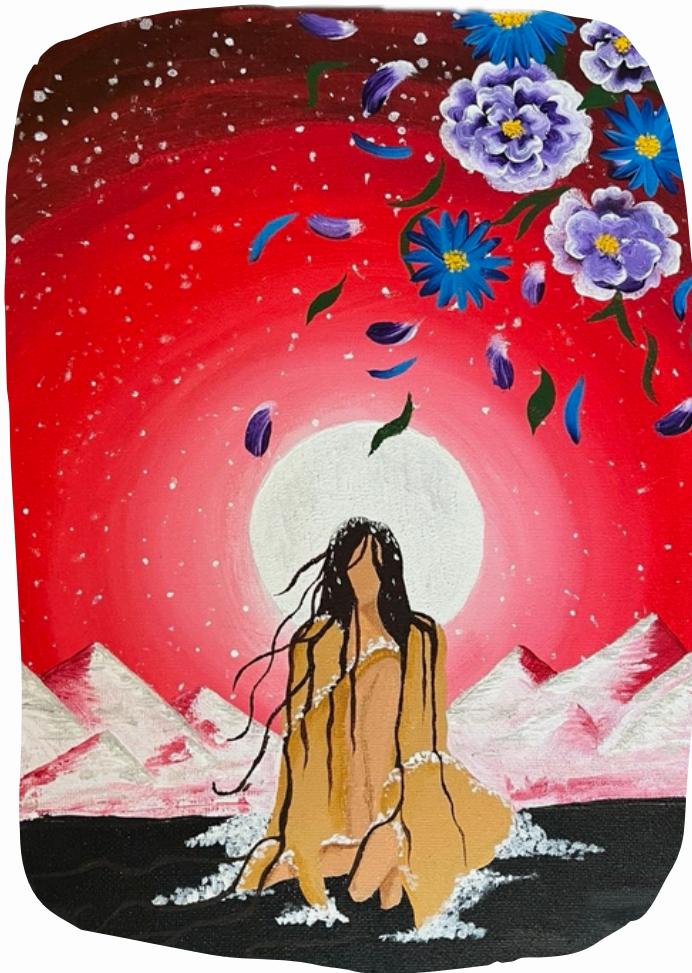


Community Newsletter

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT
PLATFORM

◆
February 2026



Original Art Contributed by
Circle Member: Neveah Rei Huel

As we enter a new year, many in our communities continue to carry the weight of global unrest, mental health, and affordability challenges, within the deep darkness of winter. These realities can bring uncertainty and anxiety, and it is important to acknowledge them with care.

In many Indigenous teachings, winter is a time of rest and renewal. The darkness invites reflection, hibernation, and gathering strength. Though the land may appear still, life is quietly preparing beneath the surface. Spring will follow—bringing growth, movement, and hope.

We are grateful for your continued engagement with our research platform and for the relationships, knowledge-sharing, and care you bring to this work. As the days slowly lengthen, may we move forward together with patience, balance, and renewed strength.



WORDS FROM OUR ELDERS: JO-ANN SADDLEBACK

I hope all had a wonderful Holiday Season and are enjoying the New Year. I want to share a couple of excerpts from stories on how the understanding and practice of Culture has an impact on asking for help and finding sobriety. I've been part of an extraordinary research project supported by CRISM, as the co-Primary researcher. Its report is a long time in coming, but the Cultural part, still sits with me. I am profoundly impacted by the stories and fearlessness of the participants. The Project meaningfully used Indigenous research methodology and Cultural approaches to help bring people out of the dark and realize they were holding the light to their recovery and healing. They were/are the medicine they needed. With their permission, I share the following:

Anohc:

Forgiveness is not saying it's okay I did that, but that I'm okay that I did that, I was still a good person even with some of my choices. The pain and struggle of being a good person makes me one. I have to learn how to do this for myself too. Using was always about the present pain, damn the future. Getting out of addiction is relishing in the present pain so I feel better in the future, but you have to make yourself better: exercise, ceremonies, kinship and feeling of family is really important. My addiction had ripples and reverberations throughout my whole family and maybe it still does. I am hoping my positiveness and healing, nurturing and loving will have the same rippling effect on my family and me.

Once I did stop using, I needed to recover and I very much looked to Culture. This meant I started attending ceremony more regularly and really engaging with humility. I thought myself as intelligent and above the need for a Divine power accept in a pretty performative way. I had been very humbled by my experiences so I was able to approach ceremony in a whole new way: as someone who had a lot to learn instead of someone who knew everything. I was able to say the words, do the tasks, sit with my own feeling genuinely because I had been broken open. I started to put some of that into practice.

Ontopayo:

This rock bottom, of having to climb back upwards. Decisions I made put me in extremely stupid and dangerous situations. Like getting stuck in the woods and yelling out to have someone find me and nobody did. I remember waking up in the forest and realizing I was completely alone. Only animals were responding to me. I was crying, I was so scared. My legs were so sore, my mouth was so dry. I was never so thirsty before. My throat was so dry, my mouth was so dry I couldn't speak. I realized I was walking in one big circle. I sat on this bed of moss against this big tree and thought to completely give up, quit trying. I was thinking how to allow myself to be fine with no one finding me: my family would never know. I was processing that fact. Sometime during that process, I fell back asleep, don't know for how long. I woke up and decided to get up and start walking again. Taking that risk allowed me to break from walking in that circle endlessly. Once I allowed myself to let go of dark thoughts and feelings, and even believing that was a possibility to survive, I heard thunder and knew a storm was coming. I immediately recalled Nôhkôm telling me we come from thunderbirds [our clan is the Blue Eagle Thunderbird of the Western Mountains]. Even though drenched and thirsty, I told myself to chase the storm: chase the clouds and follow the thunder sound. I don't know if I would have reacted if it was anything else. When I heard the thunder, I felt someone was watching and knew I was in deep trouble. Something, somebody cared for and found me and was helping me. Right in the middle of torrential rain, my mouth so dry and needed water so badly, I decided to pray. I was praying out loud for the first time in a long time, I was shouting and begging to see my daughter again and vowing to never find myself in this position again. I was screaming, following the thunder.

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It stopped and the forest was different. It was a different landscape now. I was still praying when I heard a gunshot, I got excited. I knew people were nearby and I knew people were around. I climbed a barbwire fence and saw a house across a field. In pain and exhausted, I kept going. I told myself don't stop because I won't make it. Keep going and going. The Prayer was answered: I not only found my way out and found people kind enough to give me water and food, warm clothes and directions on how to get home. They didn't owe me anything, but they helped me and I made it out of there. They let me use their phone and my Mom picked me up. She brought me home and I've been working to reintegrate myself.

Since then, I made sure I prayed again. That experience proved to me how real it is and how important it is. If you just say what you need, ask for the things you need, it happens. Someone, K'se Manto and His Creation are listening. Someone listened to me, heard me and found me and took pity.

Since I am quoting others for this article, I end with another quote, I find appropriate for the excerpts I used from these formidable women:

- People speak of hope as if it is this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spider's webs. It's not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go. -

Kind wishes, Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback



Grants & Conferences

- [NEIHR Yukon](#) Funding opportunity
- Health Canada Emergency Response Research Funds
- [SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant](#) - deadline March 16th, 2026
- CIHR REDI [Mentorship](#) funds for early career researchers
- Canadian Drug Agency [Conference](#): April 22-24, 2026



Training & Webinars

- [French language webinar: Trauma & Violence informed Approach to Addictions & Homelessness](#)
- [BRICC](#) - Community-based research cultural sensitivity training- First Nations University
- CRISM Prairies [webinar series: Addiction Rounds](#)

Parenting in the Storm

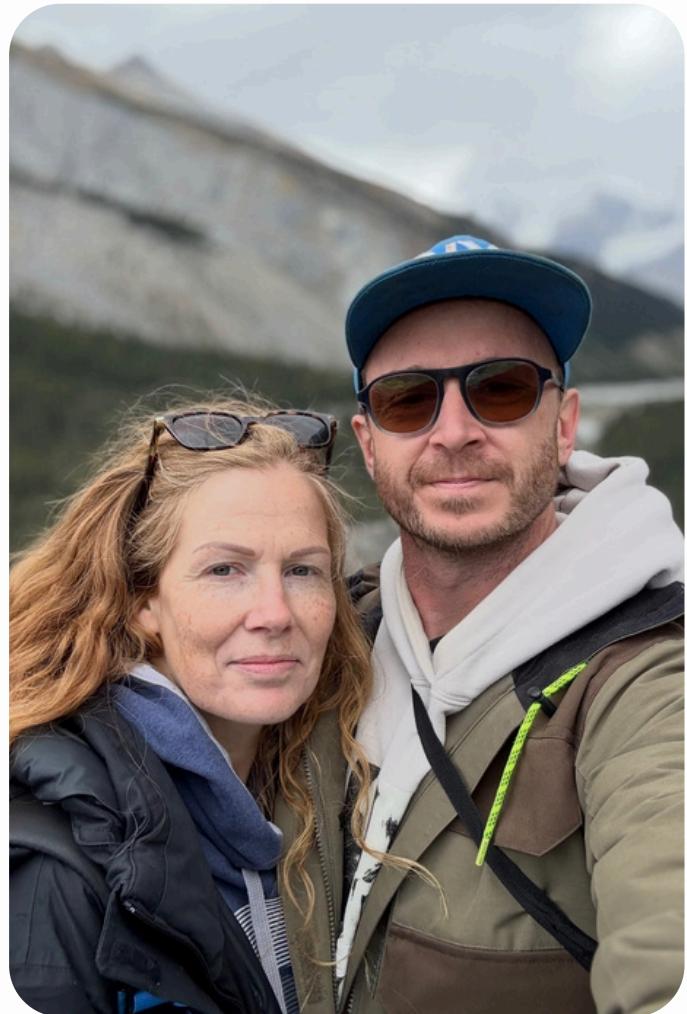
Parents in Recovery- Donna Gilchrist & Daniel Hearn

With thoughtful consideration for how best to approach research, honour community knowledge, and share the wisdom of their own lived experience, Donna Gilchrist and Daniel Hearn developed the Prairies-based workshop known as “Parenting in the Storm.”

As they created the workshop’s components and content, Donna reflected on past conversations with community-based researchers, emphasizing the importance of respecting community needs and upholding expectations of reciprocity.

Although the course did not begin from a research lens, Donna and Dan have increasingly recognized the opportunity to return meaningful data to each community they work with. Every community now receives a “validation report”- a way to affirm that their time, trust, and investment were honoured and well spent.

Using Mentimeter, an interactive digital engagement tool, Donna and Dan guide participants through honest, direct, and insightful conversations. Instead of providing answers, they help parents uncover their own internal wisdom, empowering them to rebuild confidence in their inherent strengths.



COMMUNITY NEWS

This self-trust is foundational to healing, and participants leave with tangible practices such as a rock-grounding ceremony, breathwork and meditation, physical release through movement, and other culturally informed teachings.

As Donna explains, the inspiration behind a closing candle ceremony was rooted in creating a shift in perspective- helping each parent learn to hold their own candle again, lighting their way forward. She referenced the idea behind the song “This Little Light of Mine” in the closing ceremony, reminding parents of the inner light we each carry and the resilience that leads us through the darkest moments.

Donna and Daniel are energized by the opportunity to help build community capacity, spread knowledge and tools to other parents, and are open to other opportunities to continue working with researchers in the area of substance use.



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Updates



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The IEP coordinator has been working with the CRISM nodes across Canada to begin crafting national guidelines for Ethical Research with Indigenous Peoples. We look forward to engaging with our network for feedback on co-creating this toolkit for best practices and engagement by and for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people.

CRISM-IEP Research

CRISM-IEP nominated principal investigator, Dr. Robert Henry et al. published an article on [Metis Health Data Principles](#).

A Few Notes To Remember

- The first week of May (3rd-7th) is our spring meeting with our advisory circles, CRISM members and council.
- Check out our website and stay up to date on blog posts or other engagement opportunities at www.crism-iep.ca
- If you would like to be featured in our newsletter or are interested in presenting your research or project through the CRISM-IEP, please get in touch with Heather at iepcoordinator@usask.ca



Naming Ceremony

Our naming ceremony has been set for the spring during the season growth & renewal. Our Elder Jo-Ann will keep us updated on appropriate next steps.



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