



talking stick
EVERY VOICE MATTERS

VOICES | AUGUST 2022

Talking Stick is an anonymous chat platform that connects First Nations individuals to culture-based peer support and confidential conversations.

Highlights from this edition:

- Talking Stick Guests are sharing how important—and impactful—anonymous conversations can really be.
- Real-time usage patterns and insights provide information about First Nations communities that may otherwise not exist.
- Community spotlight: How a Sixties Scoop survivor is turning hardship into helping

REACHING INDIVIDUALS WHERE GAPS EXIST

At the core of every Talking Stick chat is a commitment to anonymity. No one, not even the app developers, can access personal data about any First Nations Guest who uses the tool. All chat histories are automatically deleted, which helps provide comfort and trust to those who use the app. Our Guests have shared that this anonymity is essential because it makes speaking up just a little bit easier—and that alone can make all the difference to someone who feels ashamed, afraid, upset, or emotional.

Here's what more of our anonymous Guests are saying about their experience:



"I actually am using this. It works. It helps a lot. My mental health is so messed up I think they saved my life many times."

-Anonymous guest



"I really love having someone to talk to and listen and not having to be judged."

-Anonymous guest



"Talking Stick is a great way to communicate in a positive way, especially since talking out loud can be a struggle."

-Anonymous guest

ANONYMOUS DATA IS INFORMATIVE DATA

In their 2022 World Mental Health Report, The World Health Organization stated that digital technologies are a foundation for change and a solution to strengthen mental health systems. Anonymous platforms like Talking Stick reduce stigma, increase coverage to remote areas, and generate informative data that may otherwise not exist. This information can provide a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns affecting real people in real First Nations communities, right now.

Keep reading to explore our very early observations and data-driven insights since launching in May 2022.

KEY INSIGHT #1: OPTIMIZING TRAINING FOR PRIMARY CONVERSATION TOPICS

While the chat conversations themselves are automatically deleted, Peer Advocates are able to provide information about the nature of each chat conversation. This month, conversations centred on three main topics: Depression & Loneliness (17%), Mental Health (16%) and Grief & Loss (10%). This data can help to influence future decisions and priorities such as programming, policies, and services. Today, this information helps the program team adjust how training and education is delivered, ensuring that the network of Talking Stick Peer Advocates are equipped with resources to support relevant topics.

KEY INSIGHT #2: DIVERSITY MATTERS

Talking Stick was founded on the principle that every voice matters. First Nations Peer Advocates are diverse in age, gender, sexuality, and background, as are the Guests we serve. Diversity in our Peer Advocates provides a genuine and authentic understanding of our Guests' experiences. As we make future hires, we will continue to prioritize diversity to ensure every individual is represented.

KEY INSIGHT #3: DRIVING AWARENESS, DRIVING CHANGE

The majority of conversations this month were initiated by Guests in the Northwest region of Saskatchewan. This data may indicate that there is higher awareness or perhaps a higher need in these communities. To ensure Talking Stick can reach as many people as possible, we are ramping up our awareness efforts from North to South. Our multi-pronged marketing strategy includes traditional and social media; outreach to community leaders such as Health Directors and Tribal Councils; and grassroots community engagement at events, including Indigenous Peoples Day, Treaty Days, Youth Events, Pow Wows, and Traditional Healing gatherings.



DARLENE'S STORY: SIX DECADES OF TURNING HARDSHIP, INTO HEALING INTO HELPING

At the age of 10, Darlene was separated from her parents and her Waterhen Lake First Nations home. As part of the Sixties Scoop, she was taken to a residential school, where six long years of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse began—all at the hands of those she was told were there to help her.

At 16, Darlene ran away to the one place she had ever felt safe: a former foster home. Auntie Greyeyes, as Darlene fondly calls her foster mother, prioritized providing a safe home for Indigenous children. She was the first person who made Darlene feel like she genuinely “belonged to somebody.”

Today, Darlene is a 66-year-old Elder living in Saskatoon. She spent more than four decades as a receptionist for First Nations organizations, lending a helping hand wherever possible. She always put her whole heart into assisting her community—whether the task was facilitating bingo night at a nearby reserve or looking after an Indigenous child in need. In 1989, Darlene recorded her first studio album, singing about joyous events in her life that uplifted her.

TURNING HARDSHIP, INTO HEALING INTO HELPING

Darlene and her three children were able to overcome their hardships, one step at a time. Together, they reconnected to their Indigenous roots and learned how to support their community. Darlene is now an Elder, her youngest son, Perry, is an Indigenous archaeologist and her granddaughter Abby is a Youth Ambassador for the Saskatoon Tribal Commissioner.

As she reflects on the last six decades, Darlene is struck by the tragedy of her early years—and grateful she was able to turn her hardship into healing with the help of family, music, and her community. Now, she wants to offer her wisdom and strength to those struggling within the Indigenous community.

Darlene was excited when she learned about Talking Stick, joining the program as one of our first Peer Advocates. “Indigenous people have been craving something like Talking Stick,” she said.

Darlene knows what it's like to grow up without having someone to talk to and without being allowed to connect with her Indigenous roots. “I’m following in Auntie Greyeyes’ footsteps” says Darlene. After all these years, she wants to take the resentment she still feels from her past and use it to help others.



Left photo from the Tony Cote Summer Games, July 25, 2022 picturing Leigh Cote, Talking Stick Regional Manager

Right photo from the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly on July 5, 2022, picturing Charlene Gardiner, Talking Stick's Provincial Director, with Jim Pattison, Canadian business tycoon, investor, and philanthropist.



Need to chat? You Talk. We Listen.

- First Nations Peer Advocates are available now.
- Always Anonymous.
- Confidential. Safe. Secure.
- 1 on 1 private conversations.



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Talking Stick-Indigenous



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my.talkingstick.app

Thank you to our partners

Talking Stick was created in partnership with Saskatchewan's Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and TryCycle Data Systems.

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