



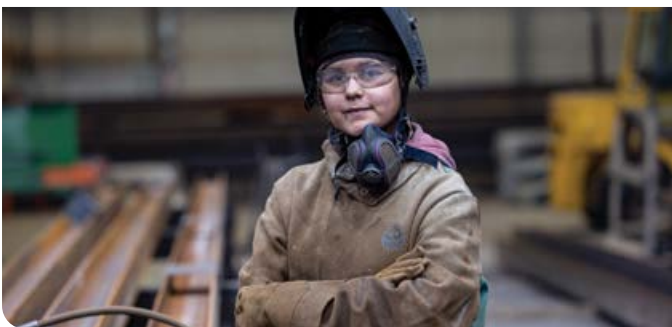
APRIL 1, 2022 • MARCH 31, 2023

# Community Report 2022



*Esquao*

Institute for the Advancement  
of Aboriginal Women





Our programs reflect the seven sacred teachings as part of connecting with and restoring our culture, beliefs and practices.

President's Message.....	1
CEO's Message.....	2
Our Purpose.....	4
Board of Directors .....	6
Elders Circle and Knowledge Keepers .....	7
2022-2023 Programs and Services .....	10
2022-2023 Programs and Projects at a glance.....	24





## President's Message



**Since its humble beginnings in 1995, Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, has served to amplify the voices of Indigenous women on the issues and challenges they face.**

We are at the forefront of breaking down systemic barriers—as leaders and advocates—experienced in taking on larger issues, shaping policy, and collaborating with our partners.

This past year, our CEO, Rachelle Venne, was appointed as Chair of the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This important work has not only connected her with Indigenous women throughout Alberta and across Canada, but has provided the opportunity to bring forward Indigenous women's voices to diverse audiences.

Through our ongoing community engagement we have been able to keep an ear to the ground and raise awareness of critical issues and challenges. Recent engagements have confirmed that prolonged isolation, more poverty, increased use of drugs and alcohol, and a rise in domestic violence have left many Indigenous women walking a tightrope. In this community report, you will notice that Esquao has expanded its programs to ensure support can be provided where it is needed.

Nationally, Esquao continues to be represented on the national board of the Native Women's Association of Canada. We use our position on the board to engage in discussions at the national and international level on matters impacting Indigenous women and girls.

In closing, I would like to thank our many funders, partners, and sponsors for their support. I also wish to express how honoured I am to work alongside the dedicated board and staff at Esquao, who labour tirelessly to make life better for Alberta's Indigenous women, girls, and families.

Please take a moment to peruse this year's community report which highlights some of the incredible work that Esquao has done this past year.



Lisa D. Weber, President

# CEO's Message

## **2022-2023 was a very busy and productive year for Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women.**

Our organization grew by leaps and bounds this past year. To keep up with the demand for our programs and services our staff complement grew from six to 22. This growth is a result of the urgent need for housing, employment and training, violence prevention, and culturally relevant navigational and advocacy support services. These programs have been a lifeline to many of our women and we are so grateful and humbled by the experiences they have shared.

This year saw us welcome our first tenants into the Iskwewak Iskotew Nihkotawan (Women's Fire Lodge). The recently acquired 20-unit apartment building in Edmonton is in partnership with Homeward Trust Edmonton. Esquao staff provide advocacy and program support to tenants who are often facing multiple barriers.

During the year we also completed a comprehensive People and Culture Framework that will ignite a new culture where people thrive, grow, and contribute in more meaningful and insightful ways. Our staff regularly witness trauma through their day-to-day interactions with participants and we are committed to putting more effort into providing support for them.

For nearly three decades we have built caring and respectful relationships with Indigenous women and their families in Alberta. We have established ourselves as trusted 'relatives' with many families who have been impacted by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis, and we walk together with them in their journey for justice and healing.

During this time we have also witnessed a significant change in the needs of Indigenous women, who represent the fastest growing and youngest population in Alberta. That said, there is little movement to create substantive equality for Indigenous women to address their ongoing



marginalization across various provincial service sectors. In March of 2023, we hosted a MMIWG Gathering to listen, learn and share information about the work being done by a multitude of partners.

We also hosted a Leadership Gathering that highlighted women trailblazers who helped create a better path for Indigenous women across Alberta and Canada. In the coming year, we will host more gatherings and connect with more communities across Alberta to listen, learn and create a network of support and advocacy.

In addition, we hosted events to bring forward perspectives of Indigenous women in regard to the Papal Visit, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act, Sisters in Spirit, and National Indigenous Day.

Our staff worked tirelessly this past year to provide support and services in person and online and deserve a great degree of credit for Esquao's success. I am deeply honoured to work with the incredible board, staff, Elders, volunteers, partners, and funders who believe in our mission and support our dreams and aspirations.

The promise that was made almost 30 years ago to amplify the voices of Indigenous women through the creation of this organization remains our North Star.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachelle Venne". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rachelle Venne, CEO

# Esquao

Institute for the Advancement  
of Aboriginal Women

We seek to be a source  
of truth... and a place  
where spirits are lifted.

We know the challenges that Indigenous  
women in our communities face every  
day. And in the face of such adversity,  
Indigenous women thrive as beautiful  
leaders, breaking down barriers for  
future generations.

We are a voice for change... a voice  
for healing... a voice for reconciliation...  
and a voice for Indigenous  
women everywhere.

We are at the forefront of breaking  
down systemic barriers—as leaders  
and advocates, experienced in taking  
on larger issues, shaping policy, and  
collaborating with our partners.

A voice that proudly highlights  
the strength, courage, and  
resiliency of Indigenous women  
and gender diverse populations  
across Alberta and Canada.

We are deeply connected to our  
traditions and committed to providing  
programs and developing opportunities  
for the women we serve.

Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, is an Alberta non-profit organization that recognizes the role, value, and achievements of Indigenous women in society and raises awareness around the challenges facing them.

Our organization is open to all First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and their families. We offer culturally respectful programming in violence prevention, achieving justice, financial literacy, healthy relationships, housing capacity building, and leadership development for Indigenous women and girls.

Our projects, services, and programs are developed by, and for, Alberta's Indigenous women, and serve Indigenous women living on and off reserves, on and off Settlement lands, and within rural and urban settings.

Serving as a conduit to government, boards, academia, funders, and the public, we are at the forefront of breaking down systemic barriers—as leaders, experienced in taking on larger issues, shaping policy, collaborating with our partners, and developing positive outcomes and opportunities, for the women we serve.

Founded in 1994 by Muriel Stanley Venne CM, AOE, BA (Hon), the organization strives to empower all Indigenous peoples in the reinforcement and rediscovery of their language, culture, and spiritual practices.

Esquao is the stylized version of the Cree word for woman.

# Our Purpose

We are experts in the field of advocacy, policy, program delivery and support, and continually work to advance the capacity of Indigenous women, their families, and communities.



## Vision

Indigenous women are recognized as strong contributors in Canadian society.



## Values

We practice and promote respect, dignity, equality, sharing, and cooperation in our efforts to advance social justice for Indigenous women in Alberta.



## Mission

We advocate for the rights and protection of Indigenous women and support Indigenous women with educational and self-development programs.

We honour the 'Angels Among Us'—recognizing Indigenous women for significant accomplishments in their communities.

We support individuals and enterprises to improve economic self-reliance for Indigenous women.



## Objectives

Develop and deliver services that advance the individual capacity of Indigenous women, their families and communities.

Create opportunities to address discrimination against Indigenous women.

Identify and promote opportunities for Indigenous women to participate in policy development and decision-making.

Celebrate the strengths and achievements of Indigenous women.

Establish forums and networks for Indigenous women to exchange information and experiences.





## Organizational Profile

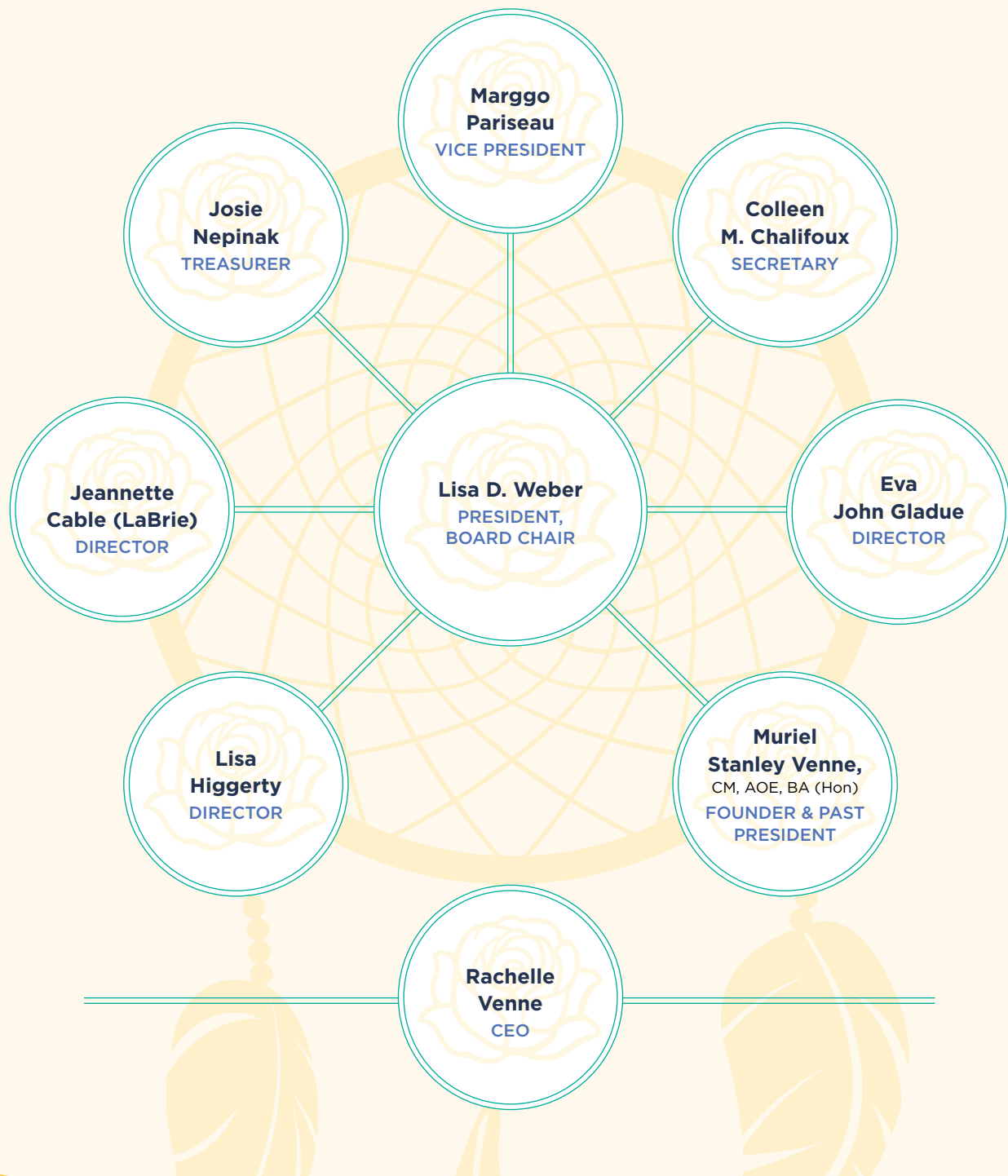
- Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, recognizes the role, value, and achievements of Indigenous women in society and raises awareness around the challenges they face.
- We are a non-profit organization based in Edmonton and conduct outreach to several communities throughout Alberta. We value the support and partnerships of 500 individual and corporate members.
- Our projects, services, and programs are developed by, and for, Alberta's Indigenous women.
- Projects are dedicated to Indigenous women living on and off reserves, on and off settlement lands, and within rural and urban settings.

## Incorporation Information

- **Scope of Territory:** Provincial/Territorial
- **Incorporation Information:** Non-Profit Society
- **Date of Incorporation:** September 29, 1995
- **Charitable Status:** In process of applying for Charitable Status

# Board of Directors

Indigenous women have a voice. We serve to amplify their voices and provide a platform for Indigenous women leaders to advocate for the rights and freedoms of all Indigenous women.







## Elders Circle and Knowledge Keepers

The Elders Circle and Knowledge Keepers bring the Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, board and staff unlimited joy and good medicine.

They offer a great connection to culture through stories and provide young women and leaders with support, guidance, and lasting benefits for future generations. We recognize and value their unique contributions to thought, action, leadership, and conscious change.

**Loretta Bowen**  
EDMONTON

**Jackie Bromley**  
CALGARY

**Mary Brown**  
SLAVE LAKE

**Myrtle Calahaisen**  
EDMONTON

**Alma Desjarlais**  
HIGH PRAIRIE

**Marion Lerat**  
CALGARY

**Hazel McKennitt**  
ST. ALBERT

**Elsie Paul**  
EDMONTON

**Lorraine Savard**  
EDMONTON

**Photo above from left to right:**

*2022 Esquao Awards Circle of Honour induction ceremony –*

Josie Nepinak, Vi Marten Roberts, Irene V. Loutitt, Myrtle Calahaisen, Lorraine Savard, Loretta Bowen, Muriel Stanley Venne, Marion Lerat, Jackie Bromley, Alma Desjarlais, Hazel McKennitt, Elsie Paul, Mary Brown

# Our History

## 1994-95

IAAW founded by Muriel Stanley Venne to help Indigenous women be heard and bring their issues to the forefront. IAAW incorporated as a Society in Alberta. First Esquao Awards held, co-founded by Muriel Stanley Venne and Marggo Pariseau.

## 2010

Expanded across the province and built a stronger connection to outlying communities. Made a presentation to the UN Secretary General on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Started Financial Independence Training program.

## 2014

Focused on increasing safety for Indigenous women through sharing information on a safety app, educating young girls and youth on predators, and developing a video series and workshop to create awareness of the dangers.

## 2015

Started Healthy Relationships and Safety in the City programs. IAAW leaders attended United Nations Forum on Indigenous People.

1994

2004

2010

2012

2014

2015

2016

## 2004-06

Participation in a national project involving 38 communities across Canada, with programs developed to combat discrimination, poverty, isolation, violence—common barriers facing Indigenous women.

## 2012

Began providing Elder services to the women in federal correctional facilities through the Edmonton Parole Office.

## 2016-17

Started Youth Leadership Development program. Formally partnered with the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) as intervenor on Bradley Barton, Angela Cardinal and Justice Camp cases.



## 2017-18

Hosted Indigenous Women's Justice Forums in Edmonton.



## 2018-19

Participated as a National Party with Standing on the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Travelled to hearings across Canada and provided a final submission.



## 2020

Secured funding from Indigenous Services Canada to engage with families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) on identifying priority actions for a National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls. Participated on the Alberta Joint Working Group on MMIWG.



## 2021

Started Justice System Navigator program in Edmonton and Calgary. Partnered with the Government of Canada on the Alberta Indigenous Women Guardian Angels Project to build a communication pipeline for Indigenous women across Alberta.

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

## 2019

Partnered with Native Women's Association of Canada as Alberta PTMA. Lisa D. Weber named President. Started Indigenous Skills Education and Training (ISET) program. Partnered with Kapawe'no First Nation to provide COVID supports to off-reserve members.



## 2022

Enhanced ISET program to include pre-employment and job retention supports through Employment Partnership Program.



## 2023

Hosted the MMIWG2S+ Gathering, Moving Forward on the Pathways to Justice. Hosted the Women's Leadership Gathering. Opened Iskwewak Iskotew Nihkotawan (Women's Fire Lodge), a 20-unit apartment building to help participants transition to permanent housing. Started a province-wide data collection project.







# Programs & Services

Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, offers a range of empowering programs and services for Indigenous women aimed at reducing barriers and promoting equal access to opportunities for women in our community.

Our programs reflect a connecting with and restoring of our culture, beliefs and practices. Areas of focus include leadership development, poverty reduction, achieving justice, violence prevention, housing, capacity building, and community outreach. **During 2022-23, a total of 820 women participated in programs delivered in person, online, and over the phone.**

---

## Financial Literacy

The Financial Independence Training (FIT) program addresses poverty in a cultural context by building skills and confidence in women and girls. As part of the Empower U collaborative, participants' savings are matched to increase their ability to learn, build, or save.

- The Empower U - FIT program was offered online over 10 weeks, two hours per week, with a matched savings component.
- The program explores our relationship with money and its link to trauma and addiction.
- One- and two-day workshops are available for a company's employees or communities.
- Free training is available on how to facilitate the program in your own community.

### 2022-23 Highlights

Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, offered this program through the Empower U collaborative. This year, the program was primarily delivered in person, with a few sessions held online. One of the groups had the program delivered at their residences. Two groups were extended to provide extra one-on-one coaching for financial goal planning and to ensure a successful cash-out for the women. **Of the 26 women who enrolled during the year, 19 completed the program.** This year saw a total cash-out of \$15,615 for the 19 women who were able to save.

**19**  
women  
completed  
the program

# Esquao Youth Leadership Development

Building skills and confidence in young women, this leadership development program includes overnight camps, exposure to community leaders, and discussions about career opportunities. Personal skills development activities include public speaking workshops, discussions of current events, and discussions and presentations on healthy relationships.

## Esquao Youth Leadership Camp

The four-day Esquao Youth Leadership Camp offers young women an opportunity to interact with community resources, take personal safety and self-defence workshops, and engage with their culture. The summer camps were held in partnership with the Bissell Centre.

## Building Our Bundle

This six-week online program helps address the mental health wellness of isolated girls and young women, aged 12-29. The two-hour sessions offer emotional, spiritual, and cultural teachings to Indigenous youth, including Elder support and teachings, cultural crafts, social connections with others, self-reflection activities, goal-setting, and mental health tools for improved well-being.



“

My favourite part was getting to have a great community and honestly feeling safe and secure in my environment and the people. I liked how high-energy and inclusive the camp was.”



### 2022-23 Highlights

In August 2022, there were **21 participants in the two Leadership and Summer Safety Camps** held at Moonlight Bay Campground in Wabamun. **A total of 87 girls and young women participated** in our six-week Building Our Bundle online program.

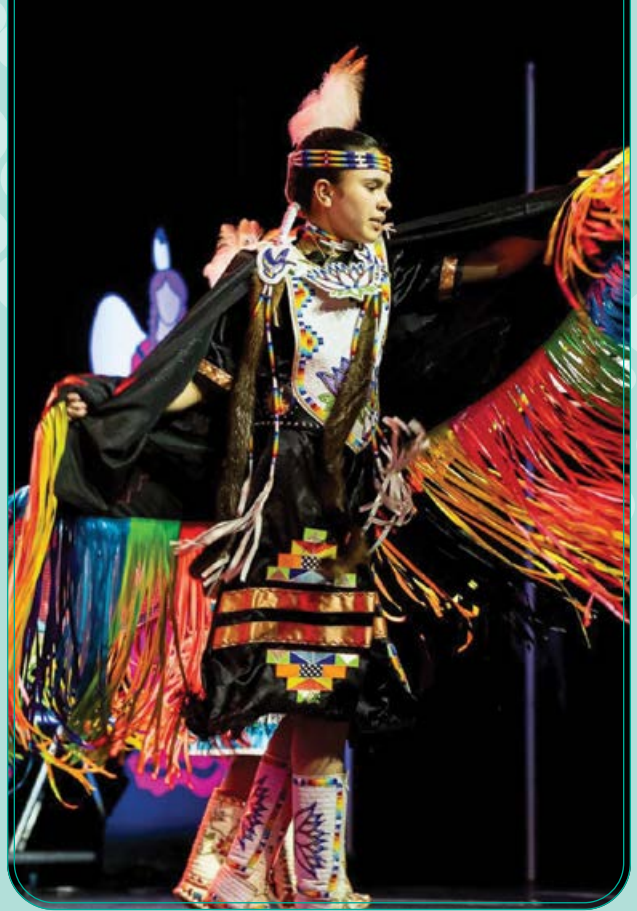
**87**  
girls & women  
participated



# Annual Esquao Awards Gala

Since 1995, we have proudly coordinated a community recognition ceremony to celebrate the accomplishments of exceptional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women in Alberta. Co-founded by Marggo Pariseau and Muriel Stanley Venne, the Esquao Awards highlight the significant role Indigenous women hold in their home, in the healing and development of their communities, and in the building of Alberta.

- Since that inaugural Esquao Awards, nearly 500 women from close to 100 communities have been honoured in what has grown to be the single largest recognition event of Indigenous women in Canada.
- We continue to promote and connect recipients to leadership opportunities.







## 2022-23 Highlights

over  
**500**  
guests  
attended

The 26th Annual Esquao Awards were held May 9, 2022, at the River Cree Resort and Casino in Enoch, with over 500 guests in attendance. This year's honoured Esquao Award recipients include leaders in academics and business, teachers of traditional Indigenous culture, community volunteers, and advocates the fields of child and youth development, mental health and addictions, and human rights. We are grateful to our sponsors for their kind support.

***Esquao Award recipients:*** Dorothy (Dot) Anderson, Marie Borynsky, Candice Calliou, Wilma Cardinal, Doris Churchill, Jackie Davis, Skye Durocher, Dr. Florence Glanfield, Elena Gould, Rhonda Janvier, Shannon Lust, Jo-Anne Packham, Dr. Dayle Poitras-Oster, Denise Rathbone, Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer.

Muriel Stanley Venne, CM, AOE, BA (Hon), was honoured with the inaugural Muriel Stanley Venne Leadership Award and inducted into the Esquao Circle of Honour.





## Transition Services

Transitioning Indigenous women from a correctional facility to a new residence by building skills and confidence is paramount. Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, helps provide support in opening doors to welcoming communities.

Transition services include a housing diversion program that assists with move-in costs while enrolled in Esquao programs; working in partnership with FIND Edmonton to help furnish housing for the participants; the Firekeepers Wellness program that addresses addictive behaviours through cultural understanding and ceremony; and the 20-suite Iskwewak Iskotev Nihkotawan (Women's Fire Lodge).

**37**

women were  
assisted

### 2022-23 Highlights

Esquao delivered supportive, non-judgement transition services that focused on giving back to the community, and with an emphasis on building new healthy activities and sharing stories of resilience.

**During the year 37 women were assisted with housing.**



Earlier this year I found myself stressing and worried about where I was going to live with my kids, and how I was going to afford everything. I felt defeated until someone mentioned Esquao. They were the light at the end of a very dark tunnel. The kind and caring staff helped me more than I ever expected, and I am beyond grateful for everything they did!"





## Transition Services – Iskwewak IskoteW Nihkotawan (Women’s Fire Lodge)

Since the very beginning, Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, has been committed to building strong, safe, and healthy communities by providing a culturally safe space for Indigenous women from all walks of life.

Recently, Esquao entered into a partnership with Homeward Trust to lease a 20-suite apartment building and deliver a recovery-oriented approach allows women experiencing homelessness to move into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, with no preconditions.

The women are transitioning from a correctional facility to a halfway house and eventually to the Women’s Fire Lodge for a maximum stay of 18 months. The overall goal of the program is to transition participants to a permanent housing solution.

**6**  
tenants  
housed

### 2022-23 Highlights

The Women’s Fire Lodge operates using a short-term supportive housing model with the duration of stay for the program set at a maximum of 18 months. The aim of the program is to transition participants to a permanent housing solution. **The Women’s Fire Lodge currently houses six tenants.**







## Transition Services – Firekeepers

The Firekeepers wellness program focuses on addressing addictive behaviours through cultural understanding and ceremony. The program provides a safe space for our women to share their stories, learn traditional ways of healing, and experience the support of their peers and elders. We are committed to wholistic wellness in a safe and sober community, addressing the root causes of addiction and trauma to support healing and growth, and helping women transitioning from correctional facilities.



Throughout the years I've continued to work on myself and utilized the supports such as Firekeepers and one-on-ones. I am very thankful for all the support and help I've received throughout my incarceration and in the community."



The traditional meaning of Firekeeper is one who protects a body after a soul passes, keeping the ceremonial fire burning as mourners gather and grieve. It also refers to the sacred role of women at the centre of their homes and communities, to keep the fire burning and support others in their healing and growth.

over  
**120**  
participants

### 2022-23 Highlights

The Firekeepers program is about building a circle of care, where women at all stages of their healing journeys help one another. Within the circle, lifelong friendships are built. **There have been over 120 participants in the Firekeepers program**, taking part in the weekly meetings, listening to guest speakers, and sharing meals and stories together.

# Justice Initiatives

Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, has extensive experience in collaborative action planning on reforms needed to improve outcomes for Indigenous women accessing or involved in the justice system. Esquao and Awo Taan Healing Lodge have been actively involved in the work of MMIWG2S+ for several years prior to the National Inquiry—hosting gatherings, delivering suites of programs and services, and striving for policy change.

Current justice initiatives include:

- Positive relationships with government, police, and communities developed over 25 years.
- Following up on the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), and Alberta's 113 Pathways to Justice.
- Assistance to families pursuing justice in the courts for their missing or murdered family members.

“

Listening to stories of others' experiences/journey through the loss of a loved one whether by murder or still missing helped with feeling connected. When someone is able to share their story it is healing. You have a chance to share your loved one's legacy and access support from a close collective community of individuals who had to live through immense loss.”



## 2022-23 Highlights

Held a Sisters in Spirit gathering and memorial walk on October 4, 2022.

**Hosted an online Two-Spirit Speaking Panel with 19 participants during Pride Month** to bring awareness to Two-Spirit people and encourage Indigenous youth that may be struggling with their identity to embrace their Two-Spiritedness. Together with Awo Taan Healing Lodge, Esquao **hosted over 150 attendees at the MMIWG2S+ Gathering, Moving Forward on the Pathways to Justice for: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and Girls, and Two-Spirited+** March 20-21, 2023. The Gathering brought together family members, survivors, and stakeholders for a collaborative and healing conference to advance justice for MMIWG2S+. **HELP navigator hired in collaborative project with Edmonton Police Services.**



## Path to Justice Navigators

This culturally-relevant navigational and advocacy support service is provided to Indigenous women in Alberta at our Edmonton offices and at the Awo Taan Healing Lodge in Calgary.

Services include advocacy and referral, court support, training, and creating awareness about barriers for Indigenous women. Emotional support and local resources are provided, especially to those women who are victims and not able or comfortable in accessing supports.

In addition to assisting women, navigators give presentations to organizations and groups across the province, creating awareness about intergenerational trauma, cultural connections, and human rights.



### 2022-23 Highlights

The navigators assisted 102 women, including 20 carried over from the previous year, with justice and other systems navigation and advocacy supports. Including the women and their families, **222 individuals received direct and in-direct support** from the program during the year.

**222**  
individuals  
received  
support

## Employment Partnerships

Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, successfully obtained funding for staffing and other resources to provide support to women through two streams—pre-employment skill development and barrier reduction; and retention and employer supports.



### 2022-23 Highlights

**In the area of pre-employment, Esquao connected with 30 women** and provided bus passes, housing and food supports; worked on debt coaching and budgeting one-on-one supports; completed resume and cover letters individually and in workshops; and made referrals to other organizations for literacy and computer training supports. **In the area of retention, Esquao connected with 47 women** and provided food subsidy, rent and transportation supports; delivered first aid training workshops and eye lash extension training; updated resumes and cover letters and assisted with job searches; reached out to potential employers to partner with for employment; and attended career fairs to build employee relationships and provide support to women.

connected  
with  
**77**  
women



# Healthy Relationships - Walking in Your Moccasins

Held weekly for eight weeks, these two-hour online sessions support Indigenous women in learning about mental, spiritual and cultural teachings and how these can support new or existing relationships. Walking in Your Moccasins helped them feel confident and empowered, and explored healthy relationships in terms of self, family, community, and the universe.

The group sessions were delivered in a grassroots, culturally appropriate and appreciated format. Some of the weekly topics include Elder/knowledge keeper support teachings, how to build self-esteem, cultural crafts, social connections with other women, historical trauma, and wellness wheel teachings.



As an Indigenous woman I've learned how important it is to have a sense of belonging within our own family and community."



## 2022-23 Highlights

**50**  
women  
participated

In all, **50 women participated in the two-hour online sessions** over the eight weeks. Though Covid was not a barrier, Walking in Your Moccasins was delivered virtually. This allowed participants to join in from across the province, and eliminated barriers such as childcare, transportation, as well as mental and physical health issues.



I can't express how important it is to be able to connect to my Indigenous community of women and elders, this course even made it possible to make connections across Canada, and for that I am grateful."





## Healthy Relationships - Mother Bear's Embrace

Mother Bear's Embrace began as a virtual program running for two hours every Wednesday evening for 10 weeks.

The aim of the program is to increase awareness and education about violence prevention and support for Indigenous women. The program equips women with some of the tools and resources they need to navigate their way through their communities safely, generates questions and group discussions, and identifies violence reduction resources in the community.

### 2022-23 Highlights

**A total of 15 women participated in Mother Bear's Embrace**, learning about the red flags which may indicate they are in or at risk of family violence, receiving support grounded in Indigenous ceremony and traditional ways, and developing closer relationships with their communities and group members.

**15**  
women  
participated

## Healthy Relationships - Kokum's Circle

The Kokum's Circle was inspired by women who were becoming Kokums for the first time and experienced Kokums who needed a space to gather. Indigenous grandmothers were traditionally known as the caretakers and the primary teachers of children. Today, daycares and schools are the norm, and mothers and grandmothers are working well into their senior years. The process of passing down traditional teachings from grandmother to mother to grandchild is fading away. The goal of the Kokum's Circle is to bring these important lessons and teachings back to life by offering a safe space where the participants feel supported and empowered.

“

Since attending this group I feel I have found a place to build relationships with other Kokums/grandmothers and to share knowledge and relearn some of our lost teachings. I have always wanted to learn more of our traditional ways and I believe here is a place we can do that.”



### 2022-23 Highlights

In all, **16 participants took part in the Kokum's Circle**, sharing knowledge about their traditional and customary roles, connecting with other Kokums and community resources, and being embraced by their culture, community and families.

**16**  
women  
participated



# Indigenous Skills Employment Training (ISET)

Esquao's ISET program provides employment and training support services across Alberta for First Nation, Métis, Inuit, urban and non-affiliated Indigenous women aged 15 years or older. The program helps Indigenous women improve their skills through training and education, and to find meaningful employment. Supports and services include individual training purchases, self-employment benefits, group training, special projects, and on-the-job training.



“

I would recommend this program to other Indigenous women. They were always on time with sending out the living allowance. This program helped me when I really needed them, so thank you!”



## 2022-23 Highlights

During the year **a total of 44 women were assisted through the ISET program**. Of these, seven were second year-funding participants and will finish up their education this year before moving on to employment or Master's programs. In all, 31 women received funding for post-secondary schooling and associated supports—four women received heavy equipment training and two took pre-employment welding, six women undertook entrepreneur training, and one attended the barber academy.

**44**  
women  
assisted





## Women's Leadership Gathering

Held on March 28, 2023, the Women's Leadership Gathering was a part of the Supporting Indigenous Women and 2SLGBTQIA+ project to engage with Indigenous women in Alberta regarding the barriers to success. Through quarterly gatherings, Esquao will explore opportunities for input, and prepare and match Indigenous women to municipal and provincial decision-making opportunities.

The Women's Leadership Gathering gave Esquao a chance to highlight significant Indigenous female leaders that played key roles in the political movement that helped shape policies to improve the well-being of Indigenous women in society and bring more equal rights to Indigenous women.

### 2022-23 Highlights

**40**  
women  
participated

In all, **40 participants explored opportunities for input into municipal and provincial justice initiatives.** The women learned about the history of Alberta's Indigenous Women's movement and previous engagements, and were connected to various resources—including employment and training, violence prevention, legal resources, and financial training. Introductions were made between interested Indigenous women and 2S+ people and community resources to help prepare them for leadership positions on government committees and councils.

“

I really enjoyed the mini-info discussions at the tables. It's very inspiring to learn about the services available to help break through the barriers that are in place. It's nice to be around people with similar goals and it helps with a sense of belonging”



# Alberta Indigenous Women Guardian Angels Project

Esquao, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, is honoured to partner with the Government of Canada on the Alberta Indigenous Women Guardian Angels Project. The project is part of our efforts to implement and evaluate a mechanism to hear the voices of Indigenous women in over 20 Alberta communities, and build local solutions to address the root causes of gender-based violence.

Through established communications channels with established women's groups across Alberta, Esquao will engage in conversations about shared concerns and challenges. Working together, we will identify positive ways forward for Alberta women post-pandemic.

Working closely with Indigenous Women Guardian Angels—often leaders in the community—Esquao will engage with these women and women's groups to identify priorities and build connections to services that advance the individual capacity of Indigenous women, their families, and communities by implementing actions on employment and training, poverty reduction, violence prevention, and mental health and wellness.

Stories of resiliency and perseverance throughout COVID-19 will provide positive ways forward to pandemic recovery.

**125**

attendees  
from across  
Alberta

## 2022-23 Highlights

As part of this project, **the coordinator met with women online or in small group settings.** The project coordinator engaged with 50 women through seven Sharing Circles via Zoom from April 2022 to March 2023. **Staff attended several large events during the summer to promote the project,** including the Métis Annual Assembly meeting in Calgary. Esquao hosted a **Sharing Circle during its Annual Gathering and Report to the Community with over 125 attendees coming from across Alberta.** Plans are underway for future Sharing Circles in northern, central and southern Alberta.



# 2022-23

## Programs and Projects at a glance

### Achieving Justice

---

- Elder Services Corrections Canada - Edmonton Parole Office
- Path to Justice Navigators
- Transition Services
- HELP navigator hired in collaborative project with Edmonton Police Services
- MMIWG2S+ Gathering
- Sisters in Spirit Gathering

### Capacity Funding

---

- Alberta Indigenous Relations - Indigenous Women's Initiatives
- Native Women's Association of Canada

### Community Outreach

---

- Alberta Indigenous Women Guardian Angels Project
- Networking and support services to women who would like to start programs in their community
- Referrals and connection to women with expertise
- Short-term workshops and training sessions on various topics

### Cultural Teachings

---

- Healthy Relationships Program - Walking in Our Moccasins
- Healthy Relationships Program - Kokum's Circle
- Two-Spirit Speaking Panel

### Employment and Training

---

- Employment Partnerships Program
- Indigenous Skills Employment Training

### Housing

---

- Housing Diversion Program
- Supported Referral, Basic Needs
- Iskwewak Iskoteh Nihkotawan (Women's Fire Lodge)

### Leadership Development

---

- Building Our Bundle
- Esquao Awards
- Esquao Youth Leadership Development Program
- Women's Leadership Gathering

### Poverty Reduction

---

- Empower U - Financial Independence Training
- Violence Prevention
- Healthy Relationships Program - Mother Bear's Embrace



The background of the page features a stylized, painterly illustration of three Indigenous figures, likely Métis, seen from behind. They are wearing traditional regalia, including feathered headdresses and beaded tunics. The color palette is dominated by warm, earthy tones such as ochre, gold, and brown, with some cooler tones like green and blue visible in the figures' clothing. The overall style is reminiscent of traditional Indigenous art or a contemporary mural.

## Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that our office is located in Edmonton, amiskwacîwâskahikan, on Treaty 6 Territory, a traditional meeting grounds, gathering place, and traveling route for many Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries.

As a provincial organization, we acknowledge this is the Homeland of the Métis and also includes Treaty 4, 7, 8 and 10 Territory. We also honour Mother Earth and give thanks to the animals and all life forms who made sacrifices so that we humans could build homes, roads and communities on this land.



10220 - 156 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5P 2R1

☎ 1-780-479-8195  
or 1-877-471-2171

✉ iaaw.ca

✉ iaaw@iaaw.ca

📷 @iaaw\_ab

🐦 @iaaw\_ab

📘 facebook.com/esquao

# ***Thank you to our Supporters!***

City of Edmonton

Correctional Service of Canada

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Edmonton Police Service

Government of Alberta

Homeward Trust Edmonton

Indigenous Services Canada

Native Women's Association of Canada

United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

Women and Gender Equality Canada