on their door and ask for them," she says. "But here in the city, you have to call them first. You have to call the parents and ask."

She still speaks mostly in a soft and unassertive manner. But her messages are powerful.

In one recent TikTok video, she starts off smiling and dancing. Then the overlay text says: "Things I have been bullied for ... my lip ... my skin colour ... my voice ... being me." Gradually her smile is replaced by a look of hurt, of insecurity.

When world leaders were meeting in Scotland to talk about climate change, she admonished them to take Indigenous people into account.

"Climate change affects the Indigenous communities around Canada in so many ways," Ms. Chubb says in a video. "A lot of people in the Indigenous community depend on hunting and gathering since food prices are so high. But climate change affects the land and the animals. I am calling out to the world leaders to take responsibility and real actions to reduce emissions now. It's 2021. My people shouldn't be suffering anymore."

One of the issues she returns to often is the tragedy of the many missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

"I knew it was a big problem here in Winnipeg," says Ms. Chubb. "Indigenous people would go missing a lot. And there weren't many mainstream reporters reporting on it. So I wanted to let people know about it."

She has talked on social media about the Indigenous economy. She has talked about the genocide of the Indian residential schools. She has talked about the lack of clean water on reserves. She is an activist and TikTok is her platform.

Ms. Chubb's interest in social media began about Grade 6, when her friends started signing on to Facebook and MSN. Instagram started in high school.

But she didn't get serious about posting her own material until January 2020 when she leapt into TikTok in a big way. Today she has followers across Canada, the United States, and around the world.

In some of her videos, she is in the full regalia of a jingle dancer. In some, she dances.

"I started jingle dancing when I was really young," says Ms. Chubb. "My family was really into it. They were really cultural. Before my



Michelle Chubb, Photo by Jen Doerksen

mom had a family, she was also a jingle dress dancer.”

Ms. Chubb’s family followed the powwow trail on summer weekends. “It was really a fun family time,” she says.

In many ways, it was the jingle dancing that launched her into social media stardom.

“It was kind of just a blending of the two things,” says Ms. Chubb. “Before I started Tik Tok, I was already planning on dancing for the summer of 2020. At the time, I was just showing off my regalia on TikTok. Then COVID hit and there was no powwow that year. So I started to incorporate culture and tradition into TikTok. And that’s when I kind of blew up.”

Experience told her that many non-Indigenous people know nothing about Indigenous culture. “I wanted to show the world that we were still here and that not every tribe and culture is the same and, across North America, across Turtle Island, we all have different values and beliefs.”

Going full bore into social media was scary at first, says Ms. Chubb. But she wanted to abandon her shy persona. The name Indigenous Baddie was part of that transformation. She chose it to give herself more confidence.

Being so open about her own life means she is also exposed to the awful side of social media. There are plenty of trolls and she gets some hate from Indigenous people who accuse her of pretending who she is.

“You have to block and just ignore,” she says. But her followers are now standing up and defending her. And there are so many positive things that have flowed from her social media career.

“I love inspiring others, especially when people are connecting with their cultures,” says Ms. Chubb. “I get a lot of comments and messages saying: ‘Thank you for doing what you do, you inspire me.’ It’s really heartwarming, especially when my little cousins are telling me that they’re proud of me and they want to do the same thing when they’re older.”

For now, she is looking forward to motherhood, and then resuming modelling, perhaps by next summer.

“Growing up, I would always question myself, what am I going to be doing when I am older,” she says. Social media and the resulting contracts have been “kind of mind-blowing and extremely great to experience. I never thought I would be in this kind of position.”

“It’s so amazing that sometimes it still blows my mind because I can’t get enough of it,” says Ms. Stephens. “I just like painting. It takes me to this calm place. And I get to work from home, and I get to raise my kids. I don’t have to drop them off at daycare. So, yeah, I’m still amazed that I’m able to do this.”

“I LOVE INSPIRING OTHERS, ESPECIALLY WHEN PEOPLE ARE CONNECTING WITH THEIR CULTURES. IT’S REALLY HEARTWARMING, ESPECIALLY WHEN MY LITTLE COUSINS TELL ME THEY’RE PROUD OF ME AND WANT TO DO THE SAME THING WHEN THEY’RE OLDER.”



Michelle Chubb, via instagram @indigenous_baddie + art by @kylaelisabeth

PAUL MARTIN

INTERVIEW



FORMER PRIME MINISTER PAUL MARTIN
BET HIS MONEY ON INDIGENOUS STUDENTS—AND THE GAMBLE IS PAYING OFF

Photo Credit: Louise Johns
Maskwacis Early Years program participants in Maskwacis, Alberta

Former Prime Minister Paul Martin bet his money on Indigenous students – and the gamble is paying off!

FORMER PRIME MINISTER PAUL MARTIN

has devoted much of his time since leaving federal politics to improving the quality of Indigenous education. The Martin Family Initiative works with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people to support education, health, and overall well-being of children, youth, and adults.

Kci-Niwesq spoke to Mr. Martin and Chloe Ferguson, the Director of Early Years at the Martin Family Initiative, about the work that is being done to obtain better outcomes in learning in Indigenous communities, and to help every child reach their full potential.

Of all the causes that you could have chosen as the focus for your Martin Family Initiative, why did you choose the cause of Indigenous education?

PAUL MARTIN: We chose it because education is the link to everything that leads to opportunity and a decent life. If you can't read and write by the end of Grade three, what happens is you just simply get passed on to Grade four, then Grade five, and eventually you drop out of school.

Ten years ago, at a particular reserve school in southern Ontario, 13 per cent of the students could read and write at the end of Grade three. At the time, across Ontario, 70 per cent of students of the same age could read and write.

We developed a course that was based on another course worked out in Ontario several years earlier. We adjusted it to the needs of the reserve school. It was a five-year pilot project. And, at the end of five years, the 13 per cent reading rate had risen to 81 per cent. In other words, we were ahead of the Ontario numbers. This course is now in 18 schools across Canada and is expanding.

But the part that got to me, which I have never forgotten, is when the chief of the community stood up to announce the results. He announced it to his own community, a lot of Indigenous people, but there were also a lot of people there from non-Indigenous communities in the surrounding area. And he looked up at the group, the tears rolling down his face, and he said: 'You thought we couldn't do it. But we did it. This is what we can do if you give us the tools to do the job.' We were so hit by this. Our goal has got to be to give the Indigenous communities the tools to do the job. So why did we choose education? It's because it is linked to all of the social determinants that lead to success.

There are business courses in high schools across the country, usually in Grades 10, 11, or 12. None of those business courses reflect what goes on in an Indigenous community. They don't talk about Indigenous role models.

I met with a group of Indigenous students and I asked them: 'Why aren't you taking business courses?' And they said: 'Because the business

courses take place in big cities like Montreal in Toronto and Vancouver. We don't live in big cities. And, second, all the role models are not Indigenous and we know there are a lot of Indigenous people who are really big entrepreneurs.'

So we developed a course along with a publisher, and some of our own teachers, but really supported by the Indigenous teachers and the Indigenous business community. And the course has been a huge success. We're now at 45 schools. We've got workbooks and textbooks that have got Indigenous role models, that have got Indigenous backgrounds in Indigenous businesses.

There are obviously many facets to your program, including literacy for school-aged children and the entrepreneurship for the high school students, which you just talked about. But there's also the early-learning component. What do you offer to young mums and their preschool kids to help ensure their futures and why is this important?

PAUL MARTIN: When you look at Indigenous Canada, when you look at the history of Indigenous Canada, what else can anyone say except that there are few members of our society who are more vulnerable than an expectant mother or a new baby. This is true for all expectant mothers, all new babies. But it is



Photo Credit: Louise Johns, Maskwacis Early Years program participants in Maskwacis, Alberta

particularly touching when we're talking about Indigenous Canada and its history.

That we wouldn't do everything to protect Indigenous people is beyond belief to me, especially when you consider that there are few things stronger than a mother's love for her child. And then when you start to think about the immense hope and possibility that every single new life represents, I believe quite simply that if we're going to build a country that we can all believe in, we have to begin with those who need us most. And that's what the early years does.

"THROUGH THE MARTIN FAMILY INITIATIVE, WE'RE STANDING WITH THOSE YOUNG PARENTS AS THEY DEFINE THEIR OWN PATHWAYS AND SET GOALS IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND LIFELONG SUCCESS."

CHLOE FERGUSON: Having worked at the high school level and then at the elementary school level, what we recognized, and what communities recognized, was that there was more that we could be doing even earlier on before children got to school. We also know that the science behind child development validates the absolute importance of those early years of life—that zero-to-five period when so many of your neurological connections in the brain are being made and the pathways that will carry you throughout your whole life are being established.

It was also to catalyze that essential bond that spans cultures and societies, which we know is extremely powerful, and that is the boundless love that parents have for each and every one of their children, that sense of possibility and hope and belief in doing the most they possibly can for that child.

The Early Years came out of looking at the science behind child development, but also the cultural knowledge around traditional child rearing and child development. And what we came to was the necessity to honour parents as the first and best teachers to young children, and the home environment as the earliest learning environment.

So, we sat down with communities, and we basically said: 'Here's the evidence, here are some examples of programs that are working. What are your priorities for your kids?' And, of course, they said support for young parents, language and literacy development, and play. All of those things make happy, healthy children. They want their children to be prepared to go to school with the skills that make successful people. And that's not reading or writing. It's resilience and empathy and problem-solving and coping mechanisms. The Early Years is all about supporting parents to build those essential skills. In many cases, parents are already doing those good things. So a lot of it is supporting parents. But mostly it's celebrating

and honouring what they're already doing.

We're also standing with those young parents as they define their own pathways and set goals in education, employment, and lifelong success. Because, for many of these young people, it's a bit of a new beginning for them too.

It's a home-visiting program. It pairs community-based workers who are mothers themselves to walk alongside young parents and children from pregnancy up until entry into either preschool or school. They support parents in healthy pregnancies, in becoming the experts in their children's optimal development, and also in accessing other community services that parents have trouble accessing.

Mr. Martin, clearly your support of Indigenous education makes you happy, or you wouldn't be doing it. Could you tell us about one of the most personally rewarding experiences that's resulted from your Initiative's involvement in Indigenous education.

PAUL MARTIN: I can. The home visitors and the mothers and mothers-to-be would have luncheons where they would all get together and they would talk about the issues that they had to deal with. Periodically, I would go to these luncheons and I would talk to the mothers and I was inevitably the only male in the room. I did this a number of times.

Then, one day, I went to one of these luncheons, and there were all kinds of young men there, and I couldn't figure that out. There were three or four of them talking over their food in the corner. So I went over to them and I said: 'Hey, what are you guys doing here?' They basically said: 'We're the fathers.'

"AS FATHERS, WE BOTH HAVE A ROLE AS PARENTS, AND BEING WITH OUR KIDS REALLY MATTERS TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT. AND IT'S REALLY FUN TO BE HOME. AND IT'S REALLY FUN TO BE WITH THE BABIES, AND WE ALL REALIZED THAT WE WANTED TO BE A PART OF THIS PROGRAM TOO. AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE."

I took one guy aside who I had come to know a little bit, and I said to him: 'How come all of a sudden, you guys have come?' And what he said to me was: 'That's what we were talking about over there. We've all had the same experience ... At the beginning, when our wives got pregnant, we weren't sure what to expect. But since they started the Early Years program, what we've noticed is that as fathers, we both have a role as parents, and being with our kids really matters to their development. And it's really fun to be home. And it's really fun to be with the babies, and we all realized that we wanted to be a part of this program too. And that's why we're here.'

And I've got to say, if I have ever seen an example of why this works, it was that.

This interview was edited and condensed.



Photo Credit: Louise Johns, Maskwacis Early Years program participants in Maskwacis, Alberta

by

**CATRIONA
KOENIG**



**“I FELT LOST AND
OUT OF PLACE. AND
MY EXPERIENCE WAS
NOT UNIQUE.”**

— CATRIONA KOENIG

*Indigenous students at university:
‘Lost’ on campus but finding our way*

I’m a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and I’ve only just started to learn what that means, even as I attend a university in a city where the culture is very much removed from that of my ancestors.

I’m in my second year at Carleton University in Ottawa taking a Bachelor of Journalism. I am a Dene who has never really lived like a Dene. I am just discovering my Indigeneity.

As I take this journey, I would like more support and communication from the Indigenous centres on campus that could connect me with other First Nations students who are on similar paths. Although I know that the experiences of Indigenous students will vary at universities across Canada, my interviews with those here at Carleton in Ottawa suggest they too are longing for more outreach.

There are many of us in my situation. And yet, we are left feeling alone.

My grandmother spent most of her childhood in residential schools and moved away from her homeland. She wasn’t able to pass down any traditional knowledge to my father because of the cultural genocide that she experienced at the schools. I grew up like a settler.

For that reason, I have often felt like an amateur Indigenous person. I had little connection to the Dene and I knew nothing about my family history. I’ve even had people tell me that I don’t “look Indigenous.”

So, like many young people of my generation whose parents and grandparents spent time in those institutions that were created to “take the Indian out of the child,” I am now relearning what has been lost.

Carleton University has two Indigenous centres where students can participate in cultural activities or just visit when they need a safe space on campus.

Ojigkwanong, the Centre for Indigenous Initiatives, is run by the university, and the Mawandoseg Centre is run by the student association.

The Ojigkwanong Centre contacted me when I first started at Carleton, sent me gifts, and made me feel welcome. I received items to de-stress, medicine pouches, and tea. They also sent out emails once or twice a month with information about different online events and opportunities.

But I didn’t know where to start. I didn’t want to attend online events fearing that I was taking the spot of someone who deserved it more than I did.

I didn’t know who ran the Ojigkwanong Centre and whether I could visit it in person or not. Up until a month ago, I didn’t know the Mawandoseg Centre existed either.

I felt lost and out of place. And my experience was not unique.

Kiana Meness is member of the Pikwakanagan First Nation and grew up in her community. She is in the third year of the Bachelor of Social Work program.

“When I first came to Carleton, I felt almost like a cultural shock,” Meness said. “I felt very out of place, and it took me a long time to find the Indigenous centres.”

Ms. Meness said she felt like she was the only Indigenous person who came from a reserve in all her classes. “I felt very singled out,” she said. “I had no other pals or peers the same as me.”

Ms. Meness said she wished the Ojigkwanong Centre communicated better with the Indigenous students at Carleton, especially those who are new to the university.

“I still want to just finish school and go back to my community because it’s a different atmosphere out here than it is back home,” Ms. Meness said. “This was my first experience ever being to a city

school and having so many faces and so many people that I didn't recognize."

Kile George is from Nipissing First Nation and moved to Ottawa for school last year. They are in their second year of the political science program. Like Ms. Meness, George felt a culture shock when they came to Carleton.

"I feel like being in Ottawa, and being away from my community, I haven't really had as much access to healing, traditional ceremonies, our Elders, and really just haven't had that family support that I used to have," George said. "I've sort of been deprived of my culture in a way."

George said that they really appreciate the Ojigkwanong Centre at Carleton. In its most recent care package, the centre sent out packets of tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar, and sage. "I actually bring all four of them wherever I go. For protection. I always have them with me," George said.

However, George expressed a desire for better communication between Carleton University and its Indigenous students. "I was walking through the tunnels. I saw one of the murals for the Indigenous student council," George said. "I've never heard anything about it. I would love to get involved with that, and I have no idea how."

Aurora Ominika Enosse is from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory and studies social work at Carleton. This year, she is also the coordinator of the Mawandoseg Centre.

Ms. Enosse said she wishes the Ojigkwanong Centre could do more to have a better connection with the students at Carleton, especially since it is being run by the university. But, as the coordinator of a student-run centre, she does not have access to the kinds of databases that list every Indigenous student on campus. She asked the Ojigkwanong Centre to share information about an event she was putting on, but it fell through.

"I feel like that's kind of disappointing because we could complement each other and help each other out," Ms. Enosse said. "I know that I'm a smaller organization than them, but I still do events for our students."

Ms. Enosse's mother was a student at Seneca College when she was in high school. They hosted a banquet ceremony for their students and organized an award ceremony

for the graduates. They would also take their students on cultural trips to visit different places, Elders, and learn to be on the land.

"I always heard a lot of good things, and then I came here and I was kind of really disappointed in the Indigenous student centre," Ms. Enosse said. "It's a beautiful space, but it just never felt like a community."

I reached out to the Ojigkwanong Centre and they were not available to speak with me. I am left with questions. Is the centre understaffed? Does it receive enough funding from the university? Is this an issue across Canada? Ultimately, universities need to reach out to Indigenous students. We should not be left in the dark.

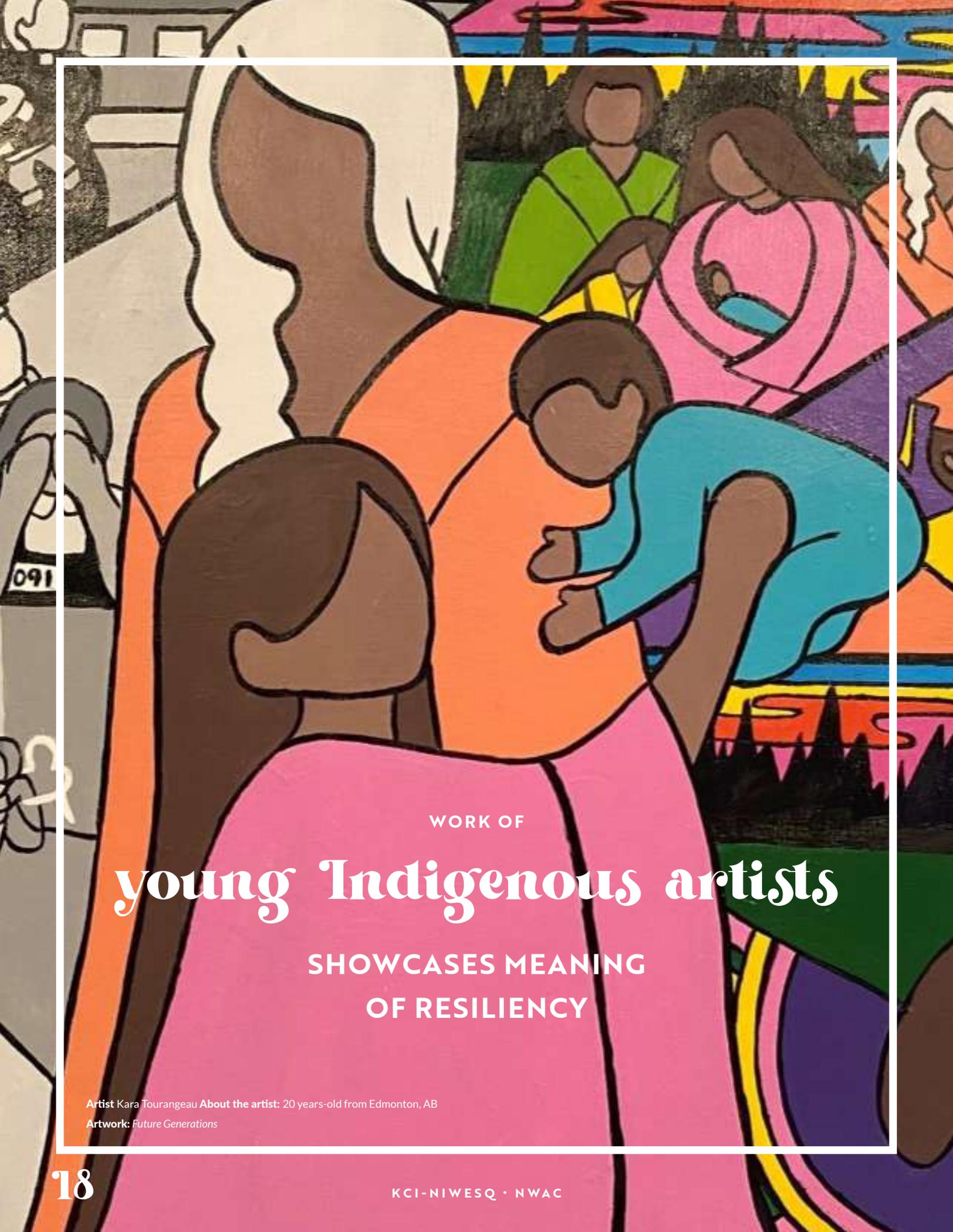


"I FELT VERY SINGLED OUT. I HAD NO OTHER PALS OR PEERS THE SAME AS ME."

- KIANA MENESS

"I HAVEN'T REALLY HAD AS MUCH ACCESS TO HEALING, TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES, OUR ELDERS, AND REALLY JUST HAVEN'T HAD THAT FAMILY SUPPORT THAT I USED TO HAVE. I'VE SORT OF BEEN DEPRIVED OF MY CULTURE IN A WAY."

- KILE GEORGE



WORK OF

young Indigenous artists

SHOWCASES MEANING
OF RESILIENCY

Artist Kara Tourangeau About the artist: 20 years-old from Edmonton, AB

Artwork: *Future Generations*

What does Resiliency mean to you?

Young Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people from across the country answered that question with their original artwork. Their work will adorn the walls of NWAC's new Social and Economic Innovation Centre, the five-storey headquarters of NWAC which is set to open soon in Gatineau, Que.

The artists, ages 29 and under, have been paid for their work with a contribution from social media giant TikTok.

Lynne Groulx, NWAC's CEO, says the organization received a call earlier this year from Steve de Eyre, TikTok's Canadian Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs, who offered a donation of \$30,000. "We proposed that the contribution be made to acquire artwork from Indigenous youth," says Ms. Groulx. "And he was very enthused by the idea."

NWAC put out a call for submissions, asking for art based on the theme of "what does resiliency mean to you?" The feedback was "tremendous," says Ms. Groulx.

In all, NWAC received 90 submissions from 62 artists, and has reached out to 39 of the artists to purchase 60 pieces.

"Some of the artwork we received is photography and some is oil on canvas," says Ms. Groulx. "We also received digital and multimedia art pieces. The artwork ranged in size from small to really large."

It also came from coast to coast to coast, she says.

"Some of it's really colorful, some of it's very modern, some of it's more traditional," says Ms. Groulx. "There are some really beautiful pieces."

"ONE OF THE ROOMS WILL BE DEDICATED TO YOUTH. HERE IS WHERE THE ART WILL BE DISPLAYED. THIS IS THEIR ROOM. IT WILL BE FOR YOUTH-BASED ACTIVITIES. IT WILL BE FILLED WITH CHAIRS THAT ARE BRIGHT YELLOW, LIKE THE SUN, SO THEY WILL FEEL THERE'S A SPACE IN THAT BUILDING THAT IS THEIR FUNKY SPACE."

To showcase the submissions, NWAC is creating a booklet. Alongside a picture of each piece of art will be a few words about how it reflects resiliency. A copy of the booklet will be sent to Mr. de Eyre to thank him for TikTok's generosity.

The art will be hung in a dedicated room in the Social and Economic Centre, which features a number of culturally designed meeting rooms, three of which have distinctions-based themes: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

"We want to dedicate one of the rooms that has a blank slate to the youth," which is where this art will be displayed, says Ms. Groulx. "This is their room. It will be for youth-based activities. It will be filled with chairs that are bright yellow, like the sun, so they will feel there's a space in that building that is their funky space."

KARA TOURANGEAU

**ARTWORK #1:
FUTURE GENERATIONS**

ARTWORK #2: HEALING



Did you know!

NWAC'S CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FROM YOUTH:

- 90 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED FROM 62 ARTISTS
- 60 PIECES PURCHASED FROM 39 OF THE ARTISTS

Resiliency & Art



BETHANY MCKAY

ABOUT THE ARTIST: 18-YEAR-OLD DAKOTA/OJIBWE ARTIST FROM WIPAZOKA WAKPA.

ARTWORK #1:
"PAHIN MITAWA TEWAKHINDA"
(I CHERISH/AM PROUD MY HAIR)



AIJA KOMANGAPIK

ABOUT THE ARTIST:
YOUNG, INUK ARTIST

ARTWORK #1: COMMUNITY

ARTWORK #2: GOVERNMENT HOUSING (OVERCROWDING)



MARIAH ALEXANDER

ARTWORK #1:
CULTIVATING RESILIENCY



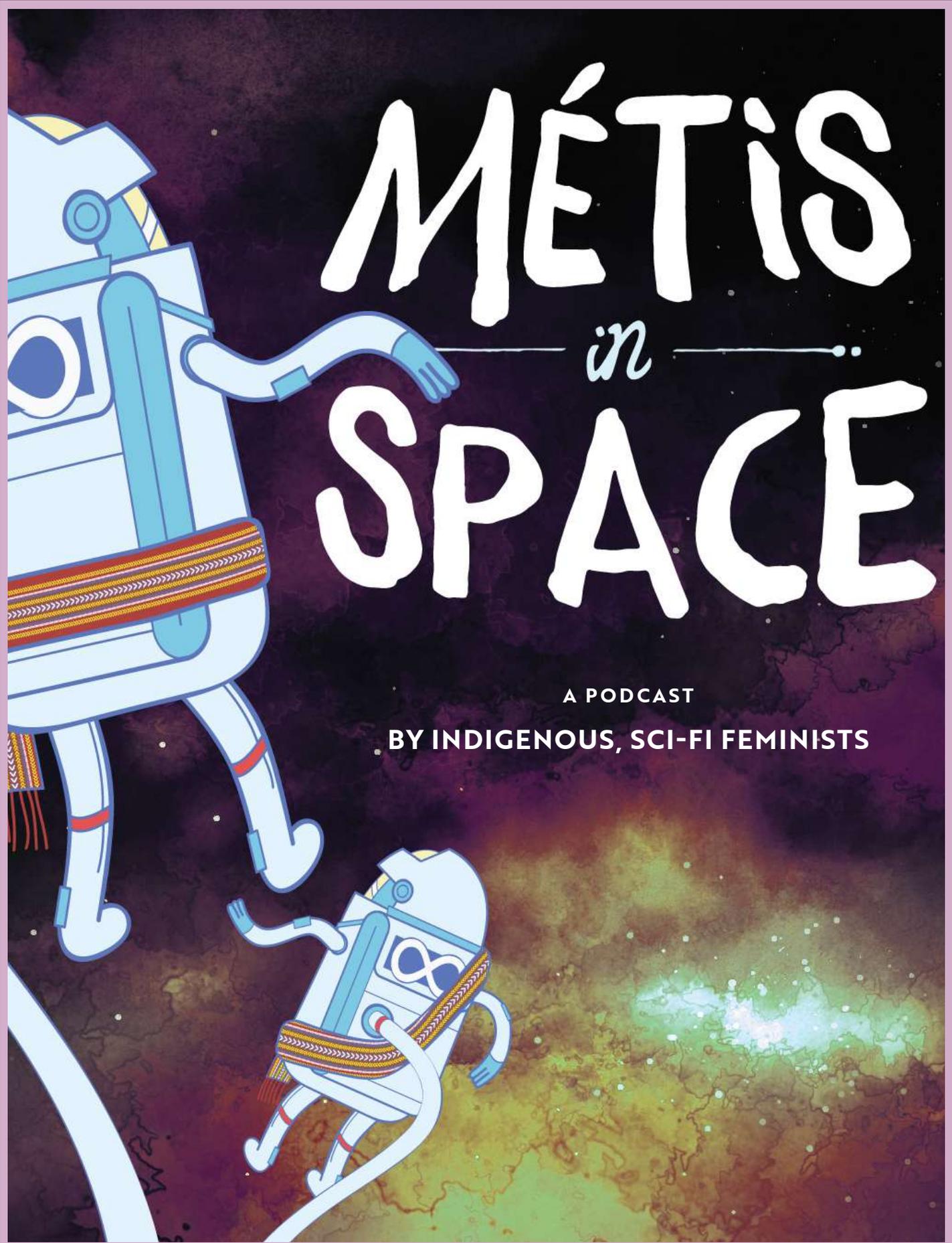
ARTWORK #2: (CROPPED)
"WASICU! WASICU!"

ANNWIN MANITOWABI

ABOUT THE ARTIST:
FIRST NATIONS OJIBWE FROM ONTARIO

ARTWORK #1: IN UNITY

Curated selection of some of the pieces selected by NWAC: *Work of young Indigenous artists showcases meaning of resiliency.*



MÉTIS

in

SPACE

A PODCAST

BY INDIGENOUS, SCI-FI FEMINISTS

Métis In Space:

WHO KNEW THERE WAS A BIG AUDIENCE FOR A PODCAST BY INDIGENOUS, SCI-FI FEMINISTS?

Molly Swain and Chelsea Vowel were having what they call their “sad summer.” The young Alberta Métis women happened to be neighbours in the same walk-up apartments in Montreal in 2014.

Ms. Swain, who was working towards an undergraduate degree in women’s studies and world religions at McGill University, was underemployed. Ms. Vowel, a teacher, was off for the summer months. They had too much time on their hands.

“So, we ended up hanging out and chatting about stuff and making jokes,” says Ms. Swain, who is now 33. “And we discovered that we had a shared love for science fiction and a shared love for making fun of the things that we love, and critiquing the things that we love.”

Ryan McMahan, an Anishinaabe comedian who is one of the best-known podcasters in

Canada, had just released a “how to make a podcast” episode of his Red Man Laughing podcast. “Chelsea and I listened to that episode and we were like, if Ryan could do it, we can do it.”

The initial plan was to record their conversations so they could laugh at their own jokes over and over again. “We thought we were hilarious,” says Ms. Swain. “But we were like ‘no one else is going to be interested in this.’ It’s an Indigenous feminist science fiction podcast, like, that’s outrageously niche.”

Days after the idea was formed, they recorded their first episode.

Their podcast is called Métis In Space and it deconstructs science fiction through a decolonizing lens. Generally, the two women share a bottle of wine as they review a science fiction television show or movie featuring Indigenous people and themes. It is, in their own words, ridiculously nerdy.

They also use the podcast to do some of their own sci-fi world-building, “We have constructed a sort of fiction where we live 300 years in the future and we’re sent back in time,” says Ms. Swain. “What we’re interested in doing with science fiction is using it to imagine decolonial futures, and then using the world we’ve imagined to start building towards that kind of future.”

It is funny and it is edgy.

“We started podcasting when Indigenous podcasting was still relatively in its infancy. And I think we were one of the first Indigenous-women-hosted podcasts,” says Ms. Swain.

They have attracted a following of devoted fans.

“It’s great that we have an audience,” says Ms. Swain. “It’s a constant source of surprise for us. We’re really happy to have listeners but we expected it to be us and our moms.”

Ms. Swain is now a PhD student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton where she is studying Métis political history and Métis anarchism. Ms. Vowel is teaching Cree at the university.

The podcast is not their only project.

They are behind an effort called Back 2 The Land: 2Land 2Furious, which aims to provide a non-urban space for Indigenous people in Edmonton to participate in land-based and cultural activities and ceremonies.

“Chelsea was finishing up her master’s thesis,” says Ms. Swain. “She loves to start new projects when she’s procrastinating on other projects. It’s like, ‘hey, why don’t we start a fundraiser and buy some land ...’”

The women figured it would be a couple of years before they had enough cash to purchase a parcel of reasonable size. But, a few weeks into the fundraiser, they were contacted by a wealthy American man they call their “sugar settler” who offered them enough money to buy a quarter section in Lac St. Anne County in Alberta.

“We were like ‘dude, tell us another one.’ We thought he was going to start asking us for credit card information, that kind of thing,” says Ms. Swain. “But, you know, we said on the off chance that this is real, let’s see how far we can take this because, if we just say no, we could really lose out here. And it turns out it was true. It turns out, it was all real!”

The land they bought is not especially suited for agriculture. But the women are, among other things, hoping to introduce Indigenous food sovereignty practices and to harvest traditional medicine.

Ms. Swain says she and Ms. Vowel are now asking themselves: “What can we do in the here and now to take those steps that we need to have a future that is free of capitalist colonialism? Where the Earth is healing from climate change, where we’ve dismantled



Pictured: Molly Swain

systems of oppression and can live together and live with the land in ways that are more balanced and less violent. So we consider this land-back project, and all the other amazing work that's going on with the land-back movement, as part of this overall scenario. We do the work that we do because we want better for coming generations."

Another of Ms. Swain's projects is Free Lands Free Peoples, an Indigenous-led anti-colonial prairie penal abolition group. Thirty per cent of federal adult prisoners are Indigenous even though Indigenous Peoples account for just 4.5 percent of the Canadian population.

Free Lands Free Peoples was initially meant to focus primarily on public education with a podcast advocating penal abolition on the prairies. Then COVID hit, and the crisis within prisons increased as the virus spread through the incarcerated population. So the group started a fundraiser to help and support prisoners, and it was quite successful.

Now they are working with other prison abolition groups in Saskatchewan Manitoba and Alberta to raise money, do public education work, and write about anti-colonial penal abolition on the prairies.

"I'm passionate about it, for a lot of reasons," says Ms. Swain. "It's our relatives being criminalized, who are experiencing the violence that's inside. Prisons are one of the primary mechanisms for containing and removing Indigenous people to increase colonial expansion, to weaken our nations."

She and Ms. Vowel are also working on a graphic novel. And, of course, they still have Métis In Space.

"When it started out, we said this is something that we're doing for fun, and we're going to do it as long as it keeps being fun," says Ms. Swain. "We make our all of our own rules. We don't do advertisements. So we can say whatever we want, we can do whatever we want, we can totally change our standards for what we're doing anytime that we want. And we can take it in all sorts of different directions."

As for her own future, Ms. Swain says she is interested in work that fundamentally transforms how people relate to one another. "I believe really strongly that liberation is possible in our lifetimes."

"I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT IT [FREE LANDS FREE PEOPLES PROJECT] FOR A LOT OF REASONS. IT'S OUR RELATIVES BEING CRIMINALIZED, WHO ARE EXPERIENCING THE VIOLENCE THAT'S INSIDE. PRISONS ARE ONE OF THE PRIMARY MECHANISMS FOR CONTAINING AND REMOVING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO INCREASE COLONIAL EXPANSION, TO WEAKEN OUR NATIONS."

Did you know!

MÉTIS IN SPACE

IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF THE INDIAN & COWBOY PODCAST MEDIA NETWORK.

PUBLISHED by NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

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NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.

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