

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 team attends FSIN Legislative Assembly
  - Dakota Dunes – Supporting Staff Wellness with Talking Stick
  - Celebrating Indigenous Storytelling Through Music – Robert Gladue



## Talking Stick and TetherAll get the Attention of FSIN Chiefs

Talking Stick was front and centre at the FSIN Winter Legislative Assembly on February 21-22, in Yorkton, SK – an event that brought together the Chiefs and other dignitaries from all 74 First Nations in the province.

Our senior provincial staff set up a booth and engaged in networking opportunities with Chiefs, health officials, and other interested visitors. They were fortunate to have been joined by a Talking Stick Peer Advocate, who could speak about their personal experiences receiving chats and helping their communities. The team also spoke about TetherAll, a companion platform to Talking Stick that is gaining recognition in Saskatchewan First Nations, for its ability to help connect people living with mental health and substance use challenges with people offering care.

## Dakota Dunes Resort using Talking Stick to support Staff Wellness

Dakota Dunes is a resort on Whitecap Dakota First Nation, SK that opened in 2020 and offers its guests access to a range of social and recreational activities, including golf, fine dining, First Nations cultural experiences, and outdoor activities. The facility was built around a golf course (2004) and casino (2007), which form the anchors for the business.



Working in the hospitality industry is difficult, particularly in these times of staffing shortages and with increasing demand. In order to support its employees, Dakota Dunes has promoted the use of Talking Stick, with great success. Key to the effort is Deanna Alm, Human Resources Business Partner from the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority who is leading the charge in helping connect staff to the platform and championing its use.

*"I love advocating for your organization – it brings a sense of belonging to the FN communities in urban centres where I work. I hope you are seeing an increase in usage with all your advocating as well," said Deanna. "I am happy to say I shared your info and am starting to see posters hung within other sites! Yay! "*

Deanna saw an opportunity to support the mental health and overall wellness of her teammates, and recognized the value of Talking Stick in her vision!

## Talkback – What our guests are saying...

**“ First time exploring the app, very friendly peer advocate! I will definitely be recommending this app ”**

**“ I was just looking for a place to share a work related event where I could be 100% honest and not have to worry about anything. I left the chat with a clear and more satisfied mind set to continue ”**

**“ Very helpful, and was genuine. Feels like you’re talking to your big sister ”**

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# Robert Gladue: Indigenous Storytelling through Music – A Passion and a Responsibility



The first thing that strikes you about Robert Gladue is his ability to connect and to draw you into a conversation. Even over Zoom, he was fully engaged, and every answer was thoughtful and measured. It is easy to imagine him as a performer.

Raised in Waterhen Lake Cree Nation, he moved two hours north and now lives in his wife's home community of Chitek Lake First Nation – the "Parkland," as it is called, where the prairies yield to a landscape of lakes and forests. His expression brightened when he spoke about the pristine land that offers unparalleled hunting and fishing.

Early in his working life, Robert was an educator, and was active in teaching and mentoring youth. He has shared his knowledge and skills by preserving traditional practices, including drum-making, and passing along traditional songs. Robert developed a passion for technology – so much so, that he taught himself to write code and was able to secure contracts as a software developer, creating apps and websites. While coding paid the bills, Robert's true calling is playing music and singing – a vocation that began when he was sixteen and has evolved ever since.

A traveler, Robert spoke of learning songs and stories from elders in communities he has visited across the country. He stressed that sometimes the teachings vary, and, as a visitor, he recognized the importance of respecting the differences and embracing the learning.

February is Indigenous Storytelling Month, and the intent was to speak to Robert, in his role as a storyteller.

*"I do not see myself as a storyteller - storytelling is something that is done by elders to pass along teachings," he said. "I am a traditional musician and a singer."*

While music may be his medium, Robert noted that each song has a story attached.

*"There is a mantra behind each story about our history – how we are taught to live our lives with respect, and how you interact with others."*

Educator, musician, traveler, tech developer – it seems that Robert's passions and skills have all contributed to his success in his latest venture as a Regional Manager on the Talking Stick team!

*"I usually do not use tech in my Talking Stick presentations – I use my words and not slides," Robert explains. "I always take my drum to school and community presentations and start off with a song and a story. It sends 'feel good' vibes with the drumbeat, so I focus on engaging and getting people comfortable. I share a story at the end."*

Robert explained that he feels that it is his responsibility to keep the stories going and to keep them as original as possible. *"Repetitiveness is key – I tell stories over and over, so that the kids learn them word for word. It is then THEIR responsibility to pass it along, word for word."*

He does concede that some stories have been "contemporized" – adjusted to changes over time to keep them relevant.

*"Cree is a descriptive language," he explains. It is not always a seamless translation from Cree to English, so there may be some variations, depending on the storyteller and the audience.*

*"I want to show the audience who I am."*

We explored the difference between being a "storyteller" and a "knowledge keeper." Robert explained that his perception of a knowledge-keeper is a younger person, who learns from elders and is responsible for passing the teachings and stories on to the younger generations, so that they may be preserved.

When asked about the preservation of Indigenous languages in Saskatchewan First Nations, Robert explained that while there are "pockets" where traditional languages are spoken regularly. There are very limited opportunities for young people to pick them up. They are spoken most often in ceremonies, which occur most often in the summertime, and then people go back to their communities and are not offered the chance to practise. He noted that traditional languages are being taught in some First Nations schools, so that is an important start.

Robert's music and storytelling talents were shared this past month as he was featured in two webcasts, called "Stories of the Drum and Flute." The presentation focused on the importance of storytelling and songs in Indigenous cultures and how they contribute as building blocks in their belief systems.

His generosity of spirit, passion, wisdom, and commitment to accepting the responsibility conveyed on him by his elders to hold up his traditions make Robert's contributions to the Talking Stick team unique, invaluable, and appreciated.

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- Confidential. Safe. Secure.
- 1 on 1 private conversations.



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**Talking Stick-Indigenous**



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## 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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