

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

Highlights from this edition:

- Acknowledging the victims and families of James Smith Cree First Nation
- Talking Stick supports post-secondary students with practicum hours
- Chelsea's Story: One conversation can save a life

In times of crisis, agility is our strength

The horrific events that took place in James Smith Cree Nation this month, shocked our country. The massacre was felt by everyone, including employees of Talking Stick, some of whom were relatives of the victims. At a time when people were forced into an emergency lockdown, fear and uncertainty were quickly followed by grief, overwhelming pain, and enormous loss.

Because the Talking Stick app was already in place, trained First Nations Peer Advocates were standing by, ready to support individuals and family members who needed a safe place to talk.

Talking Stick was quickly recognized by **CTV News Regina** as one of the support systems, available for those seeking comfort and connection. Our message was clear: "Peer Advocates are not crisis counsellors or health professionals; they are there to listen."

In the month of September, we observed an increase in chat searches and chat activity, largely in the regions near and surrounding the location of the tragedy. The duration of chats also increased, with the average chat length exceeding twenty (20) minutes. This offers some insight into the time required to explore feelings and provide comfort, which may be related to the complexity and reach of the issues themselves. In our Spotlight Story (see page 2), one of our Peer Advocates shares her experience during a particularly lengthy chat which lasted four hours.

Talking Stick accepted as practicum setting for students at SIIT, FNU, and USask

To gain experience as Indigenous Social Workers, Wellness Counsellors, Therapists and Crisis Workers, a field placement is the ideal environment to practice skills in a real environment. Students from three different post-secondary institutions across the province immediately thought of Talking Stick. They heard about the app through friends and saw our logo at various community events throughout the summer. It was this awareness that led eight (8) students from First Nations University, the University of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) to our office.

We are grateful to accept the honour of working with these students over the next several months, providing them with an enriching work environment, as well as access to practical learning opportunities to support their ambitious career path. Starting in November, Talking Stick has accepted six (6) students from the **SIIT Mental Health and Wellness** Diploma program. Additional students from other academic institutions will commence in January 2023. We are thrilled to support the goals of these students and look forward to gaining fresh perspectives and knowledge from this talented resource pool, over the coming months.

Talking Stick Users: Anonymous Testimonials



"The advocates are truly incredible people. They are kind and real. Keep doing things with a good heart, because it makes a huge difference."

-Anonymous guest



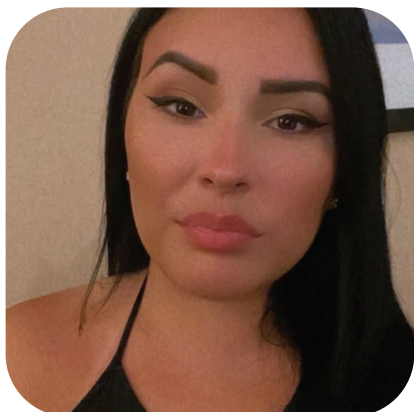
"She listen to me rant. Love talking to her. Found her online again and gave her an update on my life now. Still have ups and downs but mainly ups! Had to share with her!"

-Anonymous guest



"I really appreciate being able to talk to someone without being judged for feeling the way I do. She genuinely listened to me."

-Anonymous guest



Chelsea's Story: A conversation can save a life

In June 2022, Chelsea McKay applied to become one of Saskatchewan's very first Talking Stick Peer Advocates. Over her 34 years, there were times when Chelsea, a woman from Canoe Lake First Nation, had to overcome her own anxiety. Because she herself recognizes the power of connecting to a real person when facing life's challenges, that's what motivated Chelsea to become a Peer Advocate.

Chelsea reflects on what she learned from one of her very first chats with a Guest who was contemplating suicide. In this situation, the anonymous Guest reached for the Talking Stick chat app to talk discreetly about feelings of grief and loss. This Guest was trying to come to terms with the fact that a cherished family member was about to pass away. The pain was so overwhelming that the Guest "did not want to keep living". This information was a lot to process for Chelsea, but she remembered her training and kept the Guest chatting to normalize talking about suicide. Chelsea wanted to reduce any shame the Guest may have been feeling, so she did what she was trained to do – listen. She remembered that the role of Peer Advocates is not to give advice, but to provide a safe place for Guests to feel heard.

Chelsea stayed connected to this Guest for over four hours, listening and waiting even during long pauses where no typing occurred.

She would check in by asking "Are you still there?" and "Are you still good?" and also shared phone numbers of community-based, cultural health resources. The chat ended once the Guest indicated that they were feeling better, and "felt calm". But that is not the end of the story! Since this initial chat, the same Guest has had at least ten more chats with Chelsea to share updates and to let her know that they are doing well. This Guest shared that the relative did pass away, and that they now use Talking Stick to help cope with the loss. Chelsea shares that this particular Guest no longer mentions suicide.

When she first became a Peer Advocate, Chelsea thought that more people would want to chat about anxiety or depression; but she finds that most of her chats are from people who want to talk about "everyday" things – relationships, life changes.

"Sometimes it's just about getting an outside perspective."

Community Outreach and Events



From left to right: Angela Silva, SIIT Student Counsellor supports Talking Stick at the Mental Wellness & Addictions Knowledge Exchange, Jordan Thunderchild, Talking Stick Regional Manager visits students in Moosomin First Nation, Julianna DeBray, Talking Stick Peer Advocate attends Beady's & Okemasis Traditional Pow Wow

Need to chat? You Talk. We Listen.

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



Download our free app:
Talking Stick-Indigenous



Or go to our website:
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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