



nato' we ho win

Using Cultural Expressive-Arts to Develop Resiliency



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Intention

nato' we ho win (Cree for "The Art of Self-Healing"), is a process presented by Barb Frazer who was mentored by Willie Ermine and Norma Rabbitskin. The process was identified by Willie Ermine and is the term that captures the heart of the project. nato' we ho win is an innovative intervention program that addresses the mental and physical health needs of Indigenous women who have experienced intimate partner violence. Participants engaged in trauma-informed, artistic, and cultural programming designed to increase stress management skills, social support networks, and knowledge of traditional Indigenous culture focused on addressing health and social issues related to colonization.

nato' we ho win is a project of the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS), funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Connection

PATHS member agencies, domestic violence shelters and counselling centres in Saskatchewan, serve women who are fleeing violence and their children. The majority of clients in Saskatchewan's domestic violence shelters are Indigenous. Indigenous women who seek support at domestic violence services in Saskatchewan have often experienced multiple traumas, such as family violence, sexual violence, and/or childhood sexual abuse. As well as domestic violence (often including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and financial abuse), many Indigenous women suffer trauma stemming from Canada's history of colonization and residential schools. Whether the women themselves attended residential schools, or members of their family did, the trauma exists across generations.

The nato' we ho win intervention program aimed to decrease trauma-related symptoms and improve health outcomes for Indigenous women who have experienced domestic violence, as well as other trauma related experiences.

Relationships

The nato' we ho win program is designed to align with a trauma-and-violence-informed approach that realizes the widespread impact of trauma, recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma, responds by integrating this knowledge into the structure and practice of the intervention and above all, resists re-traumatization. The following key principles served as a framework for all aspects of this intervention:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer Support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice, and choice
- Cultural, historical, and gender sensitivity

The group manual was designed by an Indigenous Knowledge Educator who is also an Indigenous (Cree) Knowledge Keeper. Teachings to inform nato' we ho win were given to the Indigenous Knowledge Educator by two Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, male and female. Before implementing the nato' we ho win program, a full-day workshop on trauma-and-violence-informed practice was held for current team members (researchers, artist facilitators, Elders, and Domestic Violence Advocates).

The program manual is designed in such a way that the themes can be covered each week, leaving flexibility for the facilitator to bolster the content with their own teachings and skills. The program may look different if taught by an Artist/Facilitator or an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper or Elder. Three separate groups were facilitated in each of Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Regina. Each group was led by an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper in two communities whereas the other was facilitated by a trauma-and-violence-informed artist. Three team members are present at every nato' we ho win session—the Facilitator (artist or Knowledge Keeper), an Elder, and a Domestic Violence Advocate are present at every group session. Nato' we ho win consisted of a 3-hour evening group session once per week for twelve weeks, research activities included in the present study (a total of 13 weeks).

Financial contribution from



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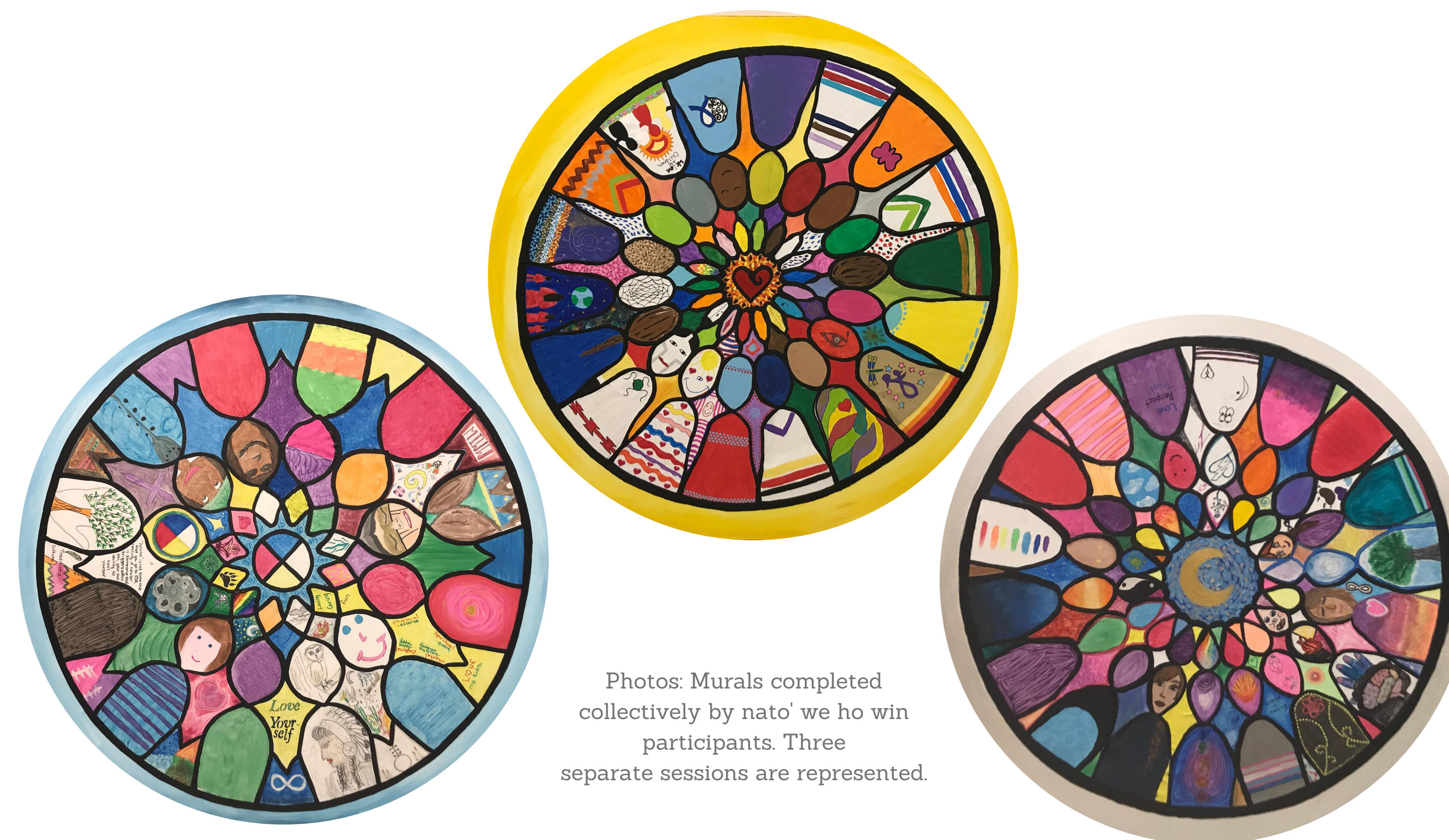
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How best can we use contemporary forms of cultural expression and Indigenous community expressive arts-based methods to engage Indigenous women in developing resiliency?

Women who participated in nato' we ho win were able to use cultural and artistic expressions to develop resiliency by connecting to their Indigenous identity, their artistic creativity, and a supportive community.

The cultural teachings and traditional art was the key element that peaked interest and brought women to the group. They stated that the cultural teachings engaged them to learn more about their culture and where they come from, especially when they didn't have other places to seek out that knowledge. This led to a greater feeling of pride in being Aboriginal and being able to strengthen that identity.

The artistic aspects allowed women to find themselves in the art process. It gave an outlet for creativity and an opportunity to discover talents. The combination of the cultural significance and therapeutic process of creating art pieces, established an environment for women to learn, heal, and grow. They even expressed an interest to learn more traditional art in the future, like language, songs, dances, and visual art.



Photos: Murals completed collectively by nato' we ho win participants. Three separate sessions are represented.

The group setting gave women a feeling of connectedness, and having a safe place to feel supported. The art was essential in building this community, by giving women a place to start talking and doing something together in order to begin developing supportive relationships. Women made a stronger bond with each other through the cultural teachings and finding unity and strength in their Indigenous group identity.

The program developed a greater sense of resiliency in the women who participated by providing them with a highlight to look forward to during the week, teaching them traditional prayers to help them during the week, and providing them with art skills to apply as healthy coping strategies. The most significant finding was that the program was able to show the women that they are in fact resilient. Participants were able to discover their own inner strength and build upon it, using the skills and teachings from the group.

Pursuing Truth

Throughout this journey, women shared their experiences of understanding and healing. "I never really knew about the traditional culture aspects like how to smudge or just things like that. I'd never really been taught that. I'm glad I've come to this group. Everything kind of soaked in like a sponge". Through the activities and relationships, a participant shared that, "in some ways it made us actually connect to ourselves creatively". Participating in nato' we ho win is "really proof that our culture is something that brings us all together and makes us embrace each other's strengths and weaknesses, or help us through our weaknesses, and just embrace each other".

"How can you get over something that's happening every day? It's systematic genocide and it's still happening. And so that's how we are resilient because we are still here. We're still breathing."

identity

"My family, we're not very traditional. We don't smudge at home. We don't pray. We don't do all those things, and to be able to have the opportunity to do that every week was very calming. It made me feel more open and less sad as well as with being surrounded by all this traditional teachings and things like that".

creativity

"I feel very proud of what I've done with these moccasins. It makes me feel proud, and it's important to feel proud because we did something. And I just want to keep feeling proud. Everyone wants to keep feeling proud of what they've done. Everyone is so unique and everything the group has done. So I think it's a very important part of life is feeling proud of yourself, and I don't think enough of us feel proud of ourselves, some of it's exhausting, and that's what this program helps with".

community

"I also feel like when we were making our moccasins it made us feel more connected to each other too. We were all helping each other and complimenting each other on our work and showing our work from before and it was just a great activity to get to know each other and get to know what our interests are and what our style is. I loved it".

resiliency

"I think resiliency is built in women, and sometimes it's really hard to accept it and acknowledge it. [This group] gave me somethin' to look forward to, and just became more of a highlight of my week. It made me feel stronger, and proud of being Aboriginal".

Future Direction

The developed nato' we ho win intervention manual will be available for community and organizational use to provide ongoing implementation and support for women experiencing intimate partner violence. In addition to the intervention manual, individual accessible community reports will be developed. These community reports will be available in print and digital versions to be shared with the participants, facilitators, knowledge shareholders, communities, agencies, and organizations.

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