



NATO' WE HO WIN

THE ART OF SELF-HEALING

INTERVENTION PROGRAM
USING CULTURAL AND EXPRESSIVE
ARTS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

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.



RESEARCH PROJECT

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.



Photo: Rachel Zelniker/CBC

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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 PROGRAM OF NATO' WE HO WIN

How do culture, expressive arts,
and sharing circles serve
as protective factors to engage
women's resiliency in recovering
from trauma?

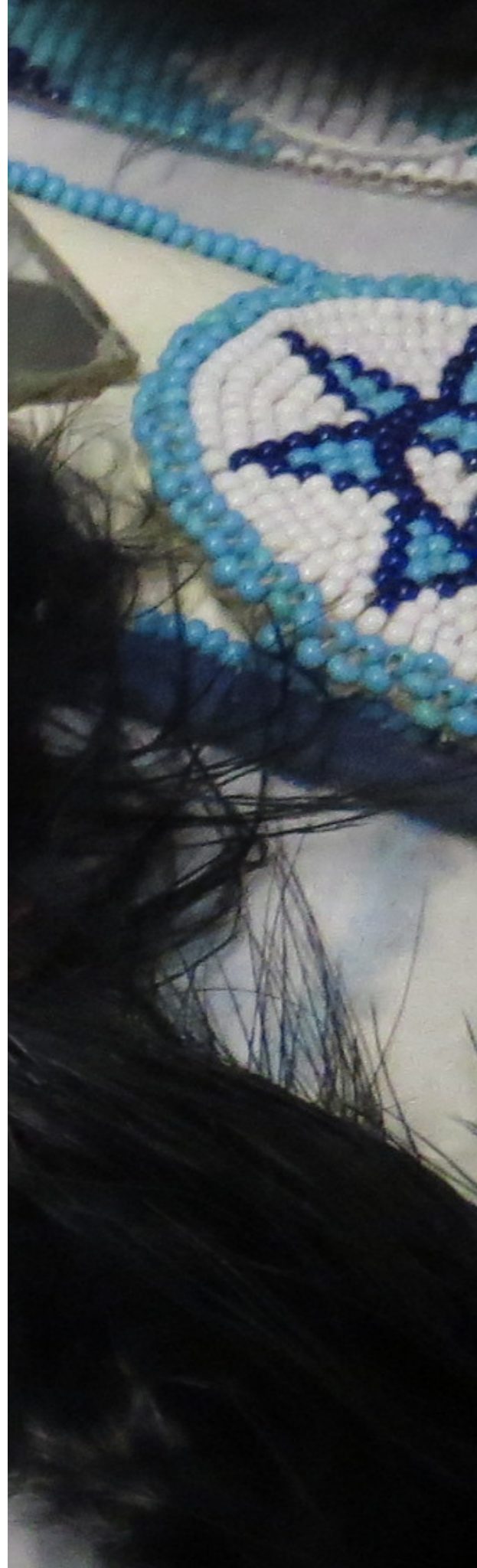
PROJECT BACKGROUND

nato' we ho win is a 13-week trauma-and-violence-informed program that incorporates art and cultural activities that promote resilience and facilitate healing for Indigenous women who have experienced IPV.

Barbara Frazer (Ahtahkakoop First Nation), an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper and Educator, led the co-creation of *nato' we ho win* with spiritual and ceremonial guidance from Knowledge Keepers Norma Rabbitskin (Whitefish Lake First Nation) and Willie Ermine (Sturgeon Lake First Nation). The name *nato' we ho win* was given to the project after ceremonial protocols were offered to Willie Ermine.

The *nato' we ho win* hosted once weekly, 3-hour sessions, over 13 weeks (as there are thirteen moons in a year) in Moose Jaw, Regina, and Prince Albert. Traditional teachings provided direction and guidance in understanding the life cycle, achieving wellness, and respecting and being accountable to oneself and others. *nato' we ho win* created a sacred circle of support for women as they sought balance and harmony within themselves and their relationships with families, communities, the natural and the spirit worlds. Each of the teachings within the Program Manual provides a different focus for self-reflection and growth and maintains space for Facilitators to adapt to local knowledge. Using the wisdom of these teachings, the women identified where an imbalance may be present in their lives. Within Indigenous healing, the emphasis is placed on spirituality and ceremony to restore a meaningful relationship between the participant and the spirit world.

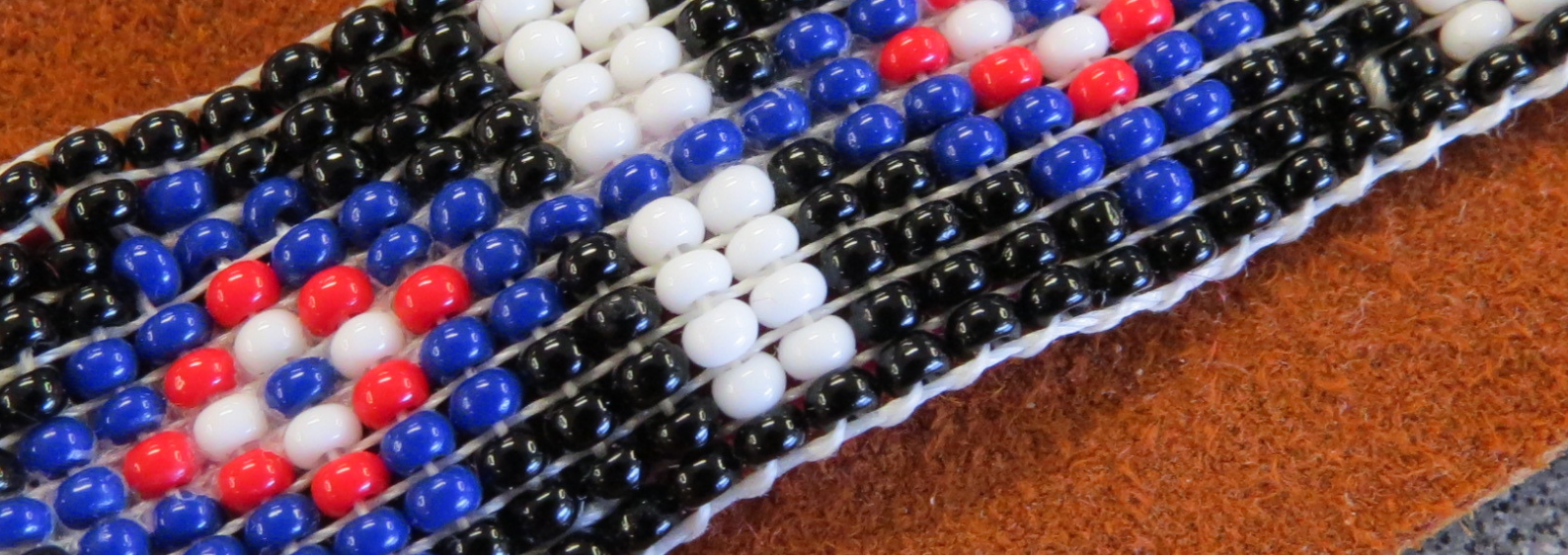
The Facilitator, a *Kehtehi*, and a Domestic Violence Advocate were all present at each group session. Facilitators delivered the group, which included the





subjects covered in the 13-moon Program Manual. Group sessions began with prayer, and the *Kehtehi* shared cultural teachings, encouragement, and guidance. Domestic Violence Advocates coordinated the group's logistical and organizational aspects (such as client intake and transportation), assisted participants with safety planning, and offered referrals or other supports.

On-site childcare was available, and each group session began with a meal. The research data were collected during the twelfth week of the program, allowing the thirteenth week to be used for the final wrap-up session and feast.



INTERVENTION RESEARCH

Innovative intervention research was conducted with women in nine groups to assess the effects of *nato' we ho win* engagement on Indigenous women's sense of well-being. Participants completed self-report questionnaires at intake (before starting *nato' we ho win*), after completing the program (week 12), and one year later. Women completed an evaluation at week 12 that included questions about the length of the program and supports provided, such as childcare and transportation. Focus groups (conducted as sharing circles) were held at week 12 and one year after completion to gather qualitative data on the women's experience.

Self-report questionnaires contained demographic questions and several validated indicators of well-being (experience of IPV, post-traumatic stress, depression, generalized anxiety, quality of life, personal agency, interpersonal agency, resilience, connectedness, and post-traumatic growth).

Questions in sharing circles inquired how women felt about their emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical well-being before and after attending *nato' we ho win*. Participants shared whether they thought the artistic, creative, and cultural practices were beneficial. One year later, women were asked if they had continued to participate in artistic and cultural activities and if they felt they had maintained significant improvements since completing *nato' we ho win*. The project's primary intervention research question was whether short and long-term health results for Indigenous survivors of IPV could be enhanced by engaging in *nato' we ho win*. Additional research questions aimed to investigate the efficacy of enhanced connections and engagement in cultural activities for Indigenous women who had experienced IPV.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Participation in *nato' we ho win* positively influenced participants' sense of well-being, according to qualitative findings from sharing circles and quantitative results from self-report measures.

Women self-reported statistically significant increases in resilience, personal agency, connectedness, and post-traumatic growth and statistically significant decreases in self-reported anxiety and depression from intake to one year after completing *nato' we ho win*.

In the program evaluation, participants were asked how valuable they found the program—on a scale of 1 to 10, 86% rated the value 8 or higher, with the majority selecting 10. An open-ended question asked participants what aspects of *nato' we ho win* they found to be the most valuable. Participants cited cultural teachings, art activities, sharing circles, and social connections as the most important. The majority (90%) of those who completed the evaluation said they would recommend *nato' we ho win* to others.

In sharing circles, women contributed examples of their resilience and the positive improvements they experienced since beginning *nato' we ho win*. Participants discussed how the lessons and practices they learned in *nato' we ho win*, and the skills they developed, enabled them to be more resilient. Women retained these skills and habits after the intervention ended.

Overall, the women said that they were happier and had a more optimistic outlook. They reported improved self-care habits, better control of their everyday routines, improved self-management, and an improved sense of balance and clarity in their lives. *Ana kâ-naskomot* stated,





I'm glad I came here. I came to these groups, to be around other Native people. And learn the culture and practicing it. It makes me feel better. It makes me feel whole again. And it helps every day, I take care of the kids, I go to school, and I'm able to handle stresses... Well I know I've become a better person from attending the first group; stronger; more independent; there are things, but it's better.

The encouragement and skills learned in *nato' we ho win* made women feel more self-sufficient, which acted as a protective factor for living in a violence-free environment. Women stated that they now have the strength and motivation to leave relationships where IPV is occurring and focus on themselves rather than seeking new romantic relationships.

... no matter what life can present to people in the different circumstances, that people grow up with in their families or through their relationships, that it's the ability to go forward and cope and grow and continue to put one foot in front of the next ... It's powerful.

“BEING IN THE GROUP NOW HAS HELPED ME SEE I’M NOT ALONE AND THAT WE’RE ALL AT DIFFERENT STAGES IN OUR LIVES, AND IT DOES MAKE LIFE BEARABLE. THERE ARE SOME ISSUES THAT HAPPENED DURING THE GROUP, AND BEING HERE REALLY, REALLY, REALLY HELPED ME EMOTIONALLY AND MENTALLY TO LET GO OF THAT AND HAVE A SAFE CIRCLE WHERE YOU CAN SHARE THAT INFORMATION, AND FEEL SUPPORTED, SO I DO FEEL A LOT BETTER BEING IN THE GROUP.” ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT

Women specifically mentioned “balance” and “physical health,” which included regularly eating nutritious foods. Women reported better sleep patterns and found it easier to get out of bed in the morning. It became easier for the women to care for their children. Several participants reported quitting or reducing substance use.



It also emerged that the cultural and expressive arts activities and sharing circles within the groups did not only benefit the women participants, but their children. Women reported increased parenting efficacy and positive relationships with their children and shared that they planned to pass the skills learned in *nato' we ho win* on to their children.

Developing healthy and supportive relationships with other participants was another positive outcome that the women experienced. The social bonds formed through group sharing assisted women in overcoming loneliness, establishing healthy boundaries, and developing a sense of community with other women. Participants described a sense of belonging and, in some cases, the positive social connections that were developed in the group were maintained beyond the completion of *nato' we ho win*.

Many women were exposed to Indigenous cultural teachings and traditions for the first time when participating in *nato' we ho win*.

They explained how these teachings instilled a sense of pride and strength. Women also found strength in spiritual practices like smudging and praying, which they integrated into their everyday lives at home. These practices improved their sense of security. *Ana kâ-naskomot* described,

When I think of resiliency, I think of that inner strength. It makes me think about where that strength comes from. And for me, it's a lot of my spirituality. It's in the morning when I smudge. It's in the prayers I say throughout the day when I'm driving. It's in the experiences and relationships that I have with everyone and everything.

Women appreciated the cultural and artistic practices taught in *nato' we ho win*. Mural painting and visual journaling were integrated into the expressive art activities, which emphasized empowerment, wholistic connectedness, and circle sharing. Indigenous hand-building activities such as sewing and beading were among the cultural activities, as was the use of herbal medicines to make tea and salves. Learning new skills was challenging

for the women, but it improved their patience and self-awareness. *Ana kê-naskomot* stated “It taught me patience, and taught me I can make something beautiful just from my hands.”




“IN OUR CULTURE, IF YOU KNOW SOME OF THE TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS AND STUFF AND OUR WAYS. IF YOU’RE RAISED WITH THOSE, AS A WOMAN YOU’RE ALREADY PROUD OF BEING A WOMAN BECAUSE YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR POWER. YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR CONNECTION. YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR ABILITIES AND THE POWER THAT YOU HOLD AND SO MANY OF OUR GIRLS DON’T EVEN KNOW THAT ANYMORE.” ANA KÊ-NASKOMOT

Expressive art projects helped women to relax and feel more at ease. Some women stated that cultural creative practices, such as beading, offered a pleasant activity to fill their free time at home, where they may otherwise have resorted to negative coping strategies. Participants expressed a desire to continue engaging in creative practices and to pass on their knowledge to others.

nato’ we ho win was developed as a short-term intervention to assist Indigenous women in developing strength and resilience to recover from IPV. The intervention research study showed this objective was met—participants reported increased resilience and improvements in physical and mental well-being that lasted a year post-intervention.

The women valued the support that they received from the other women and the intervention team (Facilitator, *Kehtehi*, and Domestic Violence Advocate). The findings of this research suggest that offering Indigenous women who have lived with IPV the opportunity to create community, reconnect with their culture, and engage in creative activities supports building resilience and contributes to healing from IPV.





“I BELIEVE THAT BEADING IS A GREAT STRESS RELIEVER. I BELIEVE EVERY ONE OF THESE BEADS IS A PRAYER AND A POSITIVE THOUGHT TO MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY AND MY LOVED ONES AND ALL YOU LADIES WHO HAVE TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT MYSELF AND ALSO YOURSELVES AS WELL. . .” ANA KÂ-NASKOMOT

The following supporting documents are available at pathssk.org/natowehowin:

FACILITATION


- *nato' we ho win*: The Art of Self-Healing Program Manual
- *nato' we ho win*: The Art of Self-Healing Facilitator Guide

COMMUNITY REPORTS

- Intervention Program: Using Cultural and Expressive Arts to Build Resilience
- Cultural Artistic Expressions and Indigenous Identity
- Women's Experiences of Health and Well-Being While Recovering from Trauma

Author Note

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How do culture, expressive arts, and sharing circles serve as protective factors to engage women's resiliency in recovering from trauma?

This report shares evidence that participating in nato' we ho win (including expressive arts activities, cultural teachings and activities, and sharing circles) assisted Indigenous women who had experienced violence and trauma to foster resilience.



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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.