

By and For Indigenous
Folks with lived
experiences in the sex
trade

The Birthing of an Indigenous Sex Work and Art Collective



We want to acknowledge and thank our financial partner for making this retreat possible

REPORT BACK FROM OUR MEMBERS

- Why we needed this
 - What we did in the retreat
 - What's next
-

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A bit of context

Montréal is a well-known city for its historical red light district with more than 20 years of advocacy by and for sex workers. However, the local sex work organisations do not have any programming for Indigenous folks and 2S people that are selling/trading sex. It's also important to note that a lot of Indigenous organisations are not supportive of sex workers' battle for their rights, and mostly advocate from a narrow perspective of understanding prostitution as inherently violent. Thus, there is no visible local campaign nor support groups either in both the sex working and Indigenous communities at this time. After years of advocating for more spaces in both sex working and Indigenous organisations for Indigenous sex workers, we have decided that we need to move forward and build our own collective.

Founding member Auntie Nana reached out to different people from diverse experiences in the sex trade after being part of a larger conversation with other Indigenous sex workers in so-called Canada. In these conversations, it became apparent that there was a need to have Indigenous sex worker voices around MMIW2SG and to organize a national gathering. On these calls, it was also clear that local Montréal sex worker organisations did not have Indigenous membership. Auntie Nana felt that she needed to organize a grassroots collective where Indigenous sex workers could have culturally safe(r) support within their community, make art and to be part of a larger Indigenous sex work gathering. Some of us Indig sex workers met in April to discuss the creation of this collective and talked about how to finance its various projects such as a retreat. We decided to apply for the 2019 Qpirg-McGill Summer Stipend and we were selected! YAY!

The Retreat



This project supported the birthing of this collective by bringing Indigenous folks with experience selling/trading sex together in a healing retreat during summer 2019. Collective members discussed how to do outreach/building relations with community members in and outside Montréal, reflecting the mobility of sex workers. We successfully built support among us so we feel safe(r) to be vocal about our realities and finally sharing a lot about ourselves while doing collective care.

The need for connecting with the Land

We gathered outside Montréal with the intention to connect with the land as we often feel overwhelmed by the concrete and the colonial way of being productive. Some of us are far from our traditional territories so we felt the importance of having a nice fire and access to water.

Sharing our Truth and Gifts

As we were organising the retreat, we wanted to recognise the gifts that this life offered each and every one of us by asking people what would they love to share with us. That is how we got collective care session with a DIY body scrub, access to amazing food with a cooking session and finally harm reduction session and support for our lovely drug users!



'We all connected with our realities as sex workers, even though we all came from different backgrounds, it was self care just to get to talk about our different issues that we all face'

Collective Care Session

We were gifted with a great collective session of body care as one member wanted to share a salt scrub with cedar essence. We gathered on the grass and collectively massaged our bodies while talking about care and how cedar can help us with protection and cleansing. Each participants left the retreat with a little jar of scrub for themselves!



What you need for doing it yourself and share it with your community

- some sea salt
- coconut or olive oil
- cedar essence
- glass container

Mix the oil with the sea salt and add your choice of essence. We loved the cedar but you can choose whatever makes you and your people feel good!

Food as Medicine Session

For the retreat, we wanted to have some great food and one member wanted to share their gift of cooking us a nice supper! During that session, we exchanged our stories dealing with poverty, colonization and access to country food when living in urban setting.



We also had the chance to eat some moose meat that was gifted to us by an ally that wanted to support this retreat. We are grateful to the hunters who harvested and shared that meat with us and our friend who cooked for us an amazing stew! What a treat!



'While sharing food, some of us were preparing food, others were there to be a helper and other were there after meal to wash dishes. It was a collective way (traditional way) of doing.'



Harm Reduction



'This retreat for me was directly connected to MMIW2S issues'

We understand harm reduction as taking care of ourselves and our people where they are at now. Some of us are sober, some of us are recreational substance users and some of us can be dealing with daily drug use. We also understand that drug and alcohol use can be a way to cope with intergenerational trauma due to colonialism.

So we added harm reduction gear in our bundle like Naloxone and brought other medicine like sage, tobacco, sweetgrass and cedar to share. We brought our drums and shared songs.

We wanted to make sure our lovely drug using folks could feel safe(r) and be able to attend. We offered money to each participant and they can spend it on whatever they might need whether it is to pay rent or buy drugs. There is no judgement in harm reduction!

So, what's next?



Members that attended the retreat are excited to continue building relations with other Indigenous sex workers and find more financial support so we can gather again and have more skill sharing sessions and find ways to be visible in a way that we can be and feel safe as sex work is still criminalized, stigmatized and we understand that a lots of us can't be 'out' as people with lived experience in the sex trade.

Members that could not attend the retreat were excited to hear from us and our experience of the retreat and how we can continue to be active as a collective.

One thing is sure, all agreed on being in touch with Indigenous folks across so-called Canada and Québec to contribute to our larger sex working commmunities!