



lessons learned from listening

EXPERIENCES OF HELP AFTER SEXUAL ABUSE/VIOLENCE

With this booklet we want to acknowledge and validate the experiences of the people who participated in this project.

Chi-Miigwetch for sharing.

This project was conducted by the Research Sub-Committee of the Naadmaagewin Aboriginal Domestic Violence Committee in partnership with Lakehead University.

Planning for this project began in 2013 and involved consultation with Indigenous stakeholders and an Advisory Committee. Participants were offered support throughout the research process.

Visit <http://advc.ca> to download electronic copies of this booklet, a full report for this project, and additional resources

lessons learned from listening

In 2015, Talking Circles and individual interviews were held with Indigenous people who have experienced sexual abuse and/or sexual violence. Based on their stories, in 2016 a survey was conducted to build on what was shared. Overall 125 Indigenous people from Thunder Bay, ON participated.

The goal of this project was to:

- LISTEN and VALIDATE the experiences of participants
- LEARN about what Indigenous people found helpful for dealing with the impacts of sexual abuse/violence

With their permission, this booklet shares what the participants are doing to deal with sexual abuse/violence. It is acknowledged that there isn't one right way to walk this journey. People are guided by their feelings, and seek help and support in the ways that work best for them.

“.. what I do now is believe in myself. This is my healing, my journey, my life.”



The Medicine Wheel is a traditional teaching tool that can be used as a guide for any journey. In listening to people's experiences in seeking help and support for sexual abuse/ violence, each quadrant on the Medicine Wheel was considered: Spiritual, Emotional, Mental, and Physical. It is acknowledged that these quadrants are interdependent. Participants assisted in placing responses in the quadrant that was most representative of their journey.



*Directions: East, West, South, North
States of Being: Mental, Emotional,
Physical, Spiritual*

*Medicines: Tobacco, Sage, Cedar,
Sweetgrass*

*Planning Stages: Vision, Feeling, Time,
Movement*

Phases of Life: Child, Youth, Adult, Elder

The Medicine Wheel represents all of creation, harmony and connections.

It is considered a major symbol of peaceful interaction on Earth (All races of people, the directions, all of the cycles of nature, day and night, seasons, moons, life cycles, and orbits of the moon and planets).

“There’s that ancient teaching: when we share our voice, we share our spirit, we share the journey. We shared it with the trees, the animals, the bugs, the bees, the flowers, the weeds, the river, the lake, with anything that was within hearing distance. And you’d be so exhausted when you’d come back, you couldn’t react to anything but just be [totally] quiet. It was... you’d stop, and it would be the total silence of the... the tree leaves, you hear the tree leaves, you begin to hear the birds, actually some of the animals.”

But when I’m in the wilderness, everything is so clear, quiet, and peaceful. And sometimes I would just yell. And after I’d yell, I’d feel better and I’d continue on. And when I come back, and when I come back I’m nice and fresh again because I left it all in the wilderness.”



what did people say helped?

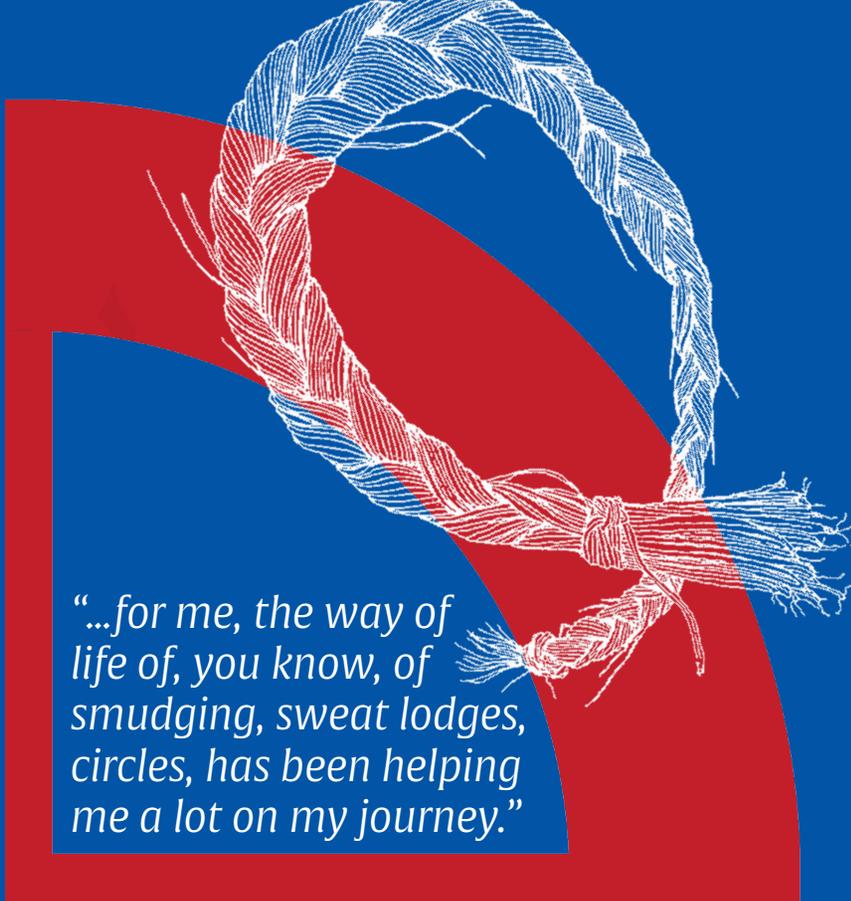
“So I started talking to Elders, I started going to treatment centres and this is where I found I could relate and start talking. Sweat lodges, the Elders ... I could still cry. I cry easy now. Before I couldn’t. I got so much. So much. But that’s part of it. Letting go. My tears and what I talk about.”

“And what helped me was mostly just attending the ceremonies, drumming, praying”

“When I was in [town] a lot of my healing was done by the water, by myself. And I couldn’t understand it, it was just the only time I felt peace, or if I was feeling anxiety ... I would go out to the lake and just sit and listen to the water....that was my way of finding my peace.”

“Sweat lodges keep me grounded. Because I can go in there and cry and pray. And even in circle now. I couldn’t before, you know. I thought, ‘I’m not going to cry here.’ I’m getting in touch with my, you know ... my hurts.”

“Creator was always there with me and helped me through ... so I give him all the credit for my life and thank him for all of the things that he has done for me and I like to share that with people because the Creator is there for all of us not just me.”



“...for me, the way of life of, you know, of smudging, sweat lodges, circles, has been helping me a lot on my journey.”

SPIRITUAL

- Elders and Traditional Healers
- Using Traditional Medicines
- Attending Ceremonies (smudging; sweat lodge; sage; eagle feather)
- Praying
- Being Outside (being in the bush; listening to water)
- Teachings
- Healing Circles





what did people say helped?

*"Sometimes I go into the wilderness...
sometimes I cry in the wilderness."*

"I walk with my kids"

*"I drive a lot by myself...Because that's
when I cry, when I am by myself...I play my
music loud and I just give 'er. I just cry"*

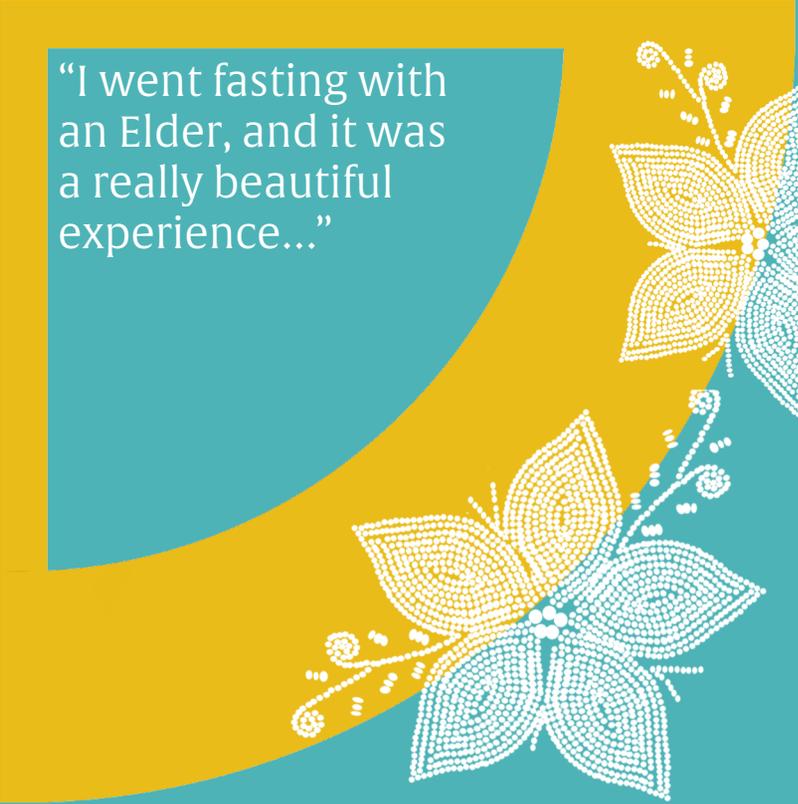
*"After 12 months of being sober and going
to treatment 12 months later, I had a better
chance at recovery ... And I had more
understanding of where I was coming
from."*

*"I got to go to my first sweat lodge and
that was a good experience for me."*



- Having a safe place to go
- Fasting
- Going for a sweat
- Medication
- Walking
- Sobriety
- Going for a ride

PHYSICAL



*"I went fasting with
an Elder, and it was
a really beautiful
experience..."*



- Connection with others
- Listening to stories of others
- Having someone listen
- Reading about someone with similar experiences
- Having someone validate the experience
- Connecting with family
- Connecting with friends
- Cultural connections
- Connecting with a counsellor
- Connecting with a physician
- Self-Reflection (journaling; listening to music)
- Belonging (with service providers; with community)
- Help With Grieving

EMOTIONAL

“A lot of women should encourage one another that we can help each other.”



what did people say helped?

“To tell you the truth, I meet people for a reason, and mainly, you guys here too, throughout my path. Because I do get messages from each of you when you start talking.”

“I help people remember their family and friends. And the supports we give each other all the time ... But unless we reach out and kind of connect with each other, it’s pretty easy to feel like you’re out there all by yourself on a limb dangling...”

“And going to powwows, gatherings ... That’s resources I know that’s been helping me through.”

“ ..and I think the more I talk about it, there’s a little less burden there.”

“Tell someone, don’t keep all that shame and guilt inside.”

“And still seeing my counsellor. And I am really so, so ,so, grateful for her, she was what I needed...”





"I am getting back to my Native culture. I am learning again...I listen to Elders...I listen to documentaries."

MENTAL

- Learning
- Understanding (effects of violence; survival skills; counselling; insight)
- Sobriety
- Non-Judgement
- Learning Coping Skills
- Being Persistent; Not Giving Up

what did people say helped?

"Trust your instincts. And if anything, go back to school....You just need your education. Doors open for you."

"...I'm trying to learn how to write in my own language."

"Reading....right now I am reading a lot about grief."

"I take time for myself and meditate."

"I want to have a voice..I learned a lot since I started wanting to change my life around and it's really helping me in a lot of ways."

"I started joining women's support groups ... learned about lateral violence."



“It’s a lot of work and I’m still doing it.”



Naadmaagewin Aboriginal
Domestic Violence Committee



Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

With funding from
Ministry of Community and Social Services