

FIRST NATIONS
LĀŃqUĀqĒ
kĒĒPĒRS

GATHERING

OUR SACRED LANGUAGES WALK WITH US



Sept. 21 & 22, 2021
PRAIRIELAND PARK, SASKATOON, SK

FINAL REPORT

For more information visit:

www.fnlkg.ca



2021 FNLKG AT A GLANCE

2800+
views

9
workshop sessions

3900+
impressions

2
sponsors

2
keynote addresses

2
panels

6
door prizes

2020 and 2021 have been shaped by the pandemic landscape. Just about every facet of the activities that SICC engages in are affected and reimagined as a result. In 2020, SICC decided to completely cancel the gathering. Reaching that decision was difficult. Chiefs across Canada take Covid-19 seriously and work diligently to protect our population. We felt it was our responsibility to ensure the safety of the vulnerable as we often have many elders who attend and travel. In 2021, with the vaccination roll out, SICC researched in person, virtual and hybrid models and ultimately, decided the virtual option was the most responsible choice in light of the fourth wave.

On September 20-21, 2021, the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre (SICC) hosted its 15th annual First Nations Language Keepers Gathering (FNLKG) on Treaty 6 Territory at Prairieland Park in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This year, SICC opted with a virtual and pre-recorded model and a live emcee on the days of the gathering. The theme for this year's gathering is Our Sacred Languages Walk With Us and showcases successful work within Saskatchewan and how others can utilize that work to increase fluency.

Language revitalization and language preservation are not in any way easy. Communities face barriers as they move forward and presenters share strategies that may assist others and to promote and protect languages. Everyone networks and soon realizes they are not alone and many are in the same situation just in a different location. Researchers, practitioners, language developers and cultural advocates provide delegates with a broad range of language issues and possible solutions from a variety of perspectives. The gathering provides delegates the opportunity to engage in dialogue and network with other communities across the country to enhance programming, policy and practice, and prevent further erosion and loss of languages.



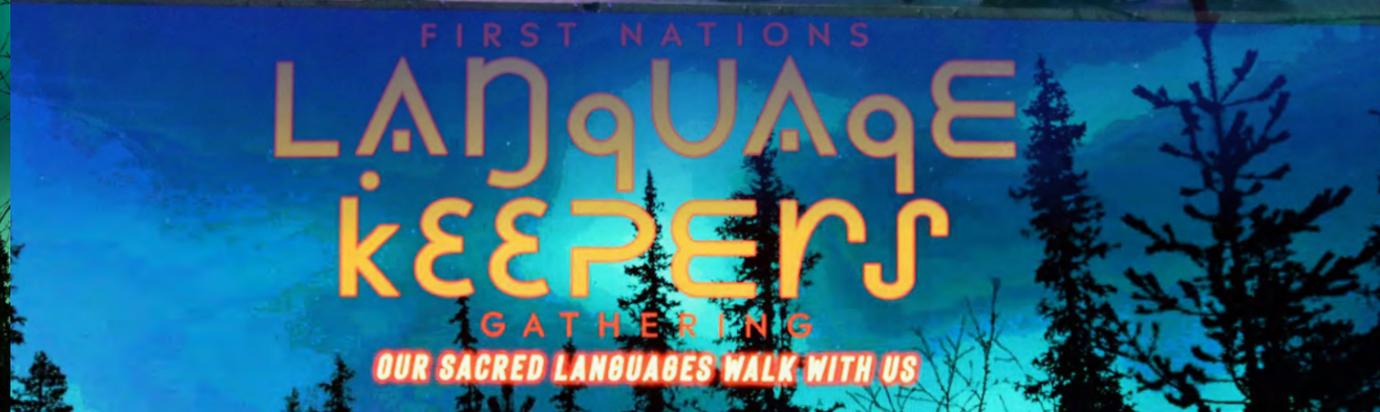
In 2006, SICC hosted its first gathering with 200 local people in attendance. SICC builds the foundation of an annual event to uphold our First Nations languages. Since then, the gathering continues to grow and welcomes people from all over the world. In 2019, SICC surpassed our goal of 750 attendees with nearly 1,000 people in attendance. SICC also meets our fundraising goal to ensure that this gathering remains relevant in future years. The thought that we would see a pandemic within our lifetime and have to cancel our 2020 gathering and go virtual in 2021 is not a bridge we thought we would cross. But, as language and culture is core to our way of life, we adapt and persevere.

Objectives

The objectives assist First Nations people and youth in understanding that language plays a critical role in the sovereignty of First Nations people and asserts our right to speak and use our First Nations languages. Through the FNLKG, SICC commits to continue addressing language retention for current and future generations. The four gathering objectives are to:

- Bring together First Nations educators, leaders, Elders, parents and students to share ideas and experiences on how to effectively teach First Nations languages and cultures both in and out of the classroom and at all levels of government;
- Assist communities and workplaces in developing strategies for revitalizing (their) languages and cultures;
- Provide participants with First Nations worldviews, traditional practices, customs and oral traditions as tools to revitalize First Nations' traditional ways; and,
- Discuss strategies relating to the policy development, community advocacy, and administrative, technical and management support for First Nations language and culture programming.

SICC staff plans the gathering and comprise the overall committee with sub-committees to tackle various aspects of planning. SICC staff also works with venue staff to ensure the event runs smoothly. Finally, SICC staff works with all speakers to ensure smooth transitioning of gathering activities.



For the FNLKG Agenda, SICC chose to concentrate within the contemporary borders of Saskatchewan and keeping in mind language groups and gender diversity, hand picked speakers for this year. This agenda is inclusive of the keynotes, panels, abstracts and other invited guests and includes all eight First Nations language groups in Saskatchewan.

MASTERS OF CEREMONIES

The masters of ceremonies play a key role in the gathering with their ability to introduce speakers, presenters, and performers, engage and entertain the audience, and generally maintain the flow of the event. The emcee is Warren Isbister-Bear, Plains Cree from Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation. SICC recognizes his leadership and professionalism and his self declaration as a novice speaker. However, SICC also recognises that he is challenging himself to learn his language and confidently supports him on this journey.

WELCOME ADDRESSES

On the first day, the gathering begins with a Pipe Ceremony and song by the drum group, Buffalo River Dene Drummers. Welcome addresses include Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre Board Chair, Chief Bobby Cameron, Plains Cree; Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Vice-Chief, Heather Bear, Plains Cree; First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education, Executive Director, Claudette Commanda, Algonquin Anishinabe; SaskCulture, Chief Executive Officer, Dean Kush; City of Saskatoon, Mayor, Charlie Clark; and, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, Interim President, Jessie Sylvestre, Dene.

On the second day, the gathering begins with a Pipe Ceremony and opening remarks from Emcee, Warren Isbister-Bear, Plains Cree; and, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, Interim President Jesse Sylvestre, Dene.





Land-Based Education & First Nation Languages

Dr. Herman Michell

He shares that land-based education is not a trend. It is a life-giving force critical to the survival of the Cree peoples. Cree culture, worldview, language, ways of knowing, stories, ceremonies, values, beliefs, and practices are rooted in the land. The land is considered a teacher and healer. Collaboration and administrative support are required to create a rich learning environment so that youth are exposed to cultural, historical, spiritual, and place-based stories while making links with Elders, community resource people, traditional land users, knowledge keepers, and local historians.



Preserving our Indigenous Languages for Future Generations

Ramona A. Billette

She discusses ways to preserve our language in our communities by using technology, Elders, and the land. Learning how everything is connected to language and how it is so sacred to us as Dene people. It also includes ways of practicing the language at home with their families and how to reach out to the community to retain their language.





Our Sacred Languages Walk With Us

The Elders Panel consists of:

Elders Jean Oakes, Plains Cree;
Hartland Goodtrack, Lakota;
Wayne Goodwill, Dakota;
Pete Bigstone, Nakoda;
Stella Ketchemonia, Saulteaux;
Gilbert Benjamin, Dene;
Bertha McKay, Swampy Cree; and,
Florence Highway, Woodland Cree.

They share that in the traditional First Nations way of life, our languages are part of our kinship. As such, they have a spirit. The Elders elaborate on their life long understanding of how our languages have spirits.



Our Sacred Languages Walk With Us

The Leaners Panel consists of:

Sienna Deschambeault, Swampy Cree;
Bronte Big Eagle, Nakoda;
Julian Sylvestre, Dene; and,
Charity Ketchemonia, Saulteaux.

This panel is comprised of people who are actively learning their language and would like to encourage others to speak their language. Through their language journeys, they are coming to know that everything has a spirit, including our languages.





Bringing Our Languages Home

Denise Kennedy, Saulteaux

Traditional Games

Chris Standing, Dakota

Almost Asleep

Hartland Goodtrack, Lakota

Land, Language & Gardening

Juanita McArthur-Big Eagle, Nakoda

Language & Podcasting

Willis Janvier, Dene

The Land & the Stories Help Us to Keep Our Language

Shirley Cardinal, Plains Cree

CTEP A Community Based Cree Language Teacher Education Program

Lily McKay-Carriere, & Bertha McKay, Swampy Cree

Cree & Coffee Group koskopita nīhithawīwin

Charlotte Ross & Andrea Custer, Woodland Cree

Life at Nimkii Aazhibikong - Building a Language, Culture & Arts Village

Christi Belcourt, Michif & Isaac Murdoch, Ojibway

The gathering consists of 9 workshops, one for each language group in Saskatchewan and one guest session from outside Saskatchewan as a gathering bonus or add on.



The FNLKG continues to grow every year. In 2018, SICC searched for a venue to accommodate our continuous growth. This process required SICC to consider several venues with their building features, parking, location of hotels and the airport as key considerations. Most importantly, the venue must care for the well-being of our First Nations Elders.

SICC selected Prairieland Park as they accommodate over 750 people, contain adjacent breakout rooms, and provide free parking. Prairieland also provides its own AV Department to cover our technical, graphics, and sound requirements. SICC staff and delegates reviewed the venue positively. SICC hosted the virtual and pre-recorded gathering at Prairieland in 2021 and hope that in 2022, we will be in person again.



MARKETING, MEDIA AND PROMOTION

Marketing avenues for the FNLKG includes its official website, email list, social media platforms, and press releases. The website houses all information about the gathering including registration processes, event details, costs, venue, promotional materials, emcees, keynotes, panels, workshops, partner hotels and sponsors. From this, SICC creates shareable content for our social media. SICC engages media with a press release and receives print and radio coverage.

Sponsors for the 2021 FNLKG include:



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

SICC commits to excellence in all facets of business including the FNLKG, recommendations include:

- Reviewing and enhancing our marketing and communications activities; and,
- Reviewing both in-person, virtual and hybrid models going forward

CLOSING REMARKS

The gathering ends with closing remarks by SICC Indigenous Knowledge Systems Researcher, Melody Wood, Plains Cree. She conveys her sincere thanks to all in attendance including, but not limited to, hosts, delegates, guest speakers, presenters, Elders, and youth to make this gathering another success. SICC is truly Elder led, and we are thankful for their guidance and in turn, they are thankful for our trust in them.



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