

THE ART OF SELF-HEALING

CULTURAL ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

An innovative intervention program supporting Indigenous women who have experienced intimate partner violence by promoting self-healing through a culture and arts model of care.



NATO' WE HO WIN

nato' we ho win (pronounced “na ta way ho win”) is Cree for “the art of self-healing” (as translated by the Knowledge Keepers). Supported through the Public Health Agency of Canada’s investment *Supporting the Health of Survivors of Family Violence* (2016- 2020), *nato' we ho win* is a partnership between the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS) and the University of Regina (research leaders Drs. JoLee Sasakamoose, (M’Chigeeng First Nation) (Educational Psychology & Counselling) and R. Nicholas (Nick) Carleton (Psychology).

nato' we ho win was piloted in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan in March- May 2017 and ran three times in September, January, and September in Moose Jaw, Regina, and Prince Albert concurrently until the end of 2018. Women who participated in these nine intervention groups also participated in research, consisting of quantitative self-report measures and focus groups, designed to determine the effects of participation in *nato' we ho win* on Indigenous women's sense of well-being.

Ana kâ-naskomot (Cree for “the one who responded”) refers to the women’s voices in this report. *Kehte-ayak* (Cree for “Old Ones”) refers to the Elders or Knowledge Keepers.

RESOURCES

nato' we ho win is a 13-week trauma-and-violence-informed program that incorporates expressive art and cultural activities that promote resilience and facilitate healing for Indigenous women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The Program Manual, Facilitator Guide, and community reports are available at pathssk.org/natowehowin.



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HEALING JOURNEY

The *nato' we ho win* program integrates culture and art as essential components of women's healing and recovery journey. The cultural focus of the *nato' we ho win* program is much more than simply a way to engage an Indigenous demographic. The culture and art itself are part of the healing journey. *nato' we ho win* participants used cultural and artistic expressions to build resiliency by relating to their Indigenous culture, artistic creativity, and a supportive community. Women sought their truth and strengthened their voice through cultural activities, and expressing stories of understanding and healing.

THE ARTS OF NATO' WE HO WIN

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

IDENTITY

The cultural teachings (led by Indigenous *Kehte-ayak* and Knowledge Keepers) and arts-based activities, facilitated by a facilitator were key elements that piqued interest and brought women into the group. Many women stated the cultural teachings were engaging and they wanted to learn more about their culture and where they come from. Due to the impacts of colonialism, many younger women did not have access or places to seek out this knowledge. Having access to this knowledge led the women to a greater feeling of pride in being Indigenous and strengthening their identity.

“I NEVER REALLY KNEW ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL ASPECTS, LIKE HOW TO SMUDGE. I’D NEVER REALLY BEEN TAUGHT THAT. I’M GLAD I’VE COME TO THIS GROUP. EVERYTHING KIND OF SOAKED IN LIKE A SPONGE.” ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT

Cultural art expressions, practices, and teachings have positively affected the women's resiliency by strengthening Indigenous identity. The cultural arts and teachings provided women with space to not only learn more about their cultural identity but also to be proud of their Indigenous identity. *Ana kâ-naskomot* shared,

My family, we're not 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 ... to follow the Cree culture. I find it's really healing. It's soothing and it's very uplifting. That's what helped me be who I am.





CREATIVITY


The artistic aspects of *nato' we ho win* assist women in self-discovery and reflection. The arts-based activities provided an outlet for creativity and an opportunity to discover talents and gifts. The combination of cultural significance and the therapeutic process of creating art pieces established an environment for women to learn, heal, and grow. Many women from each group expressed an interest to learn more traditional art, such as language, songs, dances, and visual art.

The contemporary forms of cultural expressions varied from group to group, but the central theme of having an expressive art outlet was integral to the success of the women's healing journey. Examples of non-traditional arts and crafts, which are easily learned and financially accessible, were journaling, sewing, painting, or making bath bombs.

Traditional arts included ribbon skirts, star blankets, jewelry, salve, or moccasins. Learning new skills and knowledge was a significant part of engaging the women.

“I LOVE TO LEARN AND THE FACT THAT IT WAS CONNECTED TO MY IDENTITY WAS EVEN BETTER.” ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT

The expressive arts-based activities introduced women to creative endeavours that they may not have experienced outside of the group. Art activities allow for a connection to individual creativity and strengthened the feelings of personal pride and self-esteem. For some women, these activities rekindled their joy of art and for others, they used their passion and talents to share with others and give back to their communities. In the one-year follow-up focus groups, women reported that they were continuing to utilize the skills and motivation instilled by the creative activities in their own lives.



“SOMETHING I’VE REALIZED ABOUT MYSELF IS THAT I EXPRESS MYSELF THROUGH CREATIVE OUTLETS. SO EVERY SINGLE ONE OF MY BEADING PROJECTS HAS HAD SOME SORT OF MEANING OF WHAT’S GOING ON IN MY LIFE.” ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT

COMMUNITY

The group dynamic of *nato’ we ho win* provided women with a feeling of connectedness and safety. The arts-based activities were essential in building this community through communication and supportive relationships. It is important that *nato’ we ho win* was a place the women viewed as a safe place to share and feel supported.

Through the cultural teachings, women found unity and strength in their Indigenous group identity. Connecting with others lowered feelings of loneliness and created the space and ability to heal.

The arts-based activities provided a way to build relationships and community by creating an outlet to talk and facilitated positive shared experience.

**“I ALSO FEEL LIKE WHEN WE WERE MAKING OUR MOCCASINS IT MADE US FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER, TOO. WE WERE HELPING EACH OTHER AND COMPLIMENTING EACH OTHER ON OUR WORK FROM BEGINNING TO END. IT WAS 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!”
ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT**



RESILIENCY

**"I GOT THE COURAGE TO
ACTUALLY GET COUNSELLING.
SO THAT WAS A REALLY
PIVOTAL MOMENT IN MY LIFE.
AND I'M MORE OPEN ABOUT
COUNSELLING AND MENTAL
HEALTH, AND I EVEN TALK TO
MY MOM ABOUT IT NOW, AND I
DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE
TALKED ABOUT IT BEFORE."
ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT**

nato' we ho win develops resiliency by providing each woman with an activity to look forward to during the week. In the group, women learned traditional teachings and prayers, which they accessed for support during the week. They also learned new skills and healthy coping strategies. Many women shared, that by participating in this group they discovered their own inner strength and built upon this strength by applying the skills and teachings from the group.

With the new skills, many women shared that they felt optimistic and confident and these feelings spread to other areas of their lives. Increased confidence allowed the women to

share calming techniques, prayers, teachings, and arts activities with their children and families. Women commented these skills developed into a desire to steer their children "in the right direction" through culture and art.

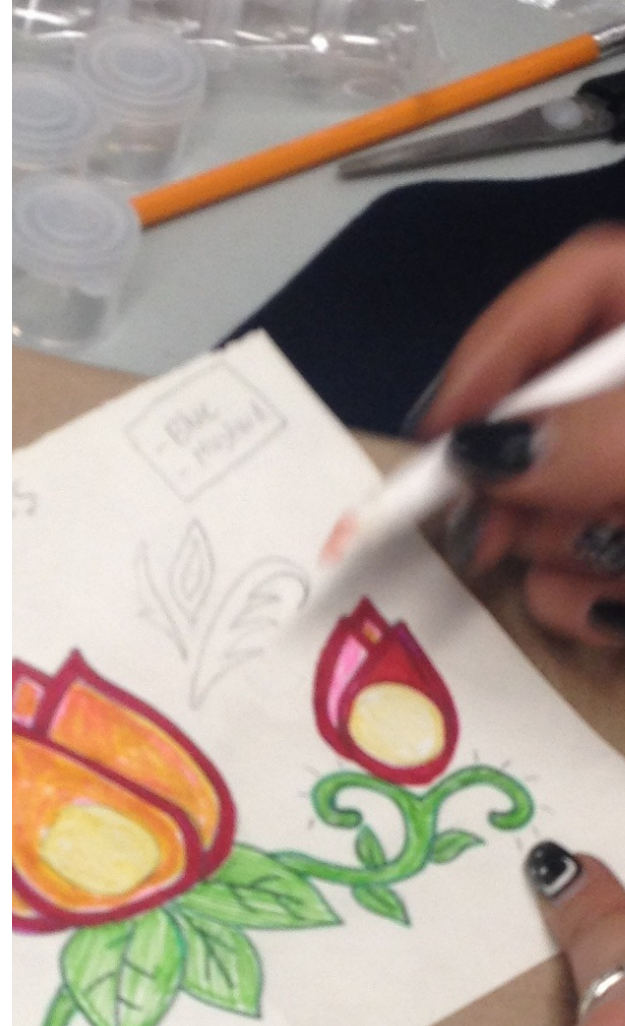
At the one-year follow-up, many women reported that they had integrated the arts-based activities into their daily lives, using these activities to stay out of destructive habits and integrating these skills into their own healing practices. Sometimes, developing resiliency turned into self-awareness and seeking mental health services. For women who had established mental health and health care providers, many women went back to share their new joy and engagement with art activities with their supports. These women shared that a few of their health care providers integrated these activities into the treatment plans of their healing journeys.

The significance of *nato' we ho win* was helping women realize that they are resilient after everything that has happened to them personally and historically. Contemporary forms of cultural arts help develop this resiliency that has always been a part of Indigenous women.

PURSUING TRUTH

Ana kê-naskomot brings together her experience with *nato' we ho win* and expresses how her healing journey will continue.

I think resiliency is built in women, and sometimes it's really hard to accept it and acknowledge it. [Nato' we ho win] 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 Indigenous.



“IN SOME WAYS, IT MADE US ACTUALLY CONNECT TO OURSELVES CREATIVELY. [NATO’ WE HO WIN] IS REALLY PROOF THAT OUR CULTURE IS SOMETHING THAT BRINGS US TOGETHER AND MAKES US EMBRACE EACH OTHER’S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES, OR HELP US THROUGH OUR WEAKNESSES, AND JUST EMBRACE EACH OTHER.” ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT

Throughout this journey, women shared their experiences of understanding and healing. Women discovered their identity, creativity, community, and reclaimed their resilience through participating in *nato' we ho win*. Ana kê-naskomot shares,

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



Author Note

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"I feel 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...So I think 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." Ana kê-naskomot



MEET THE TEAM

Partners include PATHS member agencies, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers (Barbara Frazer, Norma Rabbitskin, and Willie Ermine), and Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose and Dr. R. Nicholas Carleton from the University of Regina. Project teams in Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, and Regina communities consisted of *Kehte-ayak*, Facilitators/Artists, Domestic Violence Advocates, Childminding Organizers, Childminders, and Research Assistants.

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**UNIVERSITY OF
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NATO' WE HO WIN
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NATO' WE HO WIN: THE ART OF SELF-HEALING

nato' we ho win is an innovative trauma-and-violence-informed, artistic, and cultural intervention program from Saskatchewan, Canada developed to support Indigenous women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). This program brings in community support to guide women's self-healing through culture and arts.

The *nato' we ho win* intervention program manual is available to communities and organizations who wish to implement this program to support women who have experienced IPV.