

Treaty 7 Elder Capacity Camp & Cultural Celebration 2022



Over the course of four days, nearly 30 esteemed Elders representing various nations, including Treaty 7 and beyond, gathered in beautiful Kananaskis Country. Taking place August 22-25, 2022, this event was hosted by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), in collaboration with Mahegun Tails Inc., the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, Miskanawah, Trellis, and ATB Financial.

Now in its second year, this event is uniquely guided by the Elders, for the Elders. This year's gathering was called with the intention to support and lend strength to one another in their healing journeys. From the morning song, first sung as the sun peeks out from over the rolling hills to the late-night stories told around the fire, every detail carried intention: *to heal one's spirit*.

The organizers and helpers of this event would like to acknowledge the important role of our Elders in the community— "They give so much of themselves through their teachings, through their ceremonies. This is our

"This year, we are gathering for the purpose and intention of healing. Healing the traumas of our past, honouring those who have journeyed to the spirit world, and realizing that we do not have to grieve and heal alone. We can support one another."
-Elder, Reg Crowshoe

opportunity to give back to them." -Knowledge Keeper, Karli Crowshoe. This gathering provides a safe space where feelings can be felt, and our Elders, who work tirelessly at supporting the community, can in-turn feel that support reciprocated. The teachings shared involved themes of healing and wellness, reciprocity, ceremony, prayer, creation story, inter-nation knowledge sharing, song, medicines, parallel practices, reclamation of the old ways, living in accordance with natural law, intertribal powwow and cultural dance.

"This gathering is important because we have experienced a lot of trauma and with that, we carry a lot of weight. We have to take care of ourselves, otherwise we can't take care of anyone else. ... This Elders' gathering will benefit the entire community as our own healing will go onto heal others."
-Elder, Wallace Alexson



Elders: Reg Crowshoe and Rosemary Crowshoe, Shirlee Crowshoe, Evelyn Kelman, Clarence Wolf Leg Sr., Herman Many Guns and Brenda Many Guns (North Peigan), John Chief Moon Sr., John Chief Moon Jr. and Monica Chief Moon, Patrick Daigneault and Patricia Daigneault, Wallace Alexson and Florence Alexson, Jackie Bromley, Doreen Healy, Frances Littlelight, Ruth Scalplock and Frances Melting Tallow, Alice Kaquitts, Donna Kaquitts, Vinnia Van Overdyk, Edmee Comstock, Violet March, Anne Paulette Kokak, Linda Brass, and Darryl Brass Jr.

The languages, teachings, and practices of various Indigenous nations were celebrated including Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Stoney/Nakoda Sioux, Nêhiyaw (Cree), Métis/Michif, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Denesuline, and Inuit.

Day 1: A Prayer for Healing

The first day opened with a Pipe Ceremony led by Cree Elders, Patrick and Patricia Daigneault. Adhering to protocol, everyone was welcomed into circle and offered tobacco in a hand-painted pouch from Janet Naclia (ARPA). The gathering opened with prayers for the week ahead, a pinch of tobacco was held close to the heart throughout the ceremony and then offered to Mother Earth.

“It’s important we learn from our Elders on how they process their trauma and heal. At the start of camp, we take those traumas, and they are placed in the ground with our tobacco—we let it go and give it to Creator.”
-Knowledge Keeper, Adrian Goulet

Following this, Reg and Rose Crowshoe led us through a Blackfoot purification ceremony. Elders and helpers gathered in prayer and one-by-one, approached the Elders to have their faces painted—cleansing our minds, bodies, and spirits to begin the camp in a good way. In the afternoon, with her grandparents by her side, Karli Crowshoe hosted a Tea Dance Ceremony. Bringing everyone together in ceremony, we set our intentions upon



healing, and our first day wrapped up with joining hands in a Round Dance. Tea Dance songs were performed by Adrian Goulet, Albert Goulet, Norvin (Spike) Eaglespeaker, and Clarence (Skip) Wolfleg Jr.

Day 2: Métis Teachings

On the second day, this gathering saw its very first Métis ceremony!

Opening with smudge and prayer led by Métis Elder, Edmee Comstock, we celebrated the varied ties within our ancestries. We shared stories and reflected on the two bloods and two loves that make the Métis nation whole.

Edmee told stories of her life growing up, from her perspective living in a rural homestead as the youngest of 17 children.

A song was then shared by the Métis singer-song writers, Sandra Sutter and Brenda Roland. Sandra and Brenda attended the camp as “Elder apprentices”, learning from the Elders in ceremony to help the continuation of traditional knowledge and teachings. Sandra and Brenda wrote the song together the evening prior. Sandra then walked us through a tutorial on how to tie the Métis or *L'Assomption* Sash, and the various meanings behind how it may be tied. To

conclude her teaching, she then gifted the sash to Maddison Drader (ARPA), who is of Métis ancestry and attending camp as a staff and helper to Elders. “A sash is presented as a thank you and to show appreciation for an outstanding contribution to the Métis Nation.” -Knowledge Keeper, Sandra Sutter



The day concluded with campfire stories. Blackfoot Elder, Jackie Bromley made a special fry bread using a recipe she had growing up as a young girl that was crafted for cooking over an open fire. This honoured the resourcefulness of her ancestors who went before her.



Day 3: Together Across Nations

In the morning, a filming crew arrived to interview Elders and Knowledge Keepers on the purpose and importance of this gathering. Interviewees included: Reg Crowshoe, Karli Crowshoe, Vinnia van Overdyk, Alice Kaquitts, Clarence Wolfleg Sr., Wallace Alexson, Anne Paulette Kokak, Tamara Himmelspach, Darryl Brass Jr., Adrian Goulet, and Chris Wainwright.



The morning session was led by Cree Elder, Patrick Daigneault, who invited the non-Indigenous Helpers to share their stories of how they came to be at the Elders Camp. This sharing was meant to honour the building of relationships between the Elders and their allies. Four helpers spoke touching the themes of inclusion, humbleness, a search for spirituality, and the great gift of being able to work in a good way with the Elders present.



In the afternoon, we gathered for an inter-nation memorial powwow, honouring the character and teachings of the late Daphne Good Eagle and Darryl Brass, Sr. Close friends and relatives gathered to share stories and acknowledge the impact our loved ones had both in our own lives and within the community. Their spirits live on as we call upon them in ceremony, remembering their beautiful gifts and contributions.

To conclude the third day, ARPA gifted blankets to Reg and Rose Crowshoe to show appreciation for their effort and commitment in leading this gathering as well as for their call to the Order of Canada. With great gratitude, we thank our Elders for the time and energy they devoted to making this a successful event. Most notably, the important ceremonies that take place here, ultimately support the wellness of our community as our Elders return home feeling loved, connected, and re-energized. "Having a camp like this rejuvenates us, bringing us health and wellbeing so we can bring these teachings back to our homes and communities." -Elder, Wallace Alexson

"Elders, Knowledge Keepers, [and] Pipe Holders must heal so we can work towards healing our communities. ... We come from a very rich culture, but colonial policy denied us the right to practice ceremony. We owe it to our ancestors and those who walked before us to preserve our heritage and language. When we gather, when we sit in ceremony, this brings about healing."

-Elder, Alice Kaquitts

Day 4: Go Home Song

Our final day opened with a Sunrise Ceremony led by Saulteaux Elders, Wallace and Florence Alexson. This ceremony welcomed the day and gave thanks for our time together. The Elders, sitting together in circle, shared their own teachings on how they welcome a new day.

Following this, Saulteaux/Cree Elder, Vinnia van Overdyk led the gathering in a sacred healing ceremony. Those who participated addressed letters to their ancestors and loved ones, sharing the words that never had the chance to be spoken aloud. Our letters are then given to the fire, and we allow the smoke to carry our prayers to Creator.

"We all sit in circle and we share—in the sacred circle, we heal each other. It's important we face the harm and abuse from our past. Many use drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. Instead, we can create a healing environment, a supportive circle. We, as Elders, are modelling how to heal our traumas so our young people don't have to feel what we felt."

-Elder, Vinnia Van Overdyk



In the afternoon, Blackfoot Elder, John Chief Moon Sr., closed the camp with a prayer in his language and Patrick Daigneault led the "Go Home Song" in circle. Singer/drummer, Adrian Goulet, also introduced the song that he created for the Elders Camp as commissioned by Janet Naclia from ARPA. The Elders and Helpers all received gifts in acknowledgement of the important work and teachings that were shared this week.



Key Next Steps

Based on feedback from Elders, Helpers, and organizational partners, here are some key next steps:

- Secure Funding for an Elders Capacity Camp in 2023 with the vision of extending an invitation to include more Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Locate a camp site that can accommodate our growing needs
- Look at very specific training opportunities for camp helpers
- Build in more opportunities, in all future programming, for Elders to experience joy, share, laugh and celebrate each other
- Understand further how these camps can help families, as well as Elders, process intergenerational trauma

Partners



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We value this unique opportunity to celebrate and show appreciation to our circle of Elders and of course, we cannot carry out this important work without the support, kinship and generosity of our funders:



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Special Thanks

Thank you to our partners: Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), Mahegun Tails Inc., the Aboriginal Friendship of Calgary (AFCC), Miskanawah, Trellis, and ATB Financial! The involvement of these agencies allowed for additional supportive roles, staff, and volunteers to facilitate a successful event. These individuals offered their time as helpers to the Elders, serving meals, supporting site management and clean-up, and facilitating children's activities for the Elders travelling with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

In addition, we would like to extend our appreciation to Chris Wainwright (Miskanawah) and the kitchen staff, who nourished our hearts and tummies, giving us the energy to walk into ceremony every day. Notably, the meals offer the occasion to connect with one another and reflect on the day's events as we break bannock together!

In addition, we wish to extend a sincere note of appreciation to all of the organizers, organizing partners, and helpers who were so

essential to the delivery of this event. A special shout out to Erin "Ellie" Henderson (Mahegun Tails Inc., Miskanawah) and Janet Naclia (ARPA) for compiling this report. And, of course, we would like to express our gratitude to Adrian Goulet (Mahegun Tails Inc., AFCC) who, as the site manager, kept us safe, organized, and on track. Our most sincere gratitude to all of the participating Elders and Elder Apprentices for taking the time to share their wisdom, beauty, and guidance with us.

"This camp is an important opportunity for us to give back to the Elders, who give us so much through ceremony. It's an honour to be a helper in this work, to be a part of an event where we can give them a beautiful space to gather, to care for them through accommodation and food—to care for their spirits the way they have cared for us."

-Helper, Chris Wainwright

All our relations.



For more information on this initiative, contact Janet Naclia, Director of People and Programs for ARPA, at: jnaclia@arpaonline.ca.

Report compiled by Mahegun Tails Inc. and Janet Naclia. Photos by Mahegun Tails Inc.

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