

Grandmothers are Gathering



March 8-10/2020

Membertou First Nation

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Summary Report

Introduction

Discussions among various women leaders to host a gathering in March 2020 for grandmothers from Unamaki came to surface. With the passing of our grandmothers over time so does the knowledge that they carry. It is very critical and crucial that we start documenting their knowledge and teachings to pass down to younger generations.

- * learn sacred teachings and healing properties of traditional medicines

- * Reconnect with the foundations of life through ceremony

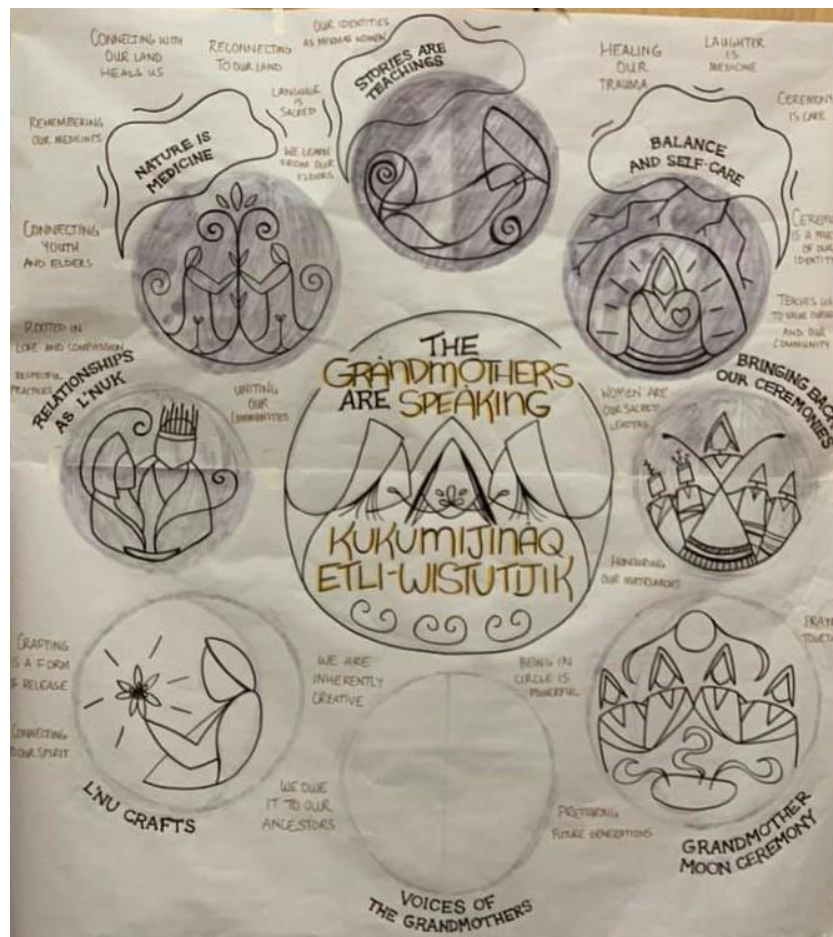
- * Learn some of the ways our people maintain balance

We were able to invite approx. 25 participants from the Unamaki Communities that ranged in different abilities such as ceremonial leaders, crafts people or even just grandmothers that have knowledge but have never been invited to such events such as this unique gathering specifically for grandmothers.

The outcome of a gathering such as this could be valuable as to how we do our work, it can be used to access funding or even for healing purposes. The grandmothers are getting very elderly and need to be valued.



Motivation



The arrival of the grandmothers on March 8th was one of happiness and joy along with extreme honor that such an event would be taking place for them. In the history of Unamaki, as stated by the grandmothers that this event would be the first of its kind taking place. Selection of Grandmothers was done by the working committee who handpicked each elder to attend who all have different levels of knowledge that we needed to capture for future generations.

This event was hosted by the Mi'kmaq Circle of Hope Society founder Audrey Marshall who initiated the event and then partnered with various organizations for funding support and collaboration...

- Nova Scotia Native Women's Association
- Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq
- Women of First Light
- Membertou Heritage Centre

Accommodations at the Hampton were provided for each grandmother for 2 nights so they would not commute daily from their communities. Evening live entertainment was provided in the main area of the hotel along with sufficient evening snacks after supper.

Cape Breton Post report Oscar Baker was asked to be invited to the evening event so that he could be introduced to the grandmothers as the he would be covering our event. All elders, facilitators and working committee members signed a release of information for pictures, video and audio recording which have been handed over to Cathy Martin (Women of First Light) as her organization graciously offered at charge to document our gathering which she will be sharing with NSNWA once she completes her edits.



Engagement

The days of March 9-10th started with breakfast and laughter as we all get ready to head over to the Membertou Heritage Centre for the welcoming of our participants. The intent of this gathering is to provide a culturally appropriate gathering that comprised of workshop such as:

- Land based teachings through legends
- Sacred teachings and healing properties of traditional medicines
- Reconnecting with the foundations of life through ceremony
- Learning the ways our people maintain a healthy balance in life

Grandmothers that attended the event were also the facilitators of the gathering, they did the drumming, singing, ceremonies and crafts which gave them the power to realize they were in control and not us. We as a working committee became the

bystanders and students of the gathering. It was surprising to hear though that quite a few of these grandmothers were raised by their own grandmothers or relative due to reasons such as early death of their mothers or their mothers would just leave them. Due to this loss of their direct caregiver, few were able to keep the language and skills such as basket making but others were able to maintain it.

Tradition and culture is something that they are only starting to grasp as many felt it was a betrayal to the catholic religion but now are starting to get comfortable with smudging and ceremony.

The loss of their own children has been devastating and still affects many today, but as some grasp onto spirituality its helping them to reconnect to their loved ones positively as the subtle signs they receive bring them happiness instead of fear of the unknown.

Many losses that youth are portraying to parents or grandparents is very discouraging such as the loss of respect and the unwillingness to learn the language or parents not teaching the language. The youth have lost respect for their bodies with the loss of spirituality and values, the need for ceremonies for youth such as the coming of age ceremonies. For girls that would be respect for body and values, boys the first hunt, respect, and values. One elder stated that the Indian Residential School was the definite start of these losses that we are all dealing with today:

- Ceremony
- Respect for self and family
- Self-identity
- Language
- Family values
- Craft knowledge (basket making, leather work, waltes etc....)
- Traditional meals
- Birth of a child (the burial of the umbilical cord)

Conclusion

the final day was one of laughter and teachings as it was starting to snow and some of the grandmothers were worried about winter driving so a few left early to start their commute. We started the final day with an opening prayer and a traditional craft of wooden stars.

There were discussions on creating a grandmothers advisory committee and the dire need to have more gatherings such as this one that took place

Some statements that were spoken:

“Great creator help me to speak the language and to embrace the culture”

“I believe that we will be a matriarchal society again”

“Always strive for a better life away from alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and bad food”

“Take care of who you reach out to in the spirit world, there are good and bad spirits”

“I.R.S. may have been the start of it all of these losses”

And inconclusion, the grandmothers are very thankful to all for making this gathering a success and hope for more it the future.

