more than words

Updates from the Sites

Check out the recent news and activities from the youth-led fieldsites!

Follow Us
July Gathering

A July 2020 prairie sunrise was the most exquisite backdrop to walk into as the girls from YIWU unloaded supplies and gathered in front of the Worme family Tipi. It fascinated each of the girls to be in a new space, never mind together after many months of isolation and social distancing due to COVID-19.

Land, Ceremony, laughter! Wahkotowin, pimatsowin, nitewak!

We were greeted by Auntie Helen Semaganis-Worme, who had given us permission to be in this sacred special place, this tipi carries many stories, ancestors, and healing and had been within their family for generations. Risen at Sundance’s and used with purpose now, Helen hung a shawl up in the tipi with love in her heart and had Gabby tie the tobacco bundles by her shawl, knowing that it would wrap the girls in love and comfort as we took time to check in after many months of being apart and invite Randy Morin and Lindsey Knight to give us teachings for the morning.

The themes of the day were planned carefully and with input from the YIWU, as always, we started with smudge and a circle, with check-ins and snacks. The girls naturally know how things roll, everyone pitching in. Gabby has started preparing and leading our smudges as an oskaypos-iskewis, this is an important role in our group as it takes calmness, gentleness, and good thoughts to help transmit our prayers and intentions between us and Creator.

It was nice just to be ... be together ... while we waited for Lindsey and Randy to arrive. What took place in the tipi was special, it was sacred, and it was just for us.

These were some of the topics Lindsey and Randy spoke about and both were extremely humbled and honoured to be able to sit and speak with such amazing young women. The girls felt the same way:

- Boundaries, prayer, time to reflect
- Sobriety, life partners, healing journeys
- Raising children, taking our power back, the power of choice
- Old ways, our ways, the future

The next few hours were spent eating, laughing, and taking a dip in the pool. Feeling refreshed we headed to the hotel to prepared for the next day, where we would invite the younger girls into our circle again for their second sessions with us. Curtis Vinish, another male role model in our community also came to hang out with us, share with us some of his experiences, and hang with us as we sewed, beaded, and prepped for Utopia 2.0.

Chokecherry Studios was hot, hot, hot, but the girls powered through and delivered a beautiful day of auntying and creating.

Gabby and Jessica quickly organized their agenda for the day for the girls to see and everyone pitched in to set up the space. Kiyari McNab, another role model and exceptional young woman took photos throughout the day to capture our special moments together.
Tanis Worme, an emerging visual artist, spent the day with us teaching us a new technique of linocut and silk-screen print making to speak back to colonial violence. This medium allowed the girls to speak directly without the convolutions of English. Tanis is Plains Cree and a member of the Poundmaker Cree Nation with roots to Mistawasis and Kawacatoose First Nations. The method of printmaking allowed the girls to send messages on paper, clothing, and banners. It is a thoughtful process that requires careful consideration of how the composition will be “read” or “perceived.” The girls’ work was astounding considering the over heated environment and it was their first attempt. They had the opportunity to etch an individual print, discover how to use the tools, and we are looking forward to creating more collaborative projects together.

As always, our time together goes hard and fast, and no one wants it to end. We created interactive journals for the girls to do their self-reflections and YIWU will support and reach out to their younger iskwewak to help them with their writing reflections and do check ins as we navigate, back to school, online learning, and continuing to survive and resist together during COVID-19 times.

Reflections: Ocean Sanderson, original member

Hey Jen! I’m thankful and very honoured to do this. Girls group is always a great time, we laugh, we cry, we share, and we create long lasting memories. Our recent girls group session was so beautiful, I wish it could be like that all the time. All of us and our lovely guests hanging out together and sharing our stories in a tipi on the land, smelling the fresh air and sage, and eating. It’s the best, like come on, nothing gets better than that. A big thank you to Helen who let us use her space to reconnect. That was very kind of her and her family. That session was very much needed, especially hearing Randy and Lindsey’s stories, they were very powerful. I’m glad they shared a part of them with us. It was a teachable moment for all of us and I learned a lot; they inspire me very much to keep going everyday and work hard, they also made me believe I can and will accomplish lots. I love how girls group reminds me all the time on how far I’ve come and how far I still have to go to get to where I want to be! Everyone in girls group and who we meet along the way is definitely a confidence booster.

Reflections: Cindy Moccasin, original member

It was very nice to finally get together with the girls after not being able to for so long, being together gives me a sense of wholeness and I love being able to create new memories. I really enjoy working with the younger girls and being able to set an example for them. They remind me of myself and the other girls when we first started, and I hope one day they can gain the same friendship and sisterhood with each other that us older girls have. We spent a day with the younger girls working, laughing, and eating in the studio together. We started with the younger girls working, laughing, and eating in the studio together. We started with smudge and introducing ourselves, then we shared a little bit about who we are. We created our self love wall with the girls and shared what self love means to each other. We then learned how to do print making and how to carve using the different pencils, for most of us it was our first time, so we took a while but everyone created their own unique designs. Once we were finished, we created our own posters and added them altogether onto one poster, some of us even added them onto our clothing. Giving plays a big part in our indigenous cultures so we also had little gifts to give our girls, so they know and feel that they’re respected and supported.

Closing

We then finished off the day with a sharing circle about how our day went and something we learned.

Moving Forward

YIWU is currently working on a collaborative journal piece for a Special Issue of Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal (IGSA@ND) which two of the girls are co-authoring, alongside Guest Editor, Catherine Vanner. Also, we celebrated another publication this past November titled, “Red Ribbon Skirts and Cultural Resurgence” Kimihko sîmpân iskwêwisâkaya ékwa sihcikêwin waniskâpicikêwin in Girlhood Studies (2019, Volume 12, Issue 3). We hope you take the time to continue to listen, read, learn, disrupt, and resist.

Hiy hiy! Ekoshi! Until next time!

Peace out from T6/THM!
Contributing to the 8th International Cellphilm Festival as this year’s youngest judge is far from Gabby Daniels’ first experience collaborating with others in participatory visual methodology. Gabby, 17, is from the Mistawasis First Nations in Saskatchewan, and has already been an active member of the Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia (YIWU) for three years, working enthusiastically to uphold the group’s mission of “representing the stories and visions for a world where women and girls can be liberated in living their best lives.” Within the organization, she’s played two distinct roles: that of a motivated student and an inspired teacher.

I was lucky enough to speak with Gabby about her work with YIWU, cellphilm, and the group’s plans for the future. The focus of the YIWU through the years has been diverse.

“We hold workshops for ourselves, workshops for younger girls (called Utopia 2.0), create artwork including cellphilms, and do public speaking. In the group, everyone shows up and has fun.”

Gabby noted how essential the group has been in deepening her understanding of social issues, as well as in empowering her to use tools like cellphilms to educate other young women on the same topics.

“We first made cellphilms about gender-based violence. I didn’t know what it was before...more people need to know about it. Young children especially are a good audience—there is lots of gender-based violence in schools.”

Gabby has been working with cellphilms for years, notably earning second place in the 6th International Cellphilm Festival. She went on to praise the medium for its applicability and power to enact change.

“Cellphilms are really great. For someone like me who can get easily distracted, I found that presentations can become boring, but videos help me focus. They’re a great way to get the message out; they usually make people pay more attention. They’re easy to make, short, and very effective.”

Gabby shared how eager she was to incorporate more cellphilm workshops within the YIWU, especially with young women like herself.

“We definitely want to introduce making cellphilms to the younger girls because that’s how old we were when we started making them ... I know a lot of the girls would like it. In the first workshop, we made TikToks with them and they all knew right away how to use the technology. I know if [the cellphilms] had an important message, they would like it even more.”

Like just about everything in our novel reality, the YIWU’s plans for the future have been forced to readjust to accommodate the new social distancing measures imposed by COVID-19.

“There have been ... some challenges. We usually meet once a month in person, but because of COVID, we couldn’t meet for a few months. We can’t have any workshops on reservations or for other younger girls.”

Nevertheless, Gabby noted how the organization has stayed resilient in these unprecedented times, and adapted their work to continue providing support for young Indigenous women in Canada.

“Recently, we were able to meet in groups of less than thirty, so in the past week we had one day where we hung out with the older girls, went to a tipi, smudged, and talked. Then, we had a workshop with the younger girls and held it at an arts space where we could be [safely] scattered. Lots changed when COVID-19 started. It was hard because [the group] also enjoyed hanging out together; it took a toll on us.”

With things beginning to approach some semblance of normalcy, Gabby has been able to think towards the future, as well as reflect on the role that the YIWU has played in her growth.

“My plans ... are to keep mentoring the young girls, travel more, and expand the group. I really enjoy being a part of [the YIWU] because I made a lot of new friends—they’re my sisters and my family. The group brought awareness to a lot I didn’t know about. I’ve very happy to be a part of it.”

For the full report on this year’s International Cellphilm Festival, visit our [website](#).

---

**Intern Profile: Colette Anton**

Colette is the lead intern for the PCL’s International Cellphilm Festival this summer. She is entering her fourth year at McGill University, majoring in Sociology, and minoring in Political Science and Hispanic Studies.

**Intern Profile: Joy Hannam**

Joy interned with the PCL this summer as part of the Arts Internship Program. She is at her fourth year at McGill completing a Bachelor of Arts in International Development, with a minor in Health Geography and Psychology.

Growing up with a creative background, she picked up many passions in art, photography and design. That, combined with her interest in working with others and helping with community initiatives led her to seek projects that engage others.
On April 21st, 2020, as the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic was creeping north to Nunavut, the girls from Rankin Inlet’s GET ART group (Girls Expressing Themselves through Art) shared a beautiful PSA to keep their community safe.

Nunavut officially declared a state of emergency on March 18th and the GET ART girls each created informative and encouraging posters from their homes during this period of confinement.

The group leader, Jennica Alhda Barcial, shared a collage of photographs of the girls with their posters on social media, reminding the community of what is important during these challenging times “Rankin! Let’s keep Nunavummiut safe by staying home, washing our hands often and spending time with our families. Thank you!”

The community responded with appreciation and the post garnered many positive remarks and notes of thanks. Nunavut has had no confirmed cases of Covid-19 throughout the pandemic, through community conscious and unifying efforts like that of the girls, Rankin Inlet is safe from the virus. The girls will continue their work to achieve the same kind of safety and security within other aspects of their community life.

Eskasoni
Linda Liebenberg

Gwe’ everyone!

And happy summer/winter greetings wherever you may find yourself. While the past few months have been limiting because of COVID, and disappointing because our wonderful trip to South Africa has been cancelled or postponed, we have been able to use our summer wisely, to focus on our memorial garden for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
We have made amazing headway on this project! As soon as the lockdown restrictions began to loosen, we got going on the garden. We began in mid-June by laying out the design on the land and building the smudge bowl and seven concrete rocks. We subsequently painted the rocks to represent each of the seven sacred teachings.

The weekend was amazing. It was our first try at the rocks and they turned out beautifully as did the smudge bowl for our memorial at the centre of the labyrinth. And, when we marked out the four quadrants of the medicine wheel beds, our original plan matched up perfectly with the four directions … as if the garden was simply meant to be.

Possibly the best part of working on the garden so far though, has been the guidance provided by our Elder Clark Paul in planting sweet grass in the garden. In the day we spent together, he taught us how to transplant the grass according to our traditional teachings, and what this sacred medicine means to us as Mi’kmaw. It was a very special day! Now that the garden and labyrinth are in, we are going to be working on the space for ceremony next, installing the sweat lodge, tee-pee, and sacred fire pit. In addition to that we still have many other smaller tasks to take care of around the garden, but we will let you know more about this later in the year!

In the interim, if you want to watch our garden grow, visit our website: changethesilence.org/watch-our-garden-grow/
The past year has seen us celebrate our achievements to date, with a celebration evening in November 2019, at the ACCESS Open Minds-Eskasoni Youth building. We invited many locals and provincial service providers, and were thrilled to see so many people there, including Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith. We were very grateful that Clark Paul and Lottie Johnson, elders who have travelled on this journey with us, were able to attend provide a smudge at the opening of the evening and close the event with a prayer. The evening gave many of us a chance to talk about the work we have done in the past 4 years, what we have found through the research and how we have shared these findings with our community and beyond. The evening gave us the chance especially to celebrate our colouring in book! It was wonderful to be able to comment on the success of the book (which is now being used by service providers across three Atlantic provinces) and share it with even more service providers (for example the Nova Scotia RCMP’s human trafficking coordinator, David Lane). We ended the evening with a feast. While people mixed and mingled, we encouraged them to look at displays of our work, including panels from the 2018 Circles Within Circles event. We also asked people to provide feedback on the colouring in book and ideas for a memorial garden we are planning.

So, this year we will be building a memorial garden for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls from Eskasoni. We have already had several planning meetings and will be sharing our ideas with families themselves at the end of February. Many ideas for the garden are taken from our previous research findings.

We are hoping to include a little something from each of the sites. We have asked that each of the Canadian sites provide us with seeds of Indigenous plants from their communities that we can grow in our own garden. If you didn’t get a chance to share them with Jenny at the More Than Words dialogue event, we would still be thrilled to receive seeds or any other artifacts you would like for us to include. We are also hoping that we can find a creative way of including something from the South African sites. If anyone has any ideas, please let us know? Maybe at the Imbizo Intergenerational! in Durban, South Africa later this year!
This year the participants of the *Girls Expressing Themselves through ART* program are working on a cellphilm that showcases the different types of bullying that occur in different generations. The girls specifically chose a topic they felt exists in all ages and an issue that needs to be explored and talked about further.

Eleven participants aged 8-14 have been collaboratively acting, directing and editing the cellphilm. Discussions around bullying and ways to stop bullying were explored. The participants suggested that the most effective ways to combat bullying are to tell an adult and attend a “caring group” where the bullies and victims could be advised by Elders who speak about Inuit values and history that touches upon about the importance of friendship and community.

Previous participants in the “Girls Talk Back: A Media Workshop about us by us,” that was held last summer, were given roles as mentors to the younger and newer participants of the group. One of the primary goals for this workshop is to strengthen and support the older participant’s ability to lead and teach the younger girls through the various arts-based activities.

Each session of the workshop is based on relevant themes such as: “Marks of belonging” and “Ulус: The women’s knife”

The participants have the opportunity to learn about:

- Inuit tools
- Inuit tattooing
- Throat singing
- Listening to Elder’s stories, and
- Creating jewellery that reflect Inuit designs all taught and presented by role-models in the community.

---

**Rankin Inlet**

**Jennica Alhda Barcial**

---

**Treaty 6**

**Young Indigenous Girls’ Utopia**

**Taanishii kiyaw wow!**

Greetings from the Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia (YIWU) in Treaty 6, Homeland of the Metis.

Things have been busy as usual and the Fall and Winter months have brought us many lessons, hardships, but most of all unity and love. With many of our planning and sewing sessions taking place in Jenn’s kitchen, these kitchen conversations are where we gather our ideas and our voices to impact the next generation of matriarchs and girls leading girls! For Indigenous peoples, the kitchen table is where many acts of resistance have been planned, red rose tea’s have been steeped, and sewing and beadwork projects completed. In its essence, this has become a methodology and practice which created a safe space for learning and sharing for Utopia.

YIWU has kicked off our *More Than Words* Project and we have recruited a new group of young Indigenous girls to begin their inquiry and exploration of gender-based violence and how it impacts our lives and the lives of our families. We welcomed 6 iskwēsis to our circle and we are excited to begin our journey of auntieship and supporting a new generation of iskwēsis from our community to learn strategies and find their voices to speak back and resist the violence that continues to attempt to oppress us as Indigenous girls!

In September 2019, we did a workshop with teachers in training at the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program Anti-Racism Conference reaching over 50 teachers in-training, sharing our poetry and book, which we are finding many educators using to teach about violence in their classrooms, whether it be the K-12 system or in post-secondary institutions. The girls are overwhelmed with humility and pride that their book continues to reach so many classrooms.
On October 4, 2019, Saskatoon held its annual Sisters in Spirit Vigil in remembrance of Indigenous women, girls and 2S/LGBTQQIA+ people who have been murdered, gone missing or had their cases left cold in what is being called a Canadian genocide. This vigil is one of many that took place all over Canada that same day. It was held at the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre. It began with a prayer and was followed by a walk that saw attendees, led by four singers and drummers, taking to the streets of downtown Saskatoon. People of all ages were in attendance, some bearing banners and others holding signs dedicated to their relatives who were being commemorated. After the walk, the solemn gathering allowed time for multiple families to tell their stories and remember their loved ones. Gabby and Jessica represented Utopia at the event, and we have had many requests to provide educational workshops with our community.

In February 2020, we were invited to perform our “Self-Love is Our Resistance” Poem at The Stories of Love and Kinship: Photo and Poetry Exhibit to raise funds as an act of solidarity for the children and women of Kanyaware, Uganda who do not have access to health care! The girls captivated the crowd with their stories of girls group and poetry and inspired the many dignitaries in the crowd including, Niko Trick from the United Nations, Dr. Louis Halfe, and Zoey Roy, spoken word artist and community-based educator! In the spirit of love and kinship, the girls decided to donate half of their book sales back to the event. This is what love and justice looks like!

As February has ended, we will be putting on our visiting scholars hats and heading to Treaty 13 Territory, Toronto, the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Invited by our favourite accomplice and ally, Sarah Flicker has organized a 4-day adventure, packed with learning, knowledge transmission, and a little bit of fun for a project titled, ‘A Youth-Led Approach to Indigenizing Curriculum at York University’. Kalan and Gabby will travel with the Utopia team to participate and perform in the Eco-Arts and Media Festival and they will facilitate several workshops with various audiences at York to share their work and approach to Indigenizing research and challenging gender-based and colonial violence. Woah! What a blessed life we lead!

With all these positive experiences the girls and their families continue to be proud of each other and having the courage to lead in our community. Utopia continues to make waves and inspire both young and old in Treaty 6/ Homeland of the Metis! We love you all!

Till next time! Ekoshii!
Tansi/Taanishii from Treaty 6, Traditional Homeland of the Metis.

The spring and summer months have brought many lessons and memories for The Young Indigenous Women's Utopia and we are thankful to Creator and our kin for the love and resilience we continue to exuberate.

The highlight of our work together during these seasons has brought us to a point where our young women were able to share their learnings and stories with our community. With great nervousness and excitement YIWU launched the first edition of our very own book, inspired by our sisters in South Africa, we spent much of the winter and early snowmelt, writing, peer editing, and working with the fabulous Indigenous Graphic Designer Gabrielle Giroux and Encore Graphics.

Within this time together our girls journeyed through the discipline and dedication it takes to self-publish and launch what Utopia has meant to us, not just as girls but as a collective of resisters, matriarchs, and survivors. Our book is an exciting collection of poetry, prose and photography that documents our journey and celebrates the girl’s resistance to colonial and gender-based violence. It stresses that self-love and pride are the first steps in creating a safer world for Indigenous girls. The compilation also includes love letters from project facilitators and prominent local Indigenous feminist artists, activists and community leaders.

The 200 copies of YIWU sold out within a month! We couldn’t believe it and we spent this summer re-editing and will have our second edition available for the fall of 2019. The girls of Utopia’s stories are now in the hands of Kokums, Professors, educators, little sisters, and many proud family members. It is quite incredible what can happen when you give young iskwewak a pen and paper and the courage to speak their truth.

Through the evening of the book launch, we wanted to create a space where families could speak back to our work and share their voices on how they felt about the evening and the girl’s involvement with Networks4Change and the impact Utopia has had on the girl’s lives. Kiyari McNab, an Indigenous filmmaker from our community, engaged in the process of ethical storytelling with our families and the girls infused with Indigenous research methodologies and fun. Kiyari has been producing a video that will capture the impact of YIWU and what it means to our community. Our video is set to launch again in Treaty 6 in late August. We will gather families and friends together to screen this powerful piece of our voices in a visual storytelling project.

As we catch our breath, resist our oppressors and pick Saskatoon berries and medicines over these next weeks of the warm summer months, we are excited to continue the next wave of our work together and though we still face the hardships and challenges that everyday life may bring, we know we are never alone and have group of girls and a larger network of sisters worldwide, who stand beside us each day fighting the gendered and colonial violence we are left to resist, and we never forget that:

We are strong, We are smart, We are girls.

With much love and respect!
Aho! Peace out from Treaty 6/TMT!

In July, the Rankin Inlet group ran a week-long media workshop, “Girls Talk Back.” The workshop took place at the Rankin Inlet Spousal Abuse Counselling Program which is part of the Pulaarvik Kablu. There were approximately 10 participants. The week-long program consisted of two parts:

1. Making a short video entitled Struggling for a Happy Life, and
2. Creating a Girifesto
The Time to Teach research project uses qualitative and participatory visual methods to examine experiences teaching and learning about gender-based violence in Canadian secondary schools. It is led by Catherine Vanner, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at McGill University, with Claudia Mitchell's supervision, and involves curriculum analysis, teacher interviews, and participatory workshops with students and teachers.

In June 2019, the first participatory student workshop was held in Treaty 6 Territory (Saskatoon) with organizing partners Jennifer Altenberg, Kari Wuttunee, and Dynelle Wolfe from Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia. The two-day workshop brought together 10 Indigenous girls ages 11-17, including girls who were experienced members of Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia, as well as some who were new to the group.

The workshop emphasized the importance of traditional Indigenous knowledge and self-love and worked with the girls to understand what colonial and gender-based violence is and invite their views on how it should be addressed by teachers in school. The workshop opened with the blessing of Elder Marjorie Beaucage, followed by an introduction on gender, healthy relationships, colonial violence, and gender-based violence led by community leaders Leigh Thomas and Breanna Doucette-Garr. Following these group discussions, the participants wrote letters to someone they knew who has experienced gender-based violence. Their messages were then transferred to a red broadcloth and signed with handprints, pictured below. We then used a series of art-based activities to explore experiences learning about gender-based violence and solicit suggestions for how teachers could best address gender-based violence issues in school contexts. Activities included letters to teachers, cellphilms, and ‘carousels’ where students responded to questions on large sheets of paper, rotating between papers to build on and respond to each others’ comments.

Key messages from the workshop participants are that girls continue to experience colonial and gender-based violence and discrimination in school, and that few have learned about gender-based violence issues in the school context. Participants stated that if it had not been for Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia, they never would have learned about gender-based violence, and that they should be taught about it so they know how to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, which particularly targets Indigenous girls during their adolescence. They encourage teachers to teach about gender-based violence with support of Indigenous community leaders, while always providing students the choice to leave a lesson about gender-based violence, making sure they feel loved and supported, and creating an opportunity for students to do something about it, such as helping to spread knowledge and awareness within their communities.
As a team we also recognized that the obvious next step in this work is one that places greater emphasis on ‘growing our own’. The emphasis here is one of building mentorship, leadership and facilitation skills of young people to take participatory arts-based work further by involving work with younger participants in the community and even by ‘rolling out’ these approaches to other community members).

A growing body of research evidence demonstrates that mentoring has significant positive and beneficial social, academic, and community outcomes for Indigenous young people. Good mentoring can act as a protective factor that increases the likelihood of success for young people, while providing them with a person or people in whom they can place their trust and from whom they can learn.

Research from Canada, Australia and New Zealand illustrates the ways in which mentoring aligns exceptionally well with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning, and its cultural relevance has been demonstrated repeatedly. Indigenous mentoring, in particular, emphasizes:

- Spirituality
- Tradition,
- Social and environmental factors,
- Integrates cultural connections that fortify identity and cultural pride.

Indigenous mentoring differs from typical Eurocentric models in that it recognizes that all people can be teachers and learners, and that teachers are not just those people who have official accreditation to do so. Indigenous models tend to be activity-based and to value different ways of knowing. Indigenous youth leadership may also be more relational and privilege qualities such as being trustworthy, humble and healthy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Sustained and not organized around ‘once off activities’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Youth-led, especially in relation to how local youth want to be involved and as such it is context and community grounded (and approaches will vary across sites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anti-oppressive and strength-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Incorporates local Indigenous perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Organized around gentle, consent based conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Arts-based with some art being more public than others (cellphone productions and screenings vs. body mapping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Organized around partnerships that are institutional, intersectional and intergenerational (e.g. university-community-Indigenous, non-Indigenous, youth-elders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Recognizes that sexual and gender based violence is not a stand-alone issue and that entry points for working with girls need to start with their concerns and where they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Includes Intersectionality analysis to highlight the complexities of issues (something clearly highlighted in the Rankin Inlet video on food security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Recognized and locates youth and community-focused ethical considerations attached to art-making within the idea of cultural safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia (YIWU) has been keeping things LIT up in Treaty 6/Traditional Homeland of The Metis. We are currently amping up for our Book Launch on April 27th, 2019 and will be launching our first ever publication showcasing each of our 7 amazing girls narratives around cultural resurgence, empowerment, mentorship, their own stories as survivors of gender-based violence. This will be a special evening that will be spent with the families of each of the girls and those from our community who have contributed to the teachings of our group over the past three years. It will be the very first time that we will be able to share the many different pieces we have produced as a group with the community of Saskatoon.

Although our prairie winter was tahkayow, the cold didn’t keep our girls from wanting to spend as much time together as possible. We had 5 or more weekend workshops over the Fall and Winter months, mostly to prepare for our trip to Victoria, British Columbia to attend the Sisters Rising Intergenerational Forum to Honour Indigenous Knowledges of Gender Wellbeing and the International Girl Studies Association Conference in South Bend, Indiana. This was a unique opportunity for Kari and I to watch some of the transformative work begin as we watched our girls turn from participants to mentors and leaders themselves.
Two highlights of our work these past few months was:

1. our “Self-Love is Our Resistance Poem” that we created for the Sisters Rising Conference, written and performed in a team slam poetry style by Jessica McNab, Cindy Moccasin, Kalan Cree Kalan McKay, and Gabby Daniels, and

2. the amazing graphic design workshops lead by Gabrielle Giroux a 19 year Indigenous women from the Prince Albert area who has been working with the girls to create their book. Gabrielle has helped to bring the ideas and contributions of the girls journaling over the past three years to life through her amazing graphics design skills and collaboration with contributors of the book.

Each opportunity that we are given to come together, whether it is to learn a new skill, peer-edit each other’s writing, or present on a panel at an International Conference, each one of the girls from YIWU continues to grow, learn, and embrace this exciting journey that we are on together.

Cindy Moccasin one of our YIWU presenters wrote a reflection on our recent trip to South Bend, Indiana:

“I never thought our group would go and do presentations at international conferences with girls from all over the world. I am very grateful for this new experience and I also never thought I would leave the country especially without my Mom at 15. When preparing I didn’t know what to expect at this conference and I am glad we chose to present at it because the feedback was very positive and made me personally feel good about it afterwards. We met some great people from Pokagon Band who were super kind and even invited us to hang out and visit their community after the conference. They showed us around and gave us a little knowledge about the Reservations in America and even opened up a little about their life experiences and what they go through. Being able to meet people especially our age who have been through similar things/situations as us girls in the group means so much and inspires me to want to do more. I can’t wait for our next presentation.”

Jessica McNab also reflected:

“Getting everything for this trip was a hassle and in some parts very frustrating for me and my family. When we got to Indiana it was very surreal to me, I never imagined myself in the States presenting at a women’s conference. Being there made me think a lot about how far our girls group has come. It made me think back to our first session and how nervous we were to be there, how we were strangers to each other. Now we’re super close and we treat each other like family. The part I liked the most about our trip was going to Pokagon with Jasmine and Glenn (the youth we presented to) I loved it there, I loved the scenery while driving back. What I’ll always remember, is when we were in the van driving back into south bend, I looked back at the window and there were trees and through those trees was the sun set, it was beautiful, the sky was pink and purple with clouds surrounding the sun. It was amazing.”
Jessica continued:

“Presenting to all the women was scary but such an amazing experience that I can now talk about to my friends and family. I felt proud of myself for standing up there and trying to talk, being someone with bad anxiety. I was proud of Jen and Kari, I was proud of my group and even more proud to be a part of this amazing experience. I can’t wait for the future and what it has in store for us.”

With our book launch just around the corner, it is in a good way that we will attend a full moon ceremony together on March 21st with our families at Marjorie’s place in Duck Lake and begin to create our new ribbon skirts for our book launch. We hold space with each of you as we continue to do this work, it is not easy, our tears may still fall, but we continue to grow, continue to rise, and continue to fight the injustices Indigenous girls have to face every day!

Treaty Six out!

See CBC Saskatoon’s article on Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia: https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.5047057
International Girls Studies Association Conference

The Montebello Girlfesto, developed by girl participants at the Circles Within Circles conference in Montebello, Quebec, was presented at the second International Girls Studies Association (IGSA) conference at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. It was presented by a team made up of Cindy Moccasin and Jessica McNab, two of the girls who contributed to its creation, with support from Kari-Dawn Wuttunee and Jennifer Altenberg, Community Scholars from Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia, and Catherine Vanner from McGill University. The Girlfesto itself, as well as other artwork by Indigenous girls in Canada and South Africa from the travelling exhibit Speaking Back: Youth-Led Perspectives on Combating Sexual Violence, was on display throughout the IGSA conference.

The presentation showcased Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia’s community research and the creation of their award-winning cellphilm Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia dealing with sexism and racism in the lives of Indigenous young women and girls who live in Treaty 6 Traditional Métis Territory Saskatoon. They also described the cultural practices of resistance and solidarity that they engage in through their girls’ group as part of Networks for Change and Well-being.

Cindy and Jessica then described the experience of travelling to Montebello and creating the Girlfesto. They identified the Girlfesto’s two Calls to Action that most resonated with them:

1. To commit to engaging more men and boys in discussions about gender-based violence, and
2. To create safe spaces for girls and women at various levels and in all ecologies.

Jessica selected the first because she felt boys should also have opportunities to share their stories and feel culturally supported. Cindy selected the second because her experience in her girls’ group taught her that sexual harassment and discrimination is not something she should expect or accept in her life. Jennifer concluded the presentation by emphasizing that Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia’s participation at the IGSA itself was an act through which they were living the Girlfesto by claiming space and time for Indigenous girls to speak.

During the IGSA conference, Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia also had the opportunity to do nation-to-nation community advocacy with members of the nearby Pokagon Band of Potawatami. Two young people from the Pokagan Band, Glen and Jasmine, were accompanied by Rebecca Williams, Youth Cultural Coordinator from the Pokagan Band, in a half-day workshop led by Jessica and Cindy about countering racism and sexism with self-love. The four young people produced a cellphilm that emphasized their experiences encountering racism, colonial violence, and homophobia, concluding with the confidence that they will rise above, exceed all expectations, and make their voices heard. Becky, Glenn, and Jasmine generously invited the Girlfesto team to visit their community, fostering an incredible experience of cross-nation cultural communication and exchange. The cellphilm they produced together was presented at the final luncheon of the IGSA conference to overwhelming accolades and invitations to share their work further at more international events.

As the only girl participants at the IGSA conference, Jessica and Cindy’s presence at the conference showed the importance of creating time and space to listen to girls. Their clear and articulate messages challenged conventional ideas of exclusion of girls and young people—Indigenous girls and young people in particular—in conversations about them, showing that girls’ voices require a central position in girls studies work everywhere.