

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

Highlights from this edition:

- Investing in our youth – Talking Stick reaches students in the classroom
- Talking Stick gets a new website
- Alyse’s story: Dialysis patient earns university credit via Talking Stick

Walking the Talking Stick App Into Classrooms



Students try out Talking Stick app at Leask Community School.

Regional Managers have been working hard to introduce the Talking Stick chat app to First Nations youth and students across the province. By providing in-person teaching and live chat experiences to kids, they have seen the app at work; and most have had a chance to connect directly with a Peer Advocate. We know that the best way to get news into the wind is by word of mouth, and these presentations are helping Talking Stick grow.

Through the initiative of visiting classrooms and presenting to schools, utilization of this uniquely First Nations chat service has not only increased but has also resulted in the creation of new relationships that will help to amplify our message.

Chat usage has increased significantly – we saw an increase of over 500% between September and October.

In-person visits have been made to more than 20 schools this month. School and classroom presentations have been made to both large and small groups, to students from grade 6 to grade 12. The experience has been that going to classrooms is the most effective approach, to offer more individualized attention. While many of the students have not heard of Talking Stick, they are quickly able to relate to the app, and see its benefits.

In most cases, the presentations are done where students have access to Chromebooks and can access the Talking Stick website to explore the site– this exercise builds trust and can help to remove any fear or uncertainty students may have about using a chat app. Students can see that the Peer Advocates are ‘real people’; they may even recognize the faces as Elders, influencers, teachers, aunts, uncles, and neighbours.

Students and school staff are very enthusiastic about the app, and plan to use it. Students were impressed with the fact that it can be accessed in Cree languages. Those with lower literacy are encouraged to use the “talk-to-text” function on their devices to get their messages across. One barrier that has been identified consistently is the lack of connectivity in many communities, meaning that access to internet-based solutions is limited.

Through the school visits, the Regional Team has connected with RCMP and Saskatoon police liaison officers and have been offered opportunities to co-present, when police are in schools. We look forward to continuing this approach through the winter months, meeting youth where they are and showing up to prove our message. Talking Stick is here to stay.

The Faces and Voices of Talking Stick Reflected

On October 26th, we launched a newly designed, dedicated website for Talking Stick. The new site serves as a “one-stop-shop” for information and access to all things Talking Stick. We are proud to include not only the voices of Talking Stick users and guests, but also the faces that power this program.

The website site features genuine photos of real people, all from Saskatchewan, all First Nations.

Community leaders, schools, and youth-led organizations can visit the site to download our poster, request an in-person presentation, or connect with us via email. Guests can start a chat from the site, as well as learn about how it works, building trust and validating our core values: anonymous, confidential, and judgement-free. Visit the new site here: <https://my.talkingstick.app>

