



Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit 2

Strong Women, Strong Communities: Restoring Our Balance

October 13 and 14, 2012 | Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre | Whitehorse, YT

Summary Report

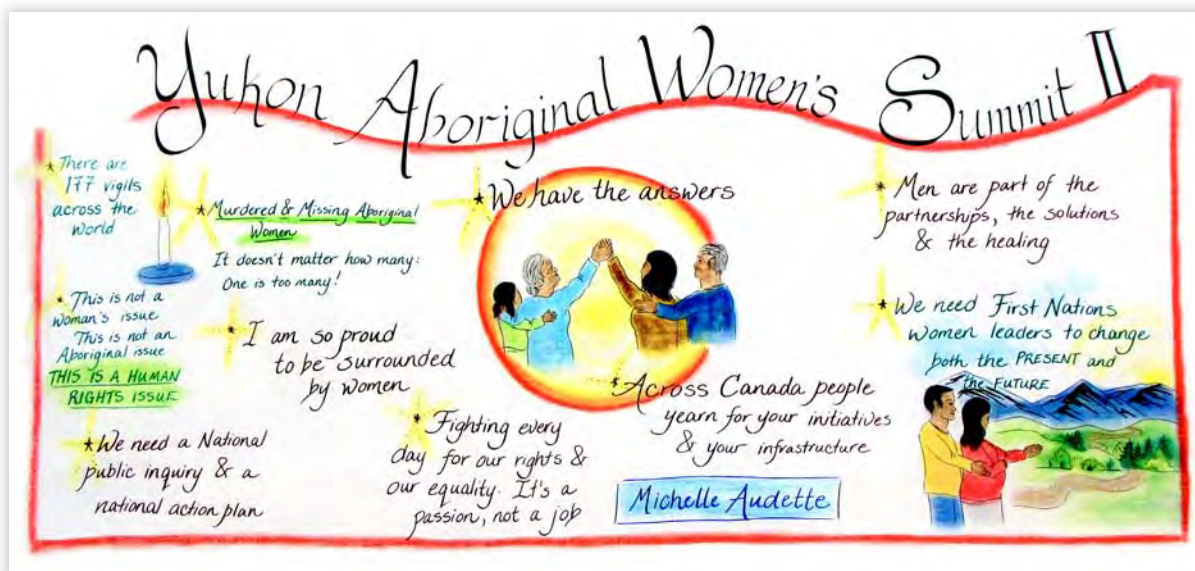


acknowledgements

Behind this report and the resulting YAWS II recommendations is the story about how these recommendations came to be, and the hard work that has been done to create equality for Aboriginal women in Yukon. It is an important story, and as part of it, we must acknowledge the many Aboriginal women who do equality-seeking work, who have taken time away from their families and communities to participate in the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits, National Aboriginal Women's Summits and the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit Implementation projects.

It is hoped that this story will help to change the social, economic and legal equality of Aboriginal women in Yukon, and that through increasing the equality of Aboriginal women, families and communities we will improve the lives of all Yukoners. It is hoped that this story honours the work that has been done to make change within Yukon families and communities, and that the story will continue.

Gunalchesh, Mahsi Cho, Souga Sin La, Klecko klecko, Kinanaskomitin, and a thousand more thank you's to everyone who has contributed to this story and to the legacy of the work that has been done. So it is with much gratitude that we acknowledge this work and the work of our Elders, and it is with much hope that we look to the future.



On October 13 and 14, 2012, the Yukon Government Women's Directorate and the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues co-hosted the second Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit in Whitehorse at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. Approximately 80 Aboriginal women attended representing various Yukon communities. Chiefs, Ministers and government officials were also in attendance. The theme of the Summit was *Strong Women, Strong Communities: Restoring Our Balance*. The Summit had three main objectives:

Engage Aboriginal women's groups and community-based Aboriginal women in reviewing collective responses to the first YAWS recommendations;

Provide a mechanism for community-based evaluation of implementation projects related to the first YAWS; and

Engage Aboriginal women in setting priorities and set the direction for future work on Aboriginal women's issues in Yukon.

This summary report is focused specifically on the third objective—to engage Aboriginal women in setting priorities and set the direction for future work on Aboriginal women's issues in Yukon¹.

YAWS2 resulted in 12 concrete recommendations to advance the status of Aboriginal women in Yukon related to the following areas: education and leadership training, housing, community, culture and tradition, justice and violence prevention, health and wellness, engaging men and boys, and sustainability. These recommendations build on the momentum, accomplishments, and successes of past YAWS Implementation projects and provided an important opportunity for the evaluation of the first YAWS projects.

¹ Objectives one and two (as listed above) will be addressed in a separate report, which will be released following the conclusion of the first YAWS implementation projects. It will be issued in the first quarter of the 2013-14 fiscal year.

speaking from the heart

The keynote speaker for the second Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit was Michèle Audette, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada. In recognition of her work and the role that the Native Women's Association of Canada plays advancing Aboriginal women's equality, Madame Audette was invited to speak at the Summit. The keynote for the first YAWS in 2007 was Beverly Jacobs, who was, at the time, the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Michèle is from the Innu community of Manu Utenam, which is next to the town of Sept-Îles on the North shore of the St. Lawrence River. She is the daughter of respected Innu activist Evelyne St-Onge, and has five children of her own.

“We, as Aboriginal people, are moving toward a greater goal of controlling our destinies. No longer are satisfied with sitting idly by and letting others speak for us. No: We have a voice. And we are using it.” YAWS II keynote address, 2012

Prior to her Presidency at NWAC, Michèle worked extensively with Quebec Native Women, serving both as a volunteer and elected President. Michèle has dedicated her advocacy to Aboriginal women, tackling issues such as governance, matrimonial real property, health, safety, youth issues and legal issues, including discriminatory practices under the Indian Act and Bill C-31 (1985). Michèle has always advocated that understanding the history of Aboriginal peoples and Canada is important to change, “if we don't understand how we got here, we certainly cannot create the changes we need moving forward,” (YAWS II keynote address, 2012)

In 2004, Michèle was appointed Associate Deputy Minister responsible for the Status of Women Secretariat for the Government of Quebec. In August of 2012, she was elected the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada. Michèle is a passionate, enthusiastic speaker who engages and inspires her audience.

“It is clear to me that events like this one are held to remind us what we have committed to...to remind us that we are not alone. Allies and partners are essential to create the type of changes we need; to ACTION recommendations like the ones you made...I think the challenge many of us face is not only in mobilizing our communities, but keeping that momentum going over the long term.” YAWS II keynote address, 2012

Getting some perspective



Looking back - a national perspective

In 2007, the Government of Newfoundland and the Native Women's Association of Canada co-hosted the first National Aboriginal Women's Summit (NAWS) in Corner Brook, NL. The Summit resulted in numerous recommendations that aimed to improve the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal women and their families across Canada.

The first National Aboriginal Women's Summit brought together 155 Aboriginal women from across the country, as well as premiers, federal, provincial and territorial Status of Women and Aboriginal Affairs ministers and support staff. Ten Yukon delegates attended NAWS, contributing directly to the recommendations and identification of priorities.

The 2007 Yukon delegation included:

Women's Directorate Minister **Elaine Taylor**

Justice Minister **Marian C. Horne**

Women's Directorate Director **Jennifer England**

Yukon delegation, continued:

Women's Directorate First Nation Liaison Coordinator **Kelli Taylor**

Carcross/Tagish First Nation member **Maria Benoit**

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation member **Shirlee Frost**

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations member **Barb Hume**

Teslin Tlingit Council member **Lucy Jackson**

White River First Nation member **Jessie Stephen**

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council member **Michelle Telep**

Other Yukon representatives included:

Kwänlin Dün First Nation and Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council member **Jessie Dawson**, who was supported through Native Women's Association Canada.

Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Council President **Adeline Webber**, who was supported through the National Association of Friendship Centres.

At the end of the Summit there were 137 recommendations made by Inuit, Métis, and First Nations women. 59 of the recommendations were identified as priorities. This Summit also identified 29 recommendations as thematic priorities, and three common themes emerged from the recommendations made by participants, which were:

Health, Safety and Wellness

Equality and Empowerment

Strength, Balance & Honour

NAWS was an important indicator of increased organizational capacity of Aboriginal women's organizations at the national level, as well as the willingness of governments and non-governmental organizations and communities to engage on critical areas of importance to women's equality in Canada. The overarching principles and statements made by participants also made recommendations that have been of high importance in increasing capacity to address these issues in Yukon. Three guiding principles formed the recommendations: Investments in Aboriginal women and Community Capacity and Building Relationships with Aboriginal Women. Here is how those principles were defined:

Invest in Aboriginal women:

- » Respect all priorities and the diversity of all Aboriginal women.
- » Include them in the future development, implementation and evaluation of all action plans and future processes;
- » Recognize traditional ways and invest in improving the lives of Aboriginal women;
- » Aboriginal women must have resources and opportunities to reclaim their traditional governing roles within families, communities and nations.

Invest in the community capacity to address the issues that are a priority to them:

Make meaningful substantial improvements to the social, economic, political conditions under which all Aboriginal women and their families live, by:

- » Investing in multi-year funding that addresses holistic needs of communities that are culturally appropriate and designed by the community;
- » Developing and training and capacity building with resources for the community to design and deliver meaningful programs by training non-Aboriginal service providers.

Build Ongoing Relationships with Aboriginal Women by Promoting:

- » Active and meaningful involvement of Aboriginal women at all levels.
- » Exposure to create capacity, engagement and leadership skills.
- » Life-long learning for Aboriginal women's development and to address the issues in their community.
- » Delivery of Aboriginal women's services by Aboriginal women.

making it relevant in yukon

Yukon delegates returned home after the first National Aboriginal Women's Summit in Corner Brook, NL, and quickly identified the need to have a Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit that focused on the realities faced by Aboriginal women in the North, taking into account Yukon's unique community landscape, as well as First Nations Final and Self-Government Agreements. NAWS delegates felt strongly that many challenges faced by Aboriginal women in Yukon were heightened due to the relative isolation of Yukon and differences in First Nations governance structures. These realities comprise a very different cultural, political, and economic landscape that required a more focused discussion amongst Yukon Aboriginal women.

Yukon's delegation to the first NAWS returned home passionate about making the national summit relevant to Yukon Aboriginal women. As a result, in November 2007, the Government of Yukon Women's Directorate and the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues (YACWI) co-hosted two successful Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits (YAWS) in Watson Lake and Whitehorse. Approximately 150 participants took part in the YAWS including Yukon Aboriginal women, Chiefs, Ministers and government officials.



The 2007 YAWS built and expanded on the momentum of the first National Aboriginal Women's Summit as the Government of Yukon and Aboriginal women's groups felt it was important to ensure that a greater diversity of Yukon Aboriginal women had an opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations on Aboriginal women's equality issues.

The theme of the two Yukon summits was "Strong Women, Strong Communities: Furthering Aboriginal Women's Equality." The goals of the summits were to communicate the outcomes of the NAWS to Yukon Aboriginal women and to determine Yukon Aboriginal women's priorities for furthering Aboriginal women's equality. The outcome of the two Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits included a list of recommendations in the three themed areas of Education, Leadership Development, and Wellness. These were distributed in a final document titled "Strong Women, Strong Communities: Furthering Aboriginal Women's Equality – Priorities and Key Messages." [Available online here.](#)

Since the first YAWS, the Women's Directorate has worked closely with Aboriginal women's groups and Yukon First Nations to implement prioritized recommendations from the 2007 Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits through funding from the Northern Strategy Trust. As the Implementation projects from the first YAWS will sunset in March of 2013, the Women's Directorate, the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's issues and Aboriginal women's groups identified the need for a community-based review of the existing projects and a space to engage Aboriginal women and work together and set priorities and direction for future work on Aboriginal women's issues in Yukon.

keeping up the national momentum

In 2008, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Native Women's Association of Canada co-hosted the second National Aboriginal Women's Summit (NAWS2) in Yellowknife. NAWS2 was designed to build on the recommendations of the first NAWS, and sought to provide focus and clarification recommendations and key messages developed at the first NAWS. NAWS2 hosted a total of 150 Aboriginal women from across Canada and invited the participation of Premiers Ministers, First Nations leadership, senior officials and support staff.

10 delegates from Yukon attended NAWS2 in Yellowknife, which included:

Deputy Premier **Elaine Taylor**

(Acting for Marian C. Horne, Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate)

Chief Ruth Massie, Ta'an Kwach'an Council

Chief Diane Strand, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations

Jacqueline Bazett, Ta'an Kwach'an Council member

Charlene Beauchemin, Acting Director, Women's Directorate

Sheila Clark, Executive Assistant, Premier's Office

Shirley Dawson, Kwanlin Dun First Nation member

Billie Maje (Youth), Ross River Dena Council member

Phyllis Smith (Elder), Champagne and Aishihik First Nations

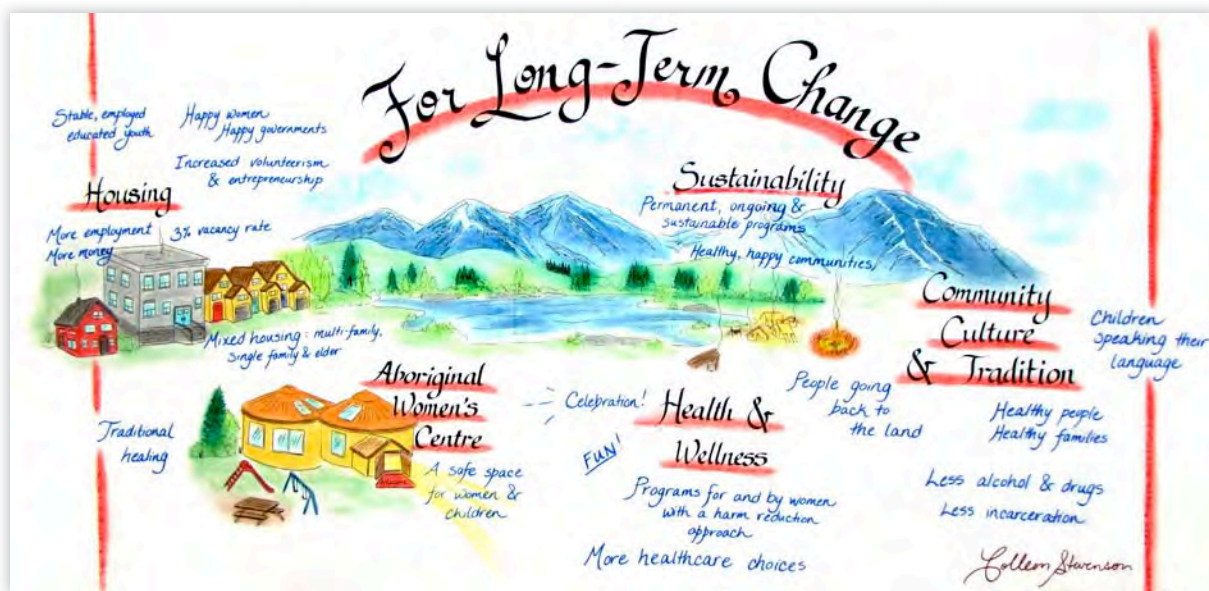
In addition, two Yukon Aboriginal women attended for National Aboriginal Organizations:

Rose Kushniruk, Native Women's Association of Canada (Champagne and Aishihik First Nations member and Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council President)

Adeline Webber, Assembly of First Nations Women's Council (Teslin Tlingit Council member and Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle President)

bringing it all together

The first National Aboriginal Women's Summit in 2007 served as a catalyst for the first Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit later that same year. Recommendations from the first NAWS were reviewed at YAWS, and Yukon Aboriginal women set priorities for Yukon communities. The second National Aboriginal Women's Summit (NAWS II) built upon the recommendations from the first NAWS, however, because NAWS II was held in 2008 (after the first YAWS), the NAWS II recommendations had no direct influence on the recommendations resulting from the first YAWS or the projects that were developed in response to those recommendations. A total of twelve recommendations resulted from YAWS II, which are detailed below.



Looking forward

YAWS II Final Recommendations

ONE *sharing our stories*

Continue to support the development of curriculum in Yukon schools that includes cultural components such as: land claims, the history of Yukon First Nations, traditional roles of First Nation women and men. Ensure children are taught traditional knowledge and culture in indigenous languages as a basis for leadership development.

TWO *building our strength*

Build on strengths and skills of women, particularly who face violence, through life skills workshops (anger management, healthy relationships, self-esteem, respect, self-care).

THREE *leading the way*

Develop a leadership program for women and deliver in communities and Whitehorse. Provide leadership training to Aboriginal women (including how to balance work/family responsibilities and personal wellness, communication skills and conflict resolution skills, financial management).

FOUR *bringing it home*

Support efforts to reduce homelessness by increasing access to and availability of affordable, safe and healthy housing for Aboriginal women and children. Work with community partners to develop an affordable rent-to-own housing program and increase housing options and support for youth who want to live independently.

FIVE *strengthening our cultures*

Support and develop a camp for gatherings that will build cultural strength and identity and that teach traditional knowledge and customs, including rites of passage, language, how to cut fish and dry meat, medicines, ceremonies and spirituality.

SIX *stopping the cycle*

Reduce victim blaming by monitoring statements, comments and other language used by the courts, RCMP, individual, leaders, (and others) when it comes to violence against women.

SEVEN *creating healthy families*

Develop community workshops and education on healthy relationships and violence prevention including sexual assaults and drug and alcohol addiction for adults, youth and front-line workers. Support the RCMP in communities to become more involved, active, and effective in the prevention of violence of any kind, including supporting victim-based programming (instead of offender-based).

EIGHT *healing our communities*

Build and permanently staff a traditional healing, treatment and after-care centre with land-based camps with programming that addresses trauma, addictions and violence, to heal the heart, mind, body and spirit. Services, programming and support will be culturally-relevant and gender-based and will incorporate traditional teachings, knowledge and medicines (Dene-Net-Sete-Tan), which means that it must support the whole family.

NINE *understanding ourselves and each other*

Address the high rates of depression/metal health issues of young rural Aboriginal girls by working with them directly by the age of 9 years old – in healthy activities, role models and opportunities to determine choices that open doors (see Health and Health Related Behaviours Among Young People in Yukon Survey results).

TEN *engaging men and boys*

Include men in violence prevention programming – we need to teach our men and boys their traditional roles and to be strong and healthy, so that they respect women and can share caregiver roles and family responsibilities. Support and invite men to share their perspectives, so that we also understand where they are coming from.

ELEVEN *supporting sustainability*

Provide adequate, sustainable CORE funding for all Yukon Aboriginal women's organizations.

TWELVE *creating space for Aboriginal women*

Build a centre for Aboriginal women and their families that is safe - with resources, welcoming women, counselling, functional gatherings, workshops, and programming.

choosing a path

The YAWS II theme; Strong Women, Strong Communities: Restoring our Balance was chosen to acknowledge the inspiring work that has been done as a result of the recommendations made at the first Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit in 2007. The Summit effectively gathered Aboriginal women from all Yukon communities to reflect on and evaluate community-based responses to the issues faced by Aboriginal women in Yukon.

While YAWS II was an important way to celebrate the collective successes of Aboriginal women in gaining equality, the gathering also facilitated conversations between Aboriginal women in Yukon to look towards the future, and to identify priorities and set direction on issues of importance in Yukon. This work is exceptionally valuable and important in shaping the future of Yukon communities and advancing Aboriginal women's equality within those communities.

The twelve recommendations made at the second Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits are both an opportunity and a challenge. They are an opportunity to work collaboratively across governments, communities, and community-based organizations. But the recommendations also present a challenge to all Yukoners to meaningfully address the priorities of Aboriginal women with a culturally relevant and gender inclusive lens, so their voices, perspectives, and issues are respectfully addressed.

Government of Yukon remains committed to improving the lives of Aboriginal women, and is motivated to address the issues of social, legal and economic equality for Aboriginal women in Yukon. Yukon Government is committed to working collaboratively with Aboriginal women's organizations, Yukon First Nations and other Yukon Government departments to address the issues outlined in the YAWS II recommendations, and looks forward to engaging community partners in moving forward together.

