

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

**Highlights from this edition**

- Spotlight on Peer Advocates
- Cycle-Breaker – Taking Back My Name – Lauren’s Story
- Celebrating National Skirt Day

## Rebecca and Clarence: Peer Advocates and Community Builders

**Rebecca Sylvestre-Lemaigre’s** day job is managing the Turner Lake and Birch Narrows Community Food Centre in Northern Saskatchewan. The name does not begin to describe the breadth of programs and services offered by the staff and volunteers at the Centre. Food insecurity is driven by high food prices and other challenges. Rebecca and her team focus on teaching their clients skills that will help them counter these pressures and ensure that these teachings are shared with other community members and passed on to the next generations.

Rebecca started the program solo, and now has three staff members to help her expand and sustain the critical services. For her incredible tenacity and vision, Rebecca was recognized in November 2022 with a Strength of Our Women Award for promoting Community Health and Wellness. Well deserved.

As if her work at the Food Centre is not enough, Rebecca also serves as a Talking Stick Peer Advocate. Given her remarkable knowledge, wisdom, and commitment to her community, we feel very fortunate to have her on the team!



Rebecca Sylvestre-Lemaigre accepting the Strength of Our Women Award.



Clarence McCallum receiving the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal.

**Clarence McCallum** is now the recipient of a Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal. This was bestowed by Jim Lemaigre, a member of Saskatchewan’s Legislative Assembly, in recognition of Clarence’s dedication to working with people who are living with problematic substance use. Clarence has been a role model and volunteer in his communities of Buffalo River Dene Nation and Buffalo Narrows First Nation. We are very fortunate to have Clarence as a member of the Talking Stick team, where he extends his experience, empathy, and compassion as a Peer Advocate.

Rebecca and Clarence are two of many Talking Stick Peer Advocates who are giving generously of themselves and making a significant impact in their home communities! We are PROUD to have them both on our team!



## Celebrating Indigenous Women

Proclaimed unanimously by an Act of Parliament, National Ribbon Skirt Day will occur every January 4 and will provide “an opportunity for us all to learn more about and to celebrate Indigenous cultures, traditions, histories, and contributions to this diverse country.” In particular, it is a day for Indigenous women to celebrate their culture, their strength, and their connections, as women. Charlene and Whitney from the Talking Stick Team seized the day and joined Indigenous women across Canada by wearing their ribbon skirts.



---

# Cycle-Breaker: Taking Back My Name

## – Lauren’s Story



**From the moment she entered the World, Lauren Moosuk’s path started up a very steep hill, and only now is she getting the feeling that she is reaching the crest.**

She was born on the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear’s Head, Lean Man First Nation, the fifth of seven children. Facing a number of challenges in her personal life, some of Lauren’s first memories were of being bullied in her elementary school because she was different.

Mosquito, Grizzly Bear’s Head, Lean Man First Nation is a community of 1,400 people, located 140 km northwest of Saskatoon. Like most First Nation communities it is completely without the mental health and substance abuse supports needed to address the effects of intergenerational trauma left by the Residential School system. Unresolved trauma is a root cause of addictions and mental health struggles, and the Talking Stick app is helping to close the gaps between suffering and healing.

Lauren shared that her mental health suffered from very early in her life, and her struggles even led her to three suicide attempts, as she bounced in and out of mental health services, often feeling alone and unsupported. She explained that the community has a long history of being overwhelmed by alcoholism and drug use, leading to family breakdowns, violence, suicide, and a sense of hopelessness.

Her own family has been impacted by all of these factors, most recently through the loss of her father to suicide in May 2022. After a lengthy illness, during which Lauren was his caregiver, her beloved father ended his life on the day that she had brought food to share with him and celebrate the completion of her first year of college. She had considered leaving her studies to care for her Dad, but he was adamant that she should stay on the road she has chosen.

Determined to overcome the early challenges she faced, Lauren has committed herself to work hard to summon her strength and lead “a good life.”

Speaking in Cree, her Dad told Lauren to “Be a ‘cycle-breaker’.” So many in her family had been struck down by alcoholism and drug abuse. He wanted her to be there for her family and her children and bring respect back to the family’s name, including Lauren’s daughters.

Lauren describes herself as a “giver.” When she graduated from high school, she founded a Women’s Healing Circle in her community. She was worried that nobody would show up. Over 40 women attended the first meeting and Lauren knew she was onto something. A mental health worker in the community noted Lauren’s skills and told her that she should consider a helping path by building her skills through a college program. Now certified in group facilitation and youth suicide prevention, she plans to resurrect the Healing Circle, which was suspended while she attends college.

As a Mom, Lauren sees herself in her daughter – she is helping her grieve the loss of her grandfather and others in her family who have been taken by suicide and substance use. During this part of the conversation, Lauren noted that she wished that she had Talking Stick when she was growing up.

**“I am strongly attached to the Talking Stick app,” she said. “I downloaded it onto my daughter’s phone and told her to use it. She is on it all the time to deal with her anxiety, and even uses it when she is out in public.”**

Lauren built her confidence in Talking Stick and got to know its power during her student practicum placement with TryCycle in the fall of 2022. As part of her studies in the Mental Health and Wellness program at SIIT, she took on the role of a Peer Advocate, which brings her another step towards graduation in May 2023. When she completes her diploma, Lauren hopes to return to her community as a Mental Health Support Worker, particularly to help women, children and youth.

“The youth look up to me,” Lauren explained. “They know that they can come to my house, and I will take them in and make sure they get a meal and feel safe. I also have a good relationship with the elders in the community, and they are encouraging me to keep working to make good changes.”

Remarkably, as we were talking, Lauren received word that the Talking Stick Team had offered her a paid position as a Peer Advocate! As a champion of the Talking Stick app, Lauren now leans on her own experience and recommends it to others as a tool to overcome some of the challenges in her community.

While she misses her Dad, her biggest supporter, Lauren is on the good path she has always envisioned; and it appears that his wish of bringing honour back to her family’s name for the future is within sight.

---

## 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](http://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](mailto:info@talkingstick.app)

