

The Sacred Space of Womanhood

Mothing Across the Generations

A National Showcase on First Nations, Inuit,
and Métis Women and Mothing



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH



CENTRE DE COLLABORATION NATIONALE
DE LA SANTÉ AUTOCHTONE

“Everything our communities do should make it easier for mothers to raise children.”

Dr. Margo Greenwood



PROCEEDINGS



“Everything our communities do should make it easier for mothers to raise children.” While this recommendation by Dr. Margo Greenwood might be indisputable, staggering obstacles remain. Discriminatory child welfare policies, shattering intergenerational effects of the Residential School system, and the broader impact of colonization all compromise the ability of contemporary Aboriginal women to live out their foundational role as mothers. Too often Mom is the one who shoulders the weight of those effects. Too often we forget that the traditional Aboriginal mothering of each child is a community responsibility that crosses generation and gender.

With these reminders, Dr. Greenwood, the Academic Leader of the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA), welcomed participants to the third in a series of related gatherings sponsored by the NCCAHA, each offering a different perspective on traditional ways of knowing and being within families. This gathering, *The Sacred Space of Womanhood: Mothering Across the Generations*, was held on January 24 and 25, 2012 in Ottawa. Beyond its potential for networking and the sharing of information, the gathering was intended to help participants:

1. explore what it means to be a mother;
2. identify cultural and Indigenous understandings related to motherhood;
3. examine ways in which teachings have been transmitted across the generations in an evolving generational experience from grandmothers to young mothers; and
4. identify elements of cultural knowledge transmission in successful mothering programs.

In short, the gathering created a space to celebrate mothering.

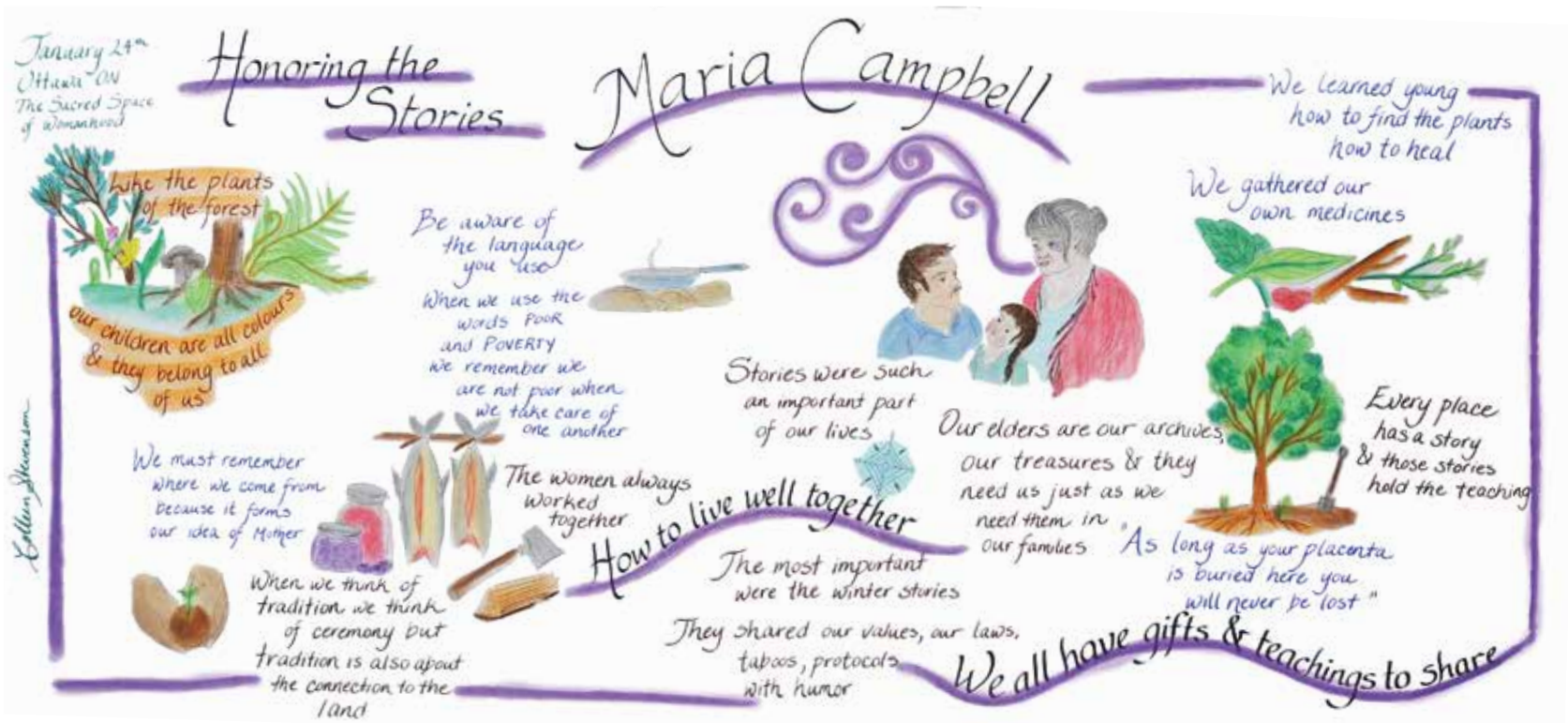
Over 160 participants gathered in Ottawa: mothers, daughters, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, fathers, grandfathers, sons and babies. From communities all over Canada, from schools and clinics, from universities and government offices, from daycares and kitchens, people came with their stories and songs, their worries and their wisdom because they believed in what Dr. Greenwood called, “the constructive and positive potential of motherhood for the lives and communities of all Indigenous peoples.” Here is an account of what transpired at that gathering.

Tradition Wrapped in Stories

Keynote Address by Maria Campbell, Cree/Métis Elder, Writer, Filmmaker, Researcher, and Educator

Maria Campbell began the first day of sessions by acknowledging that she had not always been a great mother to her children. She recollected her father’s reassurance that, if we’re lucky, the Creator gives us a second chance. Her second and third chances came with the opportunity to be a good grandmother and a very good great grandmother.

Ms. Campbell expressed gratitude at being asked to share her stories and experiences, and took the audience back to her childhood in northern Saskatchewan. Her grandmother would describe their Métis community as a forest of many different plants that were all needed. Ms. Campbell recalled outsiders labelling their community ‘poverty-stricken,’ its members ‘squatters.’ “We had little material wealth,” she remembered, “but everyone took care of each other and no one went without food.” Theirs was a community rich with stories, especially in the long winter nights before radio and regular contact with the outside world. Winter



stories were stern ones that depicted values, laws, responsibilities, obligations and protocols. But there were raunchy stories too, funny ones that made you laugh and open yourself up to let the good medicine in to do its work. Every place had a story and everyone a story to share.

Old women were the ‘bosses’ of the stories and particular stories were attached to women’s work. When caring for the graveyard, the grandmothers helped prevent marriages between close kin by telling stories of how all the families were related. Berry picking, gathering medicines for midwifery and women’s time, gardening, smoking fish and meat, canning, cleaning, cooking—each activity came with a story. As work got done, traditions ‘wrapped up’ in these stories passed from mothers to children.

There were special stories for children. Traditional birth stories about caring for the placenta helped children learn that “as long as this is buried here you will never be lost. Your spirit will always find its way back.” In spring children were told to go out and listen to the stories of the animals; children are the ones who understand what the animals tell each other.

Generally, tradition was expressed in ceremony, but tradition also lived in the ways you interact with the land. Ms. Campbell remembered asking her father about their traditions. She was disappointed when her father thought about it and said they had no culture. When she shared her disappointment with an Elder, he sent her back to her father to ask him, in Cree, how they used to live. Then the stories started flowing.

With modernization and people leaving their communities for the city, culture and traditional practices can be lost for a time. Ms. Campbell recalled this happening when she moved to the city in the 1960s with her children. Yet it was in the city where she met other young Aboriginal women, and where they helped each other by cooking, sewing and learning together. Traditions can be reclaimed. Grandmothers can be adopted and stories relearned. Ms. Campbell reminded the audience to tell people where you’re from so they know who you are, and remember: “Mother is our original place.”

Mothers & Daughters

Love is Never Wrong

It's time to renew men's role in honoring mothers

First you do what you have to do & then do what you want to do

Love is Never Wrong

You are enough: you are more not less

How do you pass on the language?


What is the role of story in your mothering?

What have you learned from the people who mothered you?

What is the role of people who mother?

Being a mother means mothering our community no matter their ages or circumstances

*NCCA Jan. 24, 2012
Ottawa, ON
The Sacred Space of Womanhood*



- ★ CONFIDENCE
- ★ Respect for others
- ★ Being there when they get home
- ★ Making culture & language the very foundation
- ★ Learning respect for money, listening
- ★ Taking the time
- ★ Treating others as you want to be treated
- ★ Education & working hard
- ★ Singing the songs
- ★ Being proud of who you are
- ★ Disciplinary
- ★ Friend
- ★ Protector
- ★ Teacher
- ★ Nurturer
- ★ Confidant
- ★ Listener

Love is Never Wrong

Mothers' and Daughters' Panel

Charlotte Reading, Samantha Loppie, Tanya Daworen, Marlene Beattie, Sarah Takolik, and Isabelle Takolik

The resilience and health of Aboriginal communities has always depended on the transmission of culture from mothers to daughters. While tasks were often gender-specific, girls learned all the lessons of survival and interdependence that life in their communities required (Anderson, 2000). The dehumanizing and disempowering impact of colonization on Aboriginal women in particular disrupted that process of teaching and learning, damaging the heart of Aboriginal life (Armstrong, 1996). The resultant chasm was acutely apparent in the Mothers' and Daughters' panelists' responses to the question, "who taught you about mothering?"

Charlotte Reading answered this question by explaining that it was difficult for her mother to mother in an emotional way and that, in this sad way, she learned from her mother the importance of protecting children. Ms. Reading's older sister was the one who taught her about mothering. It was her sister who taught Ms. Reading that she was important, and what she thought was important.

For Sarah Takolik from the Inuit community of Taloyoak, Nunavut, it was her grandparents who taught her about mothering when they adopted her. With the death of her grandmother, Ms. Takolik's auntie and older sister assumed that responsibility. However strict her auntie was, she taught Ms. Takolik to respect and care for others.

For different reasons, Marlene Beattie also felt she learned about mothering from family members other than her mother. Her mother was the breadwinner, never home when she returned from school and not the kind of mother Marlene wanted to be. Ms. Beattie learned a great deal from her auntie. She learned to cook from her father and, from her younger brother, learned how to be there when your children need someone to hear them.

When the daughters on the panel shared what they had learned about mothering from their mothers, it became evident that being mothered by aunties and sisters and fathers and siblings is not second-best but part of that "complex web of relational practices" Dr. Greenwood invoked in her introduction. From her mother Marlene Beattie, who keenly felt her

own mother's absence, Tanya Davoren learned that mothering was the ability to communicate about everything. As an adult, Ms. Davoren and her mother speak almost every night and her mother is always there for her. The respect her mother learned from an auntie was just what Isabelle Takolik learned from her mom. Samantha Loppie learned confidence from her mother, Charlotte Reading—confidence and the truth that love is never wrong.

As they shared their experiences of teaching and learning about mothering, the Mothers' and Daughters' panelists demonstrated how resilience persists in the heart of Aboriginal women. Each mother spoke to the importance of communication, whether through storytelling, language revitalization, or simply being there for conversation. Sarah Takolik stressed the importance of passing on teachings to her daughter in her language, Inuktitut, because Inuktitut identifies who you are as a person. "You need the language," Ms. Takolik stressed, "to fully understand the stories."

Panelists were asked to address contemporary challenges to mothering such as the lack of familiarity with Aboriginal languages and dependence on childcare centres. Tanya Davoren shared that she is learning Michif and wants to pass it on to her children. Sarah Takolik shared that she used to be shy to speak in her first language but she persevered. She encouraged everyone in the audience not to turn away from their language because it identifies who you are. Our language is how we transmit culture; it is what connects us to our place. The facilitator, Dan George, acknowledged that even though he and his wife did not speak their language, their granddaughter is learning her language in school.

The panelists agreed that this ability to support the transmission of culture is one benefit of the culturally relevant childcare centres and programs offered in various communities. Ms. Davoren reminded the audience that in order to survive, both parents

sometimes have to work, that we do the best with the options we have. Culturally relevant childcare does not replace mothering but can enhance it. One audience member recalled her grandmother sending her to live with various Elders over the years. From these grandmothers she learned teachings about basket-making, traditional foods, bringing people together, money, honour, respecting yourself, your body—a great deal of knowledge that she is able to draw on when teaching her own children. She also learned that a child may be mothered by many different people. However, many families no longer live in their home territories. Is where you live also important to what you teach your children? Responding to this question, Ms. Beattie described the shame her father carried because of the pain he experienced growing up a "half-breed." In order to protect his children from this reality, he isolated them from his parents, in effect depriving them from

the closeness to family and community that Ms. Beattie feels is so important.

Ms. Reading was not raised in community either. She did not know the support of grandparents and was not taught her language. Carrying a sense of shame and of not belonging, she faced the further challenge of raising her daughter in Nova Scotia, a province she finds can be a racist place. Because her daughter is also African Canadian, Ms. Reading knew she would encounter in life a variety of messages that she was "not enough." She felt it crucial to instill in her daughter pride in who she was, that she was not less but more. Mr. George thanked the panelists for encouraging the audience to model healthy behaviours for their children—to be present and value children, grateful for what you have, not miserable for what you don't have; to be proud of who you are, and to remember that love is never wrong.



Marlene Beattie, Tanya Doworen, Sarah Takolik, and Isabelle Takolik; Mothers' and Daughters' Panel.

Children are Our Gifts

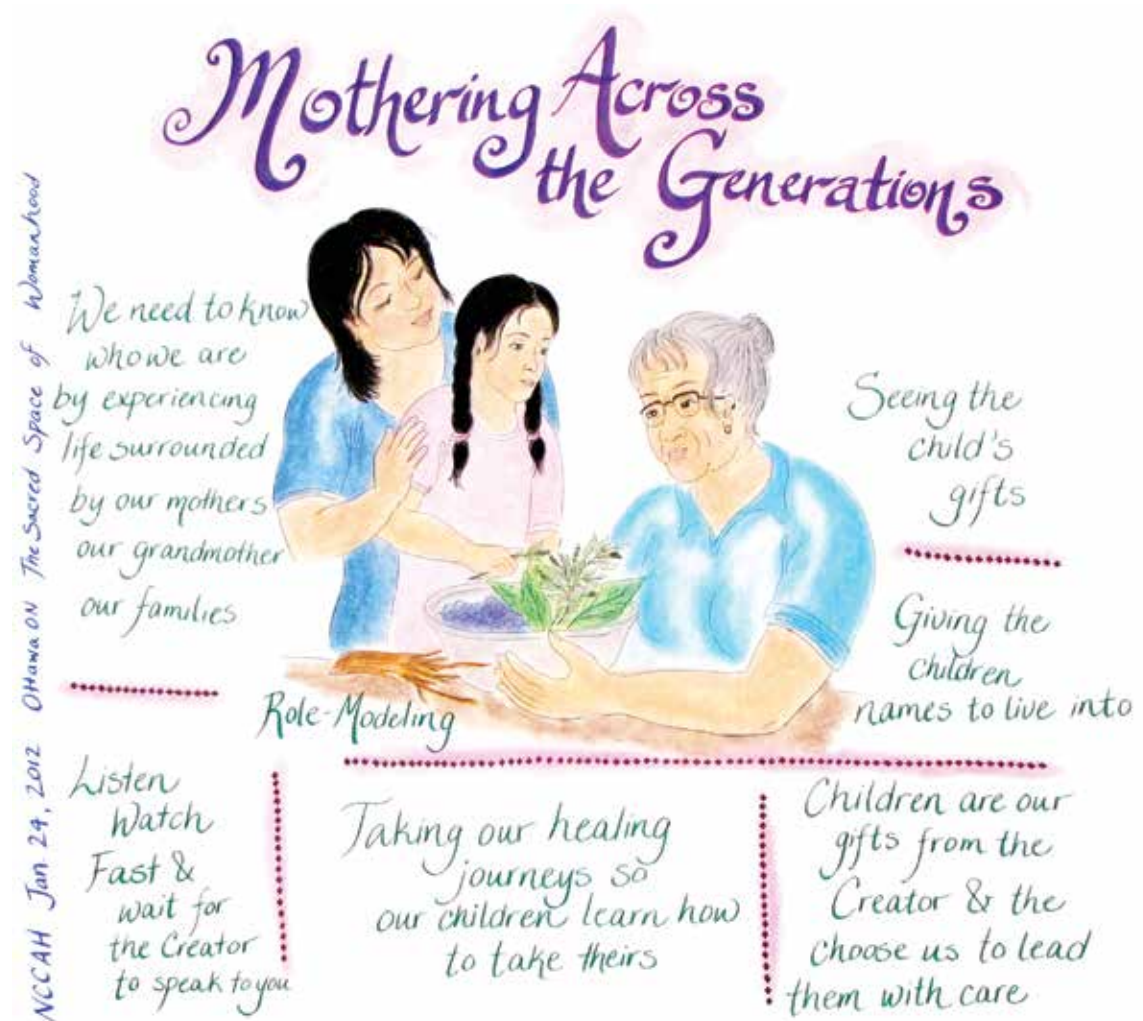
Mothering Across the Generations Panel

Emma Gladue, Diana Steinbauer, and Alexis Steinbauer

Participants of the Mothers' and Daughters' panel demonstrated poignantly the disruptive and damaging effects of colonization on traditional Aboriginal mothering, especially for children separated from their communities and families. Panelists also showed how tradition—and mothers—revive and thrive despite staggering odds. A highlight for participants of *Sacred Space* was the opportunity to hear stories of mothering across the generations from the women of one particular family.

Grandmother Emma Gladue, daughter Diane Steinbauer and granddaughter Alexis Steinbauer came to the gathering from Saddle Lake Cree Nation. Each expressed gratitude for being invited to participate. Diane Steinbauer opened the session by singing "Grandmother Song." Now it was their turn to answer the question: "Who taught you about being a mother?" Ms. Gladue began her answer in Cree, chuckled, and then continued in English. She explained that her mother and father taught her about life. She was born in a tent on her reserve and the first words she heard were spoken in Cree by the midwife. Ms. Gladue described her parents as traditional, hard-working people who lived off the land and never went to school. They spoke only Cree and passed on the teachings that were given to them by the Creator.

Ms. Diane Steinbauer shared that her mother, in turn, was the rock of the family, and taught by example. She offered an example of her mother's wisdom, how the roles she assigned each child in the family held true today. Ms. Alexis Steinbauer acknowledged that strong women surrounded her. On a daily basis, her grandmother and mother teach her the importance of family, culture and identity. She expressed gratitude for all she had learned from them through life experience and through ceremony.



When asked what advice she might have for young families today, Ms. Gladue reflected that members of the church had pressured her to have many children. Convinced that she could only raise the four children she had, Ms. Gladue asked the clergy if they would be there if she had more children, would they help raise them if they were sick or needed food. She reflected on the challenges and illnesses that face families today. She encouraged young mothers to learn about traditional

medicines and to teach their families that these medicines were passed down through generations from the Creator. Young families need to keep showing the next generation the teachings to ensure they are carried on. Young families need to know their cultures. Ms. Gladue's words sparked response from the audience. One member suggested it must be frustrating to know that Elders might pass on without enjoying the opportunity to share their wisdom. He was glad



Elder Albert Marshall, NCCAH Advisory Committee Member and Dr. Marilyn Iwama, UNBC.

that “for one speck of a moment we are able to hear the stories that have been carried around for generations.” Another audience member said that she had learned from her mother about healing and moving forward. The greatest teaching she had received from her grandmother was forgiveness. Another acknowledged that, as children, we may have learned technical lessons in residential school but we never learned wisdom.

Grandmother, daughter and granddaughter each left the audience with key messages about mothering. Ms. Diane Steinhauer reminded the audience that children are gifts from the Creator and they choose us to be their parents. She advised parents to lead by showing love and care. In choosing our parents, the grandmothers and the Creator allow us to see the world and the lives we are going to live. Before we are born, the grandmothers are kind and wipe that memory from our minds so that we can explore the world with free will. We need to honour the Creator by the promises we make.

Ms. Alexis Steinhauer stressed that family is important because we support, care and love each other throughout life. Cultural teachings are important, as is the role of women in creating life. Stories are important and our roots are important. Her advice is to “know your identity; know who your ancestors were and the lives they lived. Elders are our link to the past, so get to know them. Pray every day to the Creator.”

Ms. Gladue closed the session by explaining that every time she and her daughter and granddaughter speak about their family it is very emotional because their family is close to their hearts. One regret she has is that she didn’t teach all of her children to speak Cree. “If you’re trying to learn your language, don’t give up: look with your eyes and listen with your ears.” She advised the youth to undertake a fast if they wanted to learn about their culture. The Creator would come to them and open their eyes and hearts. It would be an experience they would take with them for the rest of their lives.

Women are the Heart

*Keynote Address by Jeannette Corbiere Lavell
President, Native Women’s Association of Canada*

At the start of day two, Jeannette Corbiere Lavell introduced herself as a member of the Anishinabe Nation. She shared with the audience her gratitude at having been present at the preceding day’s meeting between First Nations leaders and Prime Minister Stephen Harper. She explained that when the leaders presented Prime Minister Harper with a replica of the wampum belt, they presented it in a unique way, indicating that Canada had not lived up to its agreements with First Nations. In the course of addressing that gathering, Ms. Corbiere Lavell had the opportunity to assert each Nation’s right to define what a citizen is, as stated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. At the gathering she also asserted the rights of women within their Nations and in Canada. She stressed the urgent need to revive the traditional role of women in the decision-making process, and expressed gratitude at being invited to speak to this gathering about motherhood.

It was her aunts, mother and grandmothers who gave Ms. Corbiere Lavell strength to challenge the *Indian Act’s* definition of “Status Indian.” She witnessed in these women an ability to do whatever was needed to follow their principles and beliefs. She stated it was an honour to address the women at the gathering and expressed her appreciation for the important work they were doing, particularly with young mothers. She reminded the young mothers that children are gifts from the Creator and it is the mothers’ role to love them unconditionally and to teach them their identity. Women are the centre of their communities; they are the heart. This is what mothers need to convey to their communities, and to their daughters.

Ms. Corbiere Lavell shared stories of growing up in her community. Her mother was a teacher at their school and made sure her daughter spoke English and

Jeanette Corbiere Lavell

Women are

the Heart of
Community

As women we traditionally
had that strong
decision-making role



It is time
for balance
of men &
women

We have the
responsibility for
future generations

If we don't teach the children
who they are then where
will they learn that? It
must come from our homes

How do we find
compassion for the
child's autonomy & intelligence
— their spark

Belonging

Bring them up
close to our
hearts & the
hearts of our
communities
& be there
as they face
their successes &
challenges

We have a young
population: they
need to be
strong & know
who they are

We can mentor our
young women
to take on those
leadership roles

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The Sacred Space of Womanhood

Anishinabe. Since none of her classmates spoke English, Ms. Corbiere Lavell ended up being the interpreter. She grew tired of this and decided she was not going to school anymore. One day, dressed in a snowsuit rather than the dress she wanted, she left the house and kept on walking, right out of town. She walked for an hour and ended up at her auntie's house. Horrified, her auntie started heading with her back to her mother. As they were leaving, a team of horses drew up with her uncles, dad and grandfather. She thought she was in real trouble but they were so happy to see her that they bundled her up and took care of her. She can still remember that feeling of security and love.

She also told the gathering that each year their community would have an agricultural Fall Fair. When she was seven, her auntie, who was preparing for the fair, told her that there was a huge apple on the apple tree that she was planning to enter in the fair. No one was to pick it. The day the fair came around, her auntie went to harvest the apple and found that there were bites out of it all the way around. Only the core was left. All her auntie and her mother could do was laugh. She hadn't disobeyed: the apple was still on the branch. They told her she was thinking ahead about how to get around the problem.

Children might do wrong but they need to be shown compassion. At the same time they need to learn responsibility. Both of these instances conveyed to young Jeannette the strength she needed to do what she needed. So in 1970, when she married someone who did not have "status," she felt there was no reason for her to lose her own status. Believing the government policy to be wrong, she took on the challenge.¹ Ms. Corbiere Lavell told the story of when the government first came to their community in the 1820s. The men were away. When the women went to talk to the bureaucrats, they were refused an audience. Government officials

¹ Under the *Indian Act*, women who married those deemed non-status Indians lost their status. In 1985, this portion of the *Act* was amended by Bill C-31: laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/I-5/page-3.html#docCont, retrieved 30 April 2012.

viewed their status as inferior to men. This was the government's first step in taking away the decision-making powers that women had in their communities.

Ms. Corbiere Lavell stressed that women's organizations were created because women's voices were not being heard within Aboriginal organizations. This is still happening today. At one time, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was the only national voice representing women across the country. She said how proud she is of the work that NWAC does in their health department, which focuses not only on health issues, but on the issues of women and children, including missing women and violence against Aboriginal women. She stressed that "We cannot afford to lose any more young women. We need to be strong; we need the young population to know who they are."

Strength in Emotion

Young Women's Panel

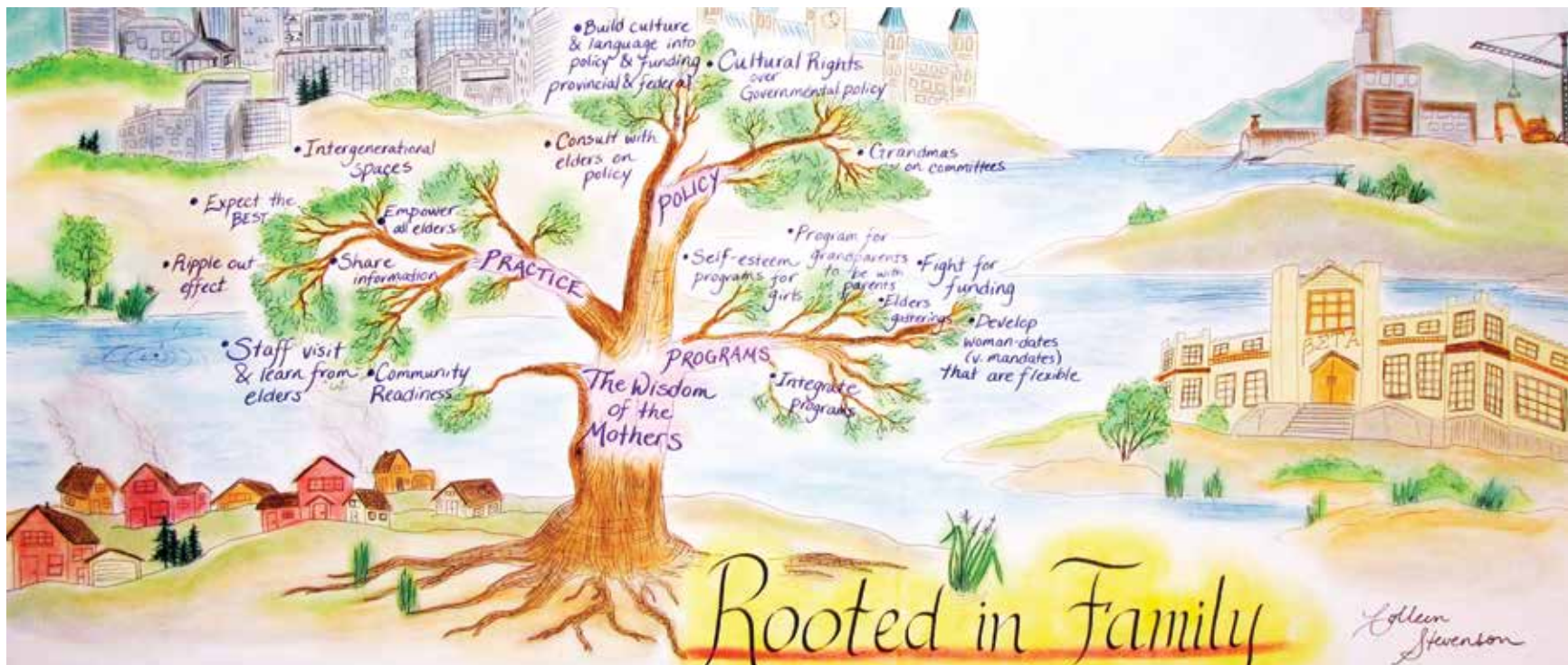
Jocelyn Formsma, Jessica Danforth, Lindsay Knight, Selma Ford, and Gabrielle Legault

Given the assault on traditional mothering by centuries of colonization, with its resulting fragmentation of families, and its assault at language and culture, the inclusion of a "young women's panel" in a gathering about motherhood might promise a somber exchange. From the moment Mr. George invited the "Young Women's" panelists to introduce themselves, it was clear that none of these attacks has matched the resilience of traditional mothering. Moreover, as Elder Paul Skanks observed, "we are in really good shape with such strong young people."

Panelist Ms. Danforth began by informing the participants that her community had recently come

together to assert "The Mothering Binding Law." She explained the law by sharing a picture of a turtle that depicted the seven stages of development that constitute the Mothering Law, and by reading the "Mothering Statement" that had been adopted by the Six Nations. Mr. George acknowledged the harmony of the Law with what participants at the gathering had been discussing. He then asked Ms. Formsma what she had been taught about mothering, who had taught her and how.

Ms. Formsma replied that three women other than her mother had taught her about mothering, that her mother had attended residential school and undergone her own healing through Ms. Formsma's childhood. Her mother knew something was missing in her life and sought out her culture; together, the two of them learned traditions and ceremonies. Ms. Formsma said she learned a lot about mothering through ceremony. She learned by sitting with the older women as they





Maria Campbell (middle), Keynote speaker, with two gathering participants.

prepared food and materials for ceremonies. As she got older, she also learned by volunteering with the Friendship Centre movement. This was where she learned about her history, and about leadership. She recalled having to play a strong mothering role for her sisters while her mother was healing, and that at times it was difficult.

When asked the same question, Ms. Ford said that not only had her mother and grandmother been part of her learning process, but so had her mother's and father's sisters. In fact, her father played a huge role in her learning to mother. Her large extended family had all helped her learn about mothering.

Ms. Knight learned about mothering from her Russian mother and also from her mother-in-law, who was there when she gave birth. She learned a great deal from her support. She learned from her mother's mistakes.

Mr. George wondered what young women needed to know about starting a family. Ms. Legault replied that she always knew that she was Métis but wasn't sure what that meant fundamentally. She said she did not ask her grandpa enough questions. Now she asks a lot of questions of her mother and grandmother, to find out how they lived. When asked about the core values, Ms. Legault said her mother was a very tough woman who had a difficult childhood. She said she would tell her children that there is strength in emotion, that there is a place for that also. Her mother taught her how to be strong and be true to herself.

Ms. Danforth observed that you do not need to be a mother in order to mother. Her mother's absence did not mean that she needed "to become a statistic." The way she grew up informed the worldview she has today. With Ms. Corbiere Lavell, she observed the lack of focus

on women at the recent Crown gathering. Nothing was said about the women and their mothers, stressed Ms. Danforth. She mothered herself and her sister from early in life. "We are all responsible for mothering one another as a community," stressed Ms. Danforth; "the health and well being of mothers is what lifts up the entire nation."

Mr. George noted that all the panelists were strong and vocal in their own rights. As a father, he tried to instill in his daughters the need to be strong and stand up for themselves. He wondered how the panelists had become such strong women. Ms. Knight said that they did not have a choice as so many of their young women were dying. They needed to hold their men accountable. Men needed to support and respect their women. They needed to raise their men to be strong and respectful of their women. They needed to teach these little warriors to be proud. They needed to hold their heads high.

Ms. Legault described how she derived strength in finding what she was good at and by following her dreams. It had been a long journey, in terms of dealing with men. She needed to set the bar high and stick to it. She expected a man to treat her like an equal.

Ms. Danforth said that there are many days when she does not feel strong and confident. When she feels like that, she uses those feelings to make change, knowing that she is only as good as what she sets out to do. Her sister always warned her to be careful about showing emotion, but Ms. Danforth feels it is her right to do so. She tells young people that if you can get up in the morning, look in the mirror and be okay with what you see, that is what will make their communities stronger.

Ms. Formsma shared that many times she does not feel confident, that she lets such feelings run their course and not get her down. "It's an ongoing process," Ms. Ford responded. She felt she had to be strong when she had her first child, that she had no choice but to be strong for her children.

An audience member asked what the panelists might tell other young women about gaining strength. “Don’t think about the negative,” replied Ms. Ford. “Focus on things you are doing right.” Ms. Formsma said she would remind young women that tall trees catch a lot of wind and have deep roots to make them stronger. Also, that the world is run by the people that show up. “Be present, no matter what you are doing. Do nothing to embarrass the ancestors and do nothing to embarrass the child. Anyone can slay a dragon, but try waking up every day and loving the world again; that’s what makes a hero.”

Ms. Danforth said she saw a lot of people struggling, missing an understanding of the seven stages of life. She stressed the importance of a good life and not being ashamed of human sexuality. She would not give advice but would listen. Ms. Legault would say not to be ashamed of who they are, to be proud. Ms. Knight said she did not have advice. Her mother told her, “look out for number one.” This means to take care of ourselves; we need to fix ourselves first so that our children can have a healthy role model.

The Young Women’s Panel culminated in Ms. Knight’s (also known as Ekwol) powerful and inspiring performance of a rap song about her son.

Mothering Programs and Digital Stories

In the course of the gathering, several participants introduced groups that they represented, from the Aboriginal Mother Centre Society in Vancouver to Nova Scotia’s Grassroots Grandmothers’ Circle (Mi’kmaki Nukumijik). Descriptions of each of these programs can be found in the Appendix. Participants also viewed digital stories in a powerful and moving session that featured the presentation, *kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk: Intergenerational Effects of Residential Schools On First Nations Women Whose Mothers are Residential School Survivors*. Each of these sessions offered vivid portrayals of the complexity of family relationships and resilience of mothering.

The Centre of the Universe is Every Child

Grandmothers’ Panel
Shirley Tagalik, Madeleine Dion Stout,
and Jo MacQuarrie

Respecting the revered position of grandmothers in traditional ways of knowing, Mr. George invited the final panel of three grandmothers and great-grandmothers to introduce themselves and share what they felt children needed to hear from them. Madeleine Dion Stout began by saying that she was honoured to participate in such an esteemed panel. She explained that her traditional name meant “child with an ancient spirit,” and that she had two daughters and three great grandchildren. Jo MacQuarrie introduced herself as an Elder and staff member of the Métis Nation of Ontario, mother of four children, and grandmother of five. Shirley Tagalik introduced herself by explaining that her Inuktitut name means “almost like an Inuk,” and that she has three daughters and three granddaughters.

Ms. Dion Stout urged participants to “cast kisses on one another, not just the babies.” She cited the photograph of the baby on the program, wondering what the baby was saying with his open mouth and little wink. She remembered her mother always telling her to be careful about the words she put out into the universe, that she must follow through with those words. She felt the baby was telling us to live our lives and remember it is the present that matters. We know a lot, but the baby is saying there is a gap in research on Aboriginal children and mothers.

Ms. Tagalik was raised in a house where children were “seen but not heard.” She then moved to a community where children were the centre of the universe. As a mother, she has come to understand how the Inuit treasure children and family. Her mother-in-law had passed away by the time her first child was born, but the community surrounded her and taught her how to be part of a family. Living in that culture, she learned how



From left to right: Samantha Cook, Rosalynd Williams, Deanna Cook.

to become a human being, someone with pride who does not worry others.

One audience member wondered about Elders who had been so hurt that they cannot be this free with teaching. "How can we get them to open up again? How can we awaken them gently so they will share their knowledge?" Ms. Tagalik explained that, since Nunavut had been colonized very recently, these difficult experiences were raw with the Elders. In the process of working with the Elders to document the Inuit worldview, she saw that the Elders first had to be supported in going through their own healing process.

"In order to create memory," agreed Ms. Dion Stout, we need "to bleed into one another." She urged the Elders "to wake up from the dread," and know that all failures are ultimately transformational gifts. As troubled as we may be, and hard though it may be to do, we must still give and receive our gifts. Ms. MacQuarrie identified the need for each to recognize their own strengths and reach out to help others move forward.

Each panelist closed with expressions of gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the panel. Ms. Dion Stout stressed the importance of listening to our grandchildren and wished that the audience could have the final word. Fittingly, participants then reassembled into small discussion groups, with the task of agreeing on one thing they would like to change.

Grandmother's Panel

We need to cast kisses on one another as we do the babies

Act on the gap in research on Aboriginal Inuit & Metis child & families

CELEBRATE

Do the important things together as a family

Share the work Share the food

CONNECTIVITY

Listen

In order to create blood memory we have to bleed into one another

The centre of the universe is every child

All of our failures are transformational

We all want to heal & be whole again

If you don't have your elders draw strength from the stories of the elders

Where to from Here? Informing Policy, Programs and Practice

In the final plenary session, each participant group shared one statement from their discussion group of what, in the world of policy, programs and practice, they would most change. The suggested changes that emerged include:

- Developing programs and policies that better integrate culture and community needs.
- Addressing jurisdictional issues (Federal versus Provincial) by replacing the unequal power balance with a strength-/client-/grassroots-based approach to programming.
- Ending compartmentalization at all levels; developing “womandate” rather than mandate. Rather than making women meet the needs of programs, ensure clear communication that is flexible enough to meet the needs of women.
- Being the stone that is thrown in the pond and ripples out. If you touch one woman in a good and safe way, they will come; always expect the best.
- Protecting funding for resources and ensuring information is shared.
- Knowing your culture and your past; Since many want to find their way back home, hold workshops for youth and Elders, and to help girls develop self-programming.
- Creating more intergenerational spaces; basing policy changes on culture and tradition.
- Building culture and language into policy framework.
- Bringing more Elders into early and older childhood programming.
- Increasing knowledge transmission across the generations.
- Empowering Elders.

Mothering Together: More, Not Less Concluding Notes

Dr. Greenwood expressed her gratitude for time shared with the participants. In reflecting on the objectives of the session, she hoped that space had been created for participants to explore what it means to be a mother. Throughout the gathering she had heard that the most important job is caring about our children, caring about each other, and caring about our Nations. She acknowledged the attempt to engage people from coast to coast to coast in the agenda, as well as the range of incredible presentations that were given. Reflecting on how she is often reminded of Thomas King and the importance of story, Dr. Greenwood observed with gratitude that, as participants told their stories, we were privileged to learn as we saw the past, present and future unfold.

In the course of the gathering, Dr. Greenwood acknowledged witnessing a tremendous amount of sharing and caring; people had indeed “cast kisses upon one another.” This is what matters, she urged; that we care for one another, and show that caring in our lives. She hoped that she had taught her sons to honour women. She hoped they knew their place and their role. In observing the young women coming behind her, she had every confidence that they were going to be just fine. Dr. Greenwood offered thanks to everyone who had worked to make the gathering a success.

In addition to keynote speakers, panelists and those who presented summaries of various mothering programs, participants at the gathering joined several times in small groups to discuss various aspects of mothering. The responses to one such discussion showed that the gathering had indeed been a place to honour the sacred space of mothering—a kind of mothering, agreed the participants, that was fully about love, mentorship, forgiveness, culture, teaching, language, pride, stories, strength, memories, protecting, ceremony, and gratitude, and a fathering that was about supporting mothers.

Thank You...

Elder Dorothy Meness, an Anishinabkwe and member of the Kitgan Zibi Anishinabeg reserve, who welcomed participants to traditional Algonquin territory.

Elder Paul Skanks, a band member of the Mohawks of Khanawake Iroquois Confederacy, who offered prayers, insights and wisdom throughout the event.

Mr. Dan George, of Four Directions Management Services, who facilitated the event with respect, sensitivity and humour.

Ms. Colleen Stephenson, the artist who beautifully and sympathetically rendered the gathering visually as it progressed, allowing participants another means of engaging with the wisdom and teachings that were shared.

The NCCAH also acknowledges and thanks the keynote speakers and all panelists for sharing their time, experience, insights and wisdom.

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For suggested resources and links to related information, please visit our website: www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/298/Messages_of_Mothering.nccah

*“We cannot afford to lose any more young women. We need to be strong;
we need the young population to know who they are.”*

Jeannette Corbiere Lavell

APPENDIX



Program Description & Contacts

Grassroots Grandmother Circle (Mi'kmaki Nugumijk) Doreen Bernard, Indian Brook, Nova Scotia

The Grassroots Grandmother Circle (Mi'kmaki Nugumijk) is a community action group of women, grandmothers and mothers who are our future grandmothers, as well as grandfathers and fathers who support the women and any others who want to come together. In the circle, the grandmothers support each other, share experiences, strengths and gifts, and empower each other to create positive change and work together to help the L'nu people, families and communities. The goals of the circle are to provide a safe place for open discussions and sharing of cultural teachings, ceremonies, prayers, life experiences, wisdom, gifts and strengths with one another. The grandmothers offer input into solutions to the many problems and issues that affect families, communities and Mi'kmaq Nation. Learn more at 1 902 758 3593.

Healthy Families Program Sandra Favel Rewerts and Heather Beatch, North Battleford, Saskatchewan

The Healthy Families Program was established in 2006 by the Battleford Tribal Council Indian Health Services. The program operates in partnership with a number of other federal initiatives including Aboriginal Headstart, Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program, FASD, Children's Oral Health Initiative, Maternal Child Health and other referral agencies. The Community Health Nurse

is the case manager for clients, prenatal parents who each undergo a voluntary strength-based holistic assessment. From this assessment, a case plan is developed and referrals are made as needed. The objectives of the program include increasing the number of women who will access prenatal health services, providing early detection and referral for developmental delays, increasing parent knowledge and skills regarding the developmental and nutritional needs of their children, and providing education, support and counseling to pre- and post-natal women to meet their emotional and mental health needs. Learn more by contacting Heather or Sandra at 1 306 937 6700.

From the Womb to Beyond Imelda Perley, Tobique First Nation, New Brunswick

From the Womb to Beyond is a culturally based program designed to ensure that the Maliseet language, worldviews, traditions, and ceremonies are promoted among expectant mothers, mothers of newborns, and mothers of young children (ages 0-6). The program also encourages fathers to participate. From the Womb to Beyond celebrates ancestral birth and welcomes the seven generations into the physical world. These traditional teachings prepare parents to accept their responsibility of protecting and guiding their gift of creation, the newborn who journeys from the spirit world into the physical world. The program celebrates the “circle of life” and traditional teachings that accompany each phase of life beginning with conception and continuing to childhood, adolescence, adulthood and Elderhood. Learn more at 1 506 273 4277 or 1 506 460 8351.

Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn (Splatsin Teaching Centre) Society Deanna Cook, Enderby, British Columbia

The Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn (Splatsin Teaching Centre) Society is a non-profit organization whose mandate is to be an early learning and teaching centre that incorporates the Splatsin language and culture into programming for children aged 0-12 years old, parents, family, and community. The society is a community hub of services offering provincially licensed group child care, Aboriginal Infant Development programs, parent workshops, dental varnishing for children, parent drop-in groups, car seat loan programs, and a resource library for parents. It also offers enhanced child care programming such as yoga, dance, music, language and culture and full hot meals for children. The society has been providing quality child care since 1990. Learn more at splatsin.com or 1 250 838 6404.

Aboriginal Mother Centre Society Jacquie Adams and Marjorie White, Vancouver, British Columbia

The Aboriginal Mother Centre Society began in 2002 to address the needs of Aboriginal women. Located in the east side of Vancouver, in a culturally sensitive environment, the centre provides a food bank program, free clothing, a drop-in centre, a daycare, a community kitchen, office and technical support such as internet and fax access, advocacy and support programs, essential skills and training through social enterprise developments. The centre has developed a strategy to address its goals for the provision of urgently needed housing for Aboriginal women and children, along with numerous supports that foster self-sufficiency. Learn more at www.aboriginalmothercentre.ca or 1 604 558 2627.

Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children (AHBHC) Program, Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) Shelley Gonville and Lynne Picotte, Ontario

The MNO AHBHC program is a prevention/intervention strategy for families with children aged 0-6. The goal is to assist all Aboriginal families to provide the best opportunities for healthy development for children through family home visiting and service coordination including referrals. An equally important goal is to ensure that the program addresses the needs of children at risk to ensure that they have access to services and support. The program is voluntary and open to any Aboriginal family that requests service. The focus of the MNO AHBHC program is preparation for parenting, prenatal and postpartum care. There are three distinct components to the program in terms of service delivery: client-based service, participant-based education, and networking. Learn more at metisnation.org or 1 705 264 3939.

Maternal Child Health Program, Northeast Alberta Region Terri Sunjtjens, Alberta

The Maternal Child Health (MCH) program is designed to take a more proactive, preventative, and supportive approach to promoting and building independent healthy families in First Nations Communities across Alberta. The MCH program is open to pregnant women, mothers, and families with children aged 0-6 years old. The MCH program coordinates with other community programs and provides support, information and linkages. The immediate goal is to improve maternal, infant, child and family health outcomes and the long term goal is to ensure that all children can reach their developmental and lifetime potential. The program offers home visits, support, parenting and literacy courses, and MCH classes that include traditional teachings, basic skills, cooking classes, and various other skill building activities. Learn more by contacting Laura Cunningham-Shpeley at 1 780 495 2177.

The Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI)* —Laying the Foundation in Kanesatake

Karen MacInnes and Suzanne Dumais, Kanesatake, Quebec

From 1995-2001, Kanesatake developed a breastfeeding promotion program that saw the breastfeeding initiation rates increase from 32 percent to 75 percent. This program called Ka'nisténhsera Teiakotihnsie's (KT), "she who helps the mother," has been well documented.* Building upon this foundation, ten years later, the Kanesatake Health Center has been working on the implementation of The Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding with the goal of becoming accredited as a Baby Friendly health center. This has

involved the adoption of a Baby Friendly policy, the training of staff and peer support mothers, community awareness activities and establishing partnerships at many levels. Recently, preliminary funding has been received to launch a pilot project that will enable staff to document the process and to develop helpful tools and resources that can be shared with other communities that want to embark on this journey.

Keynote Speakers

Jeannette Corbiere Lavell President, Native Women's Association of Canada

Jeannette Corbiere Lavell is a strong Anishinabe woman, fluent in her language and culture and a member of the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island in Ontario. Dedicated to the causes of Aboriginal women for over 40 years. Ms. Corbiere Lavell challenged gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*, going to the Supreme Court of Canada to ensure equality for Aboriginal women in the early 1970s. She is a founding member and past president of several Aboriginal women's organizations, including the Ontario Native Women's Association, Indigenous Women of the Americas, Anduhyun, a Native women's residence and was interim president of the Native Women's Association of Canada in the 1980s. Ms. Corbiere Lavell has worked tirelessly as a teacher and school principal, education and employment counselor, accomplished advocate, cabinet appointee, and consultant on matters related to law, justice, equality and Indian status. She is the co-editor of a book, *Until Our Hearts Are on the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*. Ms. Corbiere Lavell has also served on many boards of directors, has worked to advance issues of concern for Aboriginal women in Canada and internationally, and has been awarded with numerous awards, honours and distinctions.

In 1987, the Ontario Native Women's Association established the Jeannette Corbiere Lavell Award, "to be presented annually to a deserving Native woman demonstrating the same qualities and dedication as Jeannette." In 1995, Ms. Corbiere Lavell was awarded the YWCA Women of Distinction Award. In 2008, she was appointed the first Anishinabek Nation Commissioner on Citizenship. In September 2009, she was elected to a three-year term as President of the Native Women's Association. In October 2009, she was presented with the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case, which honours individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of women's equality. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell is a proud mother of three and grandmother of five.

Maria Campbell

Maria Campbell is an author, playwright, filmmaker, researcher, educator and Cree/Métis Elder from Saskatchewan. Her publications include *Halfbreed* (1973), *The Book of Jessica* (1987) and *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (1995).

Among her plays, *Jessica* won the 1986 Dora Mavor Moore National Award for Playwriting, and the 2008 Spirit of Saskatchewan Award for *The Crossing*. In film and television work, Ms. Campbell has produced and directed over 35 documentaries, mostly in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples. Ms. Campbell's artistic work has always been grounded in social justice and a commitment to community. She has been doing volunteer work for over 40 years, working mostly with women and children in crisis. Her work has included being one of the founders of the First Women's Halfway House as well as the Women and Children's Emergency Crisis Centre in Edmonton; working with youth in community theatre; setting up food and housing co-ops; facilitating women's circles; and doing workshops on leadership and community organizing. Ms. Campbell was the translator and helper for the "Elders' Blockade" to stop logging in traditional Cree territory in Northern Saskatchewan in the 1990s. She has also worked with the Lubicon Lake First Nations in their struggle for land claims.

Awards for Ms. Campbell include an Officer of The Order of Canada, a Saskatchewan Order of Merit, a Canada Council Molson Award, and a National Aboriginal Achievement Award. Ms. Campbell holds four honorary doctorates and is a former professor from the University of Saskatchewan and First Nations University of Canada. She has held several writer-in-residence positions and is currently the Elder in Virtual Residence at the Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge, Athabasca University. She is also a co-applicant on two national research projects and a Trudeau Mentor. She has four children and is a grandmother of seven and great-grandmother of four.

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* The Baby Friendly Initiative is an international program established in 1991 by the World Health Organization and UNICEF to promote, support and protect breastfeeding worldwide in hospital and in the community.

