

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

Highlights from this edition

- Grey Cup Anthem Singer – Peer Advocate Teagan Littlechief
- Talking Stick is Gaining Wider Attention
- A Veteran’s story – Victor Sanderson
- Talking Stick in Canadian Healthcare Technology Magazine

Grey Cup Opening: Teagan Littlechief

On November 20, Regina played host to the 109th Grey Cup. Even with their beloved Roughriders sitting in the stands for this one, the Saskatchewan fans braved the cold to be part of the game that determines which team gets to claim the coveted trophy, as champions of the Canadian Football League.

This year, there was a “Talking Stick” presence during the festivities, as Peer Advocate and 2022 Saskatchewan Country Music Award Indigenous Artist of the Year, [Teagan Littlechief](#), from White Bear First Nation shared her talents as she belted out the National Anthem in Cree, English and French.

Congratulations to Teagan on a fantastic rendition!



Teagan Littlechief singing the national anthem.

Presentations by Talking Stick Staff Pique Broad Interest

The word about Talking Stick is getting out, and the reception has been full of enthusiasm and curiosity!

On November 10, Talking Stick’s Associate Provincial Director, **Cecile McKay** presented at the **FSIN Emergency Management Forum** about the work she and the team are doing in Saskatchewan. With winter coming, risks increase for people who are feeling isolated and disconnected, so the timing of the presentation was intentional. The flexibility and accessibility of the platform resonated with members of the audience and prompted a number of questions and inquiries about potential applications outside of the current circle of users.

- **Northern Alcohol Strategy**, wants to bring Talking Stick to communities in La Ronge. Our Regional Manager for the North will be making a trip to that community in the New Year, to introduce Talking Stick to the local youth and schools.
- **National Indigenous Fire Safety Council** has indicated interest in promoting Talking Stick in B.C. as part of the Junior Firefighters program.
- **Preparing Our Home** is an organization that engages parents and children in emergency preparedness and sees Talking Stick as a tool that can support their work.
- **Dakota Dunes Casino** invited Talking Stick to attend their AGM and present the tool to the casino employees. Talking Stick is recognized as an anonymous, safe destination to talk about mental health, work stress, and other issues.
- **National Addictions Awareness Week** (Nov 22-28), Talking Stick representatives will be presenting to a few communities, including **Cowessess First Nation**.

As people are hearing about Talking Stick, their imaginations are taking the potential uses of the application to new places every day.

Voices from the Field

“I’m from Chief Whitecap School and a lady came in and told us about this. I’m so glad she did! This is the only place where I can talk about things and no one will judge me.”
-Anonymous guest

“Thank you for being there, needed to reach out and someone was there.”
-Anonymous guest

“I felt humbled to be able to just talk to someone and them be grateful for the chat.”
-Peer Advocate

“Talking helps you to move ahead” – Veteran Victor Sanderson talks about PTSD



During our conversation, Victor Sanderson spoke several times about “triggers” – things that prompt difficult memories of his time as a soldier. He is very open about his struggles with the physical and mental health effects of his seven years of service in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Victor joined the Forces when he was 22, after finding himself homeless in his community of James Smith Cree Nation. At that time, there was no prospect of deployment, and he recalled that the war in the former Yugoslavia “came out of nowhere.” Victor completed the 6 ½ months of training required to be a “combat (field) engineer.” He described his duties as building bridges and other structures to facilitate troop movement, as well as to set mine fields and participate in demolition exercises in conflict areas. “Civilians just don’t understand – we are trained to do things,” he explained. After spending half of a planned six-month deployment overseas, he returned to Canada to continue his training.

After he left the military, Victor began to experience signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He described it as feeling as though he was “boiling inside with turmoil” and it led him to leave Canada and travel to Tennessee, “to get as far away as possible.” He could not say how long he was gone – “It is all a blur.”

Victor returned to Canada to be with his sick father, and it was not until he received support from two World War 2 Veterans that he agreed to enter therapy – that was in 1998. He continues to receive mental health care to this day, and must travel to Saskatoon, two hours away every month to see his therapist. “Talking helps you to move ahead” he says.

Victor also has chronic physical health challenges, which he says have slowed him down significantly. He was once an active outdoorsman. Now, at age 55, he says he is happy to just be able to get up in the morning. Receiving physical therapy called “body traction” also requires regular trips to Saskatoon. He has considered moving off the First Nation to be closer to care but is not interested in the “ratrace” that often comes with city living.

Before our call, I sent Victor an introductory message to let him know why I hoped to speak with him. In that message, I described Talking Stick, and our efforts to expand the use of the app specifically to Veterans. Little did I know that Victor would actually download the app and try it out before our call! He managed to chat with a number of Peer Advocates, as he checked it out. In short, he thought it was a great approach. He told me that he is a strong advocate for innovative ways of making services more accessible to Veterans in remote communities. He regularly calls the Veteran’s Affairs Canada Call Centre to recommend innovations, such as videoconferencing, to close the gaps between Veterans and care providers.

“If you lay it out in a good way, it will help,” he concluded about Talking Stick. “It will not be for everyone, but it is good that they (Advocates) are out there trying.”

Victor indicated that it took 20 years for him to get the help he needed for his physical care. He now has a reliable contact, an Advocate at Veteran’s Affairs – a soldier, himself – that has helped him access services.

According to Victor, the rules for Veteran’s care have changed, and he asserted that support for those who serve are at an all-time low. He expressed particular concern for the younger Veterans, who have returned from Afghanistan. That said, he did feel that Talking Stick would be a good tool for the younger Veterans to consider, “They will let you know that they think.”

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is not easy to live with or to talk about. Access to care for mental and physical health supports for Veterans is often blocked by systemic barriers, geography, legislation, and policy. By listening to stories like Victor’s, we have the opportunity to learn and to influence innovative changes that will benefit all those who have served Canada with honour and courage. Tīnikī, Victor.

Talking Stick featured in Digital Health Industry Magazine



Canadian Healthcare Technology Magazine is a recognized leader in reporting on important innovations in digital health. November’s “News and Trends” section included an article called, [“New hope for Indigenous mental healthcare: Talking Stick platform”](#) (Page 10).

The piece underscores the app’s role in creating meaningful connections between the guests and Peer Advocates. It also emphasizes the importance of the platform being designed and rolled out by the Indigenous community in Saskatchewan, while employing Peer Advocates from across the province. We look forward to more of these opportunities to tell our story and highlight the important work being done by our Talking Stick team.

Photo: Charlene Gardiner - Talking Stick Provincial Manager

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.

info@talkingstick.app

