



**Treaty 7 Elders  
Capacity Camp and  
Cultural Celebration 2023**



Over the course of four days, nearly 35 esteemed Elders representing various nations of Treaty 7 Territory and beyond, gathered down in a beautiful valley lining the Bow River. Marking its third annual occurrence, Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) has collaborated with a group of Elders called the Elders Knowledge Circle Society (EKCS) to organize the **Treaty 7 Elders Camp and Cultural Celebration**. Taking place August 22-25, 2023, this annual gathering is called with the intention to share and organize knowledge, honour inter-nation traditions, and to teach the younger generation of Elders. In addition to our funders, this special event is made possible with the involvement of key partners: the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC), Mahegun Tails Inc., Miskanawah, and Trellis.

#### **Elders Camp fulfills four important purposes:**

- To serve as a platform for the Elders Knowledge Circle Society (EKCS) to seek guidance and support, paving the way for their self-sufficiency and sustainability.
- To preserve oral traditions and systems of Indigenous governance.
- To build capacity among each other and to share knowledge with the younger generation, supporting the transference of language and teachings.
- To heal with the support of one another through ceremony and within a supportive circle of Elders, coming together with a shared purpose and vision for the future.

The Elders in attendance included: Florence Alexson, Wallace Alexson, Ollie Benjamin, Teresalyn Benjamin, Darryl Brass Jr., Linda Brass, Jackie Bromley, John Chief Moon Sr., John Chief Moon Jr., Monica Chief Moon, Karli Crowshoe, Reg Crowshoe, Rosemary Crowshoe, Shirlee Crow Shoe, Patricia Daigneault, Patrick Daigneault, Doreen Healy, Alice Kaquitts, Donna Kaquitts, Evelyn Kelman, Anne Paulette Kokak, Frances Littlelight, Brenda Many Guns, Herman Many Guns, Violet March, Diane Meguinis, Frances Melting Tallow, Mina Powderface, Brenda Roland, Ruth Scalplock, Virgle Stephens, Philomene Stevens, Vinnia Van Overdyk, and Clarence Wolf Leg Sr.



Our profound respect and gratitude go out to Métis Elder, Edmee Comstock and Stoney Elder, Una Wesley, who were dearly missed this year. Their absence did not reduce the lasting impact of their teachings and contributions, which we carried with us throughout the camp.

The spirit of Elders Camp surpassed linguistic boundaries, celebrating the traditional languages, teachings, and practices of various nations. The voices of Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Stoney/Nakoda Sioux, Nêhiyawêwin (Cree), Métis/Michif, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Denesuline, and Inuktitut echoed in ceremony.

**“To be friends across nations is something so powerful.”**

The teachings shared during this gathering encompassed themes of knowledge transfer, healing and wellness, reciprocity, ceremony, prayer, protection, respect, creation stories, inter-nation knowledge sharing, song, medicines, parallel practices, reclamation of the old ways, living in accordance with natural law, music, friendship, intertribal celebration, and cultural dance.

**“I am so happy to be in this circle. I feel freedom and I feel strength ... I know I am supported here.” – Elder, Violet March**

**“Our circle supports a unity across nations. We care for each other, and we care for the young people. We raise them collectively with the culture, the language, the land.”**

*– Elder, Diane Meguinis*





“This is important for our ongoing healing and wellness. To join in circle together – to pray together. Our responsibility is to share knowledge with the young people and they may ask questions where we are unsure about the answer – we can then approach other Elders. We support one another. We learn from each other.” –  
*Elder, Ruth Scalplock*



### Day One: Ceremony, Feast, Repeat

The first day opened with a Blackfoot purification ceremony led by Elders, Reg and Rose Crowshoe. Elders and Helpers gathered in prayer and one-by-one, approached the Elders to have their faces painted—cleansing our minds, bodies, and spirits to begin the camp in a good way. Adhering to protocol and in the spirit of reciprocity, everyone was welcomed into circle and offered tobacco in a handmade pouch from Janet Naclia and the ARPA team.

The latter half of the day led with an in-depth discussion where all the Elders had the opportunity to contribute their thoughts around their purpose for gathering and what key priorities exist for this circle coming together. “[The key purposes are] to build capacity with our young people, to protect our knowledge, to protect our circle and our practices.”  
– *Elder, Reg Crowshoe*



“This gathering involves different cultures and nations—including those coming from up North. This camp bridges the gap with the younger generations, revitalizing the culture and languages.”  
– *Elder, Anne Kokak*



## Day Two: A Celebration Across Nations

The second day opened with a Sunrise Ceremony led by Saulteaux Elders, Wallace and Florence Alexson. This ceremony welcomed the day and gave thanks for our time together. Sitting together in circle, the Elders and Helpers shared their own teachings and practices behind how they greet sun and welcome a new day.

Following breakfast, Cree Elders, Patrick and Patricia Daigneault led us in a Pipe Ceremony, setting the tone for the day. At the heart of this year's camp lay the central theme of capacity building and the transfer of traditional teachings to the upcoming generation. Elder Patrick's *oskâpêwis* (a Cree term meaning ceremonial helper), Josh, shared healing songs imparted to him by his Elder, in addition to sharing a few songs played on a hand-carved flute.



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**“When we come together, we respect each other and the traditions of one another ... There is strength in this circle—we are believing in our own abilities and sharing our stories as part of our healing journeys. Through this support system, we empower one another.”**

*— Elder, Alice Kaquitts*

**“Our ancestors gifted us with so much—the smudge, the songs, the language—and there are teachings embedded in each of these. It’s important we give thanks and pass our knowledge onto the young ones.” - Elder, Patrick Daigneault**

In the afternoon, the Elders and Helpers donned their regalia and gathered for a formal event and intertribal celebration. An afternoon of ceremonial drumming, singing, and dancing,

this event is a way to celebrate and honour the Elders and the richness of their varying traditions, raising a deep sense of unity among the camp. Such gatherings remind us of the importance of preserving traditional knowledge for generations to come. **“To heal and have pride in who we are and where we come from.”** – Elder, Linda Brass

Looking to the future, the next Society Leaders are then captured in ceremony. At last year’s Treaty 7 Elders Capacity Camp and Cultural Celebration in August of 2022, Reg and Rose Crowshoe were captured in ceremony. This year, Elders, Diane Meguinis and Virgle Stephens were captured. Meaning, Reg and Rose will provide guidance over this next year and then move to the door of the tipi, taking supportive roles as Diane and Virgle lead the Elders Knowledge Circle Society.

Ceremonial songs were performed by Norvin (Spike) Eaglespeaker, Adrian Goulet, Albert Goulet, Kevin Sandy, and Clarence (Skip) Wolfleg Jr.



As the day drew to a close, Elder, Watson Kaquitts and his son, Watson Kaquitts, Jr., shared a blend of old country tunes. Skillfully playing the guitar and fiddle, they shared songs that transcended time and connected generations.





### Day 3: Medicines of Water, Plant, Fire, Song

The third day began with a Midewiwin Ceremony led by Anishinaabe Elders, Linda Brass and Darryl Brass Jr. The Elders led the circle with Water Drum teachings, offering everyone the opportunity to share with one another and speak their prayers aloud.

**“When we say ‘aaniin’, we are acknowledging the light we see in each other. My light sees your light.” – Elder, Darryl Brass, Jr.**

In the afternoon, the camp had the option of attending a medicine walk led by Blackfoot Elder, Shirlee Crow Shoe or a sacred healing ceremony with Saulteaux/Cree Elder, Vinnia van Overdyk.

Led by Shirlee, the circle journeyed on a medicine walk, providing the opportunity to delve into the traditional names and medicinal properties of various plant species, some native and some invasive to Southern Alberta and Blackfoot Territory. Shirlee shared some of the traditional uses for Wolf Willow (or “Silver Berry Bush”),



**“I wish to acknowledge the power that is here—the life givers and the balance brought to this circle by the grandmothers and the grandfathers. What brings us together is our spirituality. This is a circle of Elders backed by the knowledge and ways of our ancestors, the people before us.” – Elder, Herman Manyguns**

## Treaty 7 Elders Capacity Camp and Cultural Celebration

Lady Slippers, Creeping Bellflower, Aspen Poplars, Horsetail, Prairie Sage, Cottonwood, and Cicer Milkvetch.

Those who joined Vinnia's healing ceremony addressed letters to their ancestors and loved ones, sharing the words that never had the chance to be spoken aloud. Our letters are then given to the fire, and we allow the smoke to carry our loving thoughts and prayers up to Creator.

Back by popular demand, the final evening of Elders Camp treated attendees to a lively concert! The stage came alive with the songs performed by singer-songwriter, Sandra Sutter as she performed a collection of country, folk, blues, and rock songs. Adding to the joyous atmosphere, a semi-open mic session allowed for friends of Sandra, including Lindsay Crowshoe, Brenda Roland, Darryl Brass Jr., and one of the young helpers, to take the stage, creating an unforgettable evening of soulful music, fun, and friendship.



### Day 4: Closing Camp

The final day opened with a Pipe Ceremony led by Stoney Elder, Virgle Stephens. Conducted in his language, it served as a powerful reminder of the camp's deep commitment to the protection and preservation of teachings. Within the circle, everyone expressed their heartfelt gratitude, offering blessings and prayers as they collectively prepared to bid farewell to another impactful Elders Camp.

**“We are a family with a responsibility to help each other, for the young people and for the future. It our responsibility to lead by example – to act respectfully and truthfully.” – Elder, Virgle Stephens**

Before parting ways, Reg Crowshoe shared a prayer and the Moving Camp Song, to close our camp in a good way. The Elders and Helpers all received gifts in acknowledgement of the important work and teachings that were shared this week. As everyone dispersed, they carried with them not only cherished memories but also an abundance of food and fresh deer meat, symbolizing the nourishment that the camp had provided on both a physical and spiritual level.

**“The more we share with each other, the more love that is shared when we return home to our communities.”**



“This circle makes me feel like a whole person—to see how our circle has grown and we have already accomplished so much. Welcoming the next generation into our circle from a young age – actively engaging with them so they have exposure to the traditional ways is so important.” – Elder, Doreen Healy



In light of the profound injustices inflicted by Canada’s residential school systems and government policies, which silenced Indigenous voices and suppressed their culture, the Treaty 7 Elders Camp and Cultural Celebration stands as more than just an event—it serves as a lifeline and source of protection for the traditional ways. This gathering heightens the urgency of healing and reconciliation, the importance of extending support to our Elders and building capacity among communities by ensuring the preservation of traditional knowledge. As our Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Ceremonialists heal themselves, they in turn heal their communities—this will be felt through generations, shaping a brighter future for all.



“To teach the young people and make room for the youth who are coming up is so important. Like my father-in-law would say, ‘keep the circle strong.’ And that’s what we’re doing, each and every one of us—together.”

– Elder, Rose Crowshoe

### Special Thanks

Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) values the unique opportunity to celebrate and show appreciation to this circle of Elders and of course, we cannot carry out this important work without the support, kinship, and generosity of our funders: Indigenous Services Canada - “Pathways to Safe Indigenous Communities Initiative”, the Government of Alberta - “Community Initiatives Program (CIP)” Grant, and ATB Financial.

We express our appreciation to the organizers, all of the helpers, and partnering entities, who brought this event to realization: the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC), Mahegun Tails Inc., Miskanawah, and Trellis Society. Their continual support enabled us to assemble a remarkable team of staff and volunteers who ensured the success of this event. These dedicated individuals generously contributed their time to assist our Elders, offering their support with meal preparation and serving, site navigation, cleanup, and much more.

Special thanks to Chris Wainwright and the kitchen team from Miskanawah, who nourished our hearts and tummies, giving us the energy to walk into ceremony every day. Thank you to our site manager, Adrian Goulet from Mahegun Tails Inc. and AFCC, for ensuring our safety, organization, and adherence to our schedule.

Special recognition goes to Ellie Henderson from Miskanawah and Mahegun Tails Inc., and Janet Naclia from ARPA, for their involvement in creating this report. Most importantly, our heartfelt gratitude goes to the Elders and their Helpers for their participation and generosity in sharing their beauty, wisdom, and guidance. Hiy Hiy.

### All our relations.





## Key Next Steps

Based on feedback from Elders, Helpers, and organizational partners, here are some key next steps:

- Secure Funding for an Elders Capacity Camp in 2024 with the vision of extending an invitation to include more Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Locate a camp site that can accommodate our growing needs
- Look at very specific training opportunities for camp helpers
- Build in more opportunities, in all future programming, for Elders to experience joy, share, laugh and celebrate each other
- Understand further how these camps can help families, as well as Elders, process intergenerational trauma

## Partners



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## Funders



**Canada**  
Indigenous Services Canada





**“It’s important that the youth learn their traditional language ... embedded within the language are teachings of love and respect.” – Elder, Frances Littlelight**

**“Joining together in circle, our spirits intermingle, and we grow stronger.”**

*– Elder, Wallace Alexson*

**“For me, this circle represents the opportunity to help our community, to build sustainability for the future, and to share love.” – Elder, Brenda Roland**

