



***The Legacy Children's Foundation – Alberta***  
*Registered as a Society in Alberta and a Registered Charity with CRA*

**A brief description of the organization's history, purpose, scope of activities**

For the past 19+ years The Legacy Children's Foundation, Gift of Music Programs, have been providing instruments, half hour individualized music lessons (primarily guitar) and full hour individualized DJing and on-line drum lessons – 1–3-day workshop opportunities have also been offered...all programs provided through schools and service agencies, at no cost to participants.

All program activities are offered to youth 9-22 years of age and who are at extreme risk of leaving school early and being drawn into street culture and gang engagement.

A second critical program component that youth receive is long-term mentoring, with the majority of youth remaining involved with the same instructor/mentor for 6-8 years, at the same location. This unprecedented level of continuous engagement is unheard of within the industry and an outcome that has contributed significantly to our extremely impressive level of success - Legacy's GOM (Gift of Music) Programs have consistently met their above noted objectives at an 80% plus level since their inception...a similar program outcome to similar programs offered throughout North America and Abroad.

Other music related projects have included Music Infused Education, modelled after Education Through Music (ETM) in the US; our 10 week, Music Based, Entrepreneurial Training Course and year long Job Coaching Program; and our newly crafted Mental Health Program designed to support youth struggling with the aftermath of COVID, and those leaving care and those at risk of becoming homeless and subsequently engaged in crime – all circumstances that put a youth's mental health at extreme risk.

During these unprecedented times, like all agencies, we continue to investigate how we might creatively assist our communities' most vulnerable citizens and youth, while at the same time remaining true to our mission.

To accomplish this, we have stepped "out of the box" with an objective of assisting local First Nations Communities and Indigenous populations from around the world who are suffering severely from the sociological damage of historical abuses, poverty as well as the current COVID pandemic, and who have essentially lost their ability to market and sell their traditional arts, music and culture on a worldwide stage. Their ability to do this has essentially vanished and in order to assist them, we have created an interactive, on-line platform where First Nations People can continue to be involved in the healing aspects of their cultures, as well as market and sell their products and create awareness about their culture, to a world-wide audience of customers and potential philanthropic donors.

**Project: Strengthening & Healing Indigenous Communities Through Artistic Commerce**

Within first Nations communities it is clear that art and culture, in all its forms, play an important crucial, cultural AND societal role. This love of culture and the arts is deeply rooted within First Nations communities and has traditionally impacted these communities by creating a sense of pride and artistic expression that has for years drawn the attention of people from around the world who wish to explore the myriad of traditional art forms created by very talented and passionate artists.

As one would expect, this attention also brings with it financial opportunities. For Alberta's Indigenous communities revenues generally come from government and, in many communities, entrepreneurial initiatives that, in relation to the arts, are actually being driven by non-Aboriginal people.

What we have found revealing through our research is that the majority of stores and galleries selling Indigenous arts are not Indigenous owned or run, leaving the majority of profits and revenues in the hands of non-Aboriginal store and gallery owners, as well as non-Indigenous owned manufacturers. What is important to note as well is that very little marketing is done to assist in selling the above noted articles, leaving First Nations artisans extremely vulnerable during a crisis like COVID, since their sales strategy relies heavily on store fronts and walk in customers with very little strategic marketing occurring locally, nationally, or internationally.

The arts play a vital role in Indigenous culture and tradition and as noted, their livelihoods are significantly impacted by their ability to market what has been locally created on a world-wide stage. *Statistics Canada identifies arts, entertainment and retail and trade within Indigenous communities as the hardest hit in terms of revenue generation, employment, and layoffs with regard to the pandemic with apparently little relief forthcoming in the foreseeable future.*

Indigenous entrepreneurship is nothing new. According to a report created by RBC, 2020, the number of Indigenous business owners is growing at five times the rate of self-employed Canadians, and Indigenous women are starting businesses at twice the rate of non-Indigenous women. Indigenous people represent the fastest growth segment of the population, and given the tremendous growth projections for their economy, Indigenous entrepreneurship is — and will continue to be — a driving force of their long-term economic stability.

Marketing and selling arts and culture in the manner that we are proposing will generate jobs and subcontracting opportunities for Indigenous people throughout the community, i.e. marketing and sales, tech support, purchasing, security, training youth as well as consultation services and business development. When Indigenous people and businesses succeed, we all succeed, with communities moving away from managing poverty and relying on others, to managing wealth.

For Indigenous women in particular, self-employment is a way to increase their financial independence and stability. Indigenous women see entrepreneurship as a way to raise their family's quality of life and improve their community's socioeconomic circumstances. The ability to govern your own schedule as an entrepreneur is also a significant advantage, as it makes it easier to balance work and family time.

While entrepreneurial drive and impact are strong among Indigenous people, the existing model of operating will not be successful given the circumstances associated with COVID and other similar situations. Barriers to growth and success include small local markets, remoteness, and infrastructure challenges. For example, the high transportation costs, weak (or non-existent) internet, and expensive electricity all have a major impact on businesses operated on-reserve or in remote communities.

As does the challenge of attracting skilled employees — particularly in remote areas. "Some of the Northern communities might not have the same access to specifically skilled labour, and they have to

go elsewhere to fill their gaps. In remote environments, it is more costly to do that," says Patles Richardson, an Aboriginal entrepreneur. He also indicates the challenge of not having an established peer network. "*A lot of Indigenous companies and entrepreneurs don't have the same access to mentor-ships or peer groups, which can be very limiting as they look for support in growing their business,*" he says.

**For women entrepreneurs, there is a distinct lack of networking and training programs designed for women, and few role models or mentors**

### **Advantages Of Healing Through Art and Culture**

*with intro by Rita Kennedy/ Legacy's Artist liaison*

My family is the original maker of a popular line of mukluks and moccasins across Canada. My great, great, great, great, grandmothers showed their daughters how to hand stitch this apparel. And so, my generation was born. My sisters did not care to learn this art as they had their own interests in indigenous art. Some ribbon dresses and some star blankets, but I was most interested in what came from my family. As a child my family grew up with many dysfunctions and generational trauma.

As an outcome of this my mom did not know how to be a mother. She would stay in her room sewing making the beautiful apparel and sold it to a store that took advantage of her. This store was family owned and we watched them grow and prosper from our family's art. I used this art as a form to get close to my mom I offered to do her bead work for her only as a way to be close to her.

She would be so happy with my offer and started to tell me why the family started making them. She added that this skill would help me give my children milk one day that I could sell it to the store like she did.

In time I eventually learned to do the whole moccasin and started working making them from home and selling them to the stores as well.

These were the years I lived in very abusive surroundings. The neglect and abuse I suffered I thought to be normal, my mom did not know how to be a mom she only knew to sew so that's what she did. My dad abused her almost daily and abused us kids as well.

We grew up in pain and suffering. After a childhood of abuse, I then attached myself to abusive friends and married an alcoholic who was a residential school survivor. Again, I thought it was normal he showed me alcohol and drugs. I then started down a path to self destruction. I left my older children in the reserve because I did not learn how to be a mother.

To this day there is healing that is in progress for both me and my children. I then after a few years had my last child. I finally got my own apartment and started back to my sewing because my mom had passed away and the store she worked for needed to keep our work. I took the job but struggled because I was still addicted. I worked and stopped repeatedly because I struggled for stability in my life trying desperately to find it. Then one day at work as I was doing my craft the higher power revealed himself to me.

Through my sewing and worshipping I found clarity and started my road on a healing journey.

It has been many, many years I suffered from CPTSD and have learned to deal with my trauma. Let me gratefully say I would not have found this inner healing if I was not called to do this craft. It helped me to think, and self explore while I was sitting there quietly stitching my beads together. Today I have mastered the craft and my inner peace is the healthiest it has ever been. I no longer use

drugs or alcohol to cope with trauma.

The road of when I learned to make these apparel, sometimes was a struggle I had to pull apart and start over many, many times those struggles made me who I am today. I have since mastered the craft and a now thinking of ways I would like to give back.

My highest interest is to teach women and children how to start and appreciate this craft. As it would not only help them in struggles, but it will also be a tool in future self awareness and healing. Children will have a healthy avenue to turn back to in struggles as this will be seeds planted for future, as we all go back to what we know. Instead of only unhealthy seeds there will also be seeds of self exploration and healing planted in them.

That's a little bit of why I feel this is important - I feel not enough emphasis is given to this amazing tool.

### **Quotes from Dancing, Singing, Painting, and Speaking the Healing Story: Healing through Creative Arts**

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman wrote about the role of connecting with others as essential to healing:

*"The core experiences of psychological trauma are dis-empowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (1997:133).*

### **Creative Arts-in-Therapy**

Art can be used to express emotions safely, ideographically. People learned in residential school that you are punished for speaking, so they lost their voice, they lost their capacity to express themselves. Art became the process of regaining voice. Stories can be told in pictures, in music and in movement; sometimes with tears, but often with lots of laughter. I realized that at residential school people learned not to play, so we turned it over, invented or created games and provided experiences whereby people could express themselves through play with the effect of helping them to rebuild trust in relationships, an essential ingredient in healing. We began to use play—drums, balls, stilts, string—and do things they did not get to do as children. They expressed themselves as they would have, if allowed to be children (Bill Stewart, Yukon psychologist, interview, 7 May 2010).

Chapter 3, "Creative Arts and Healing: Building an Evidence Base," was originally published in *Pimatisiwin: Journal of Aboriginal and Community Health* in 2010. A revised version is reproduced here. The article describes the research methods and presents the findings from the survey and the key informant interviews. The survey confirmed that creative arts are being incorporated into healing programs to an extraordinary degree. In fact, only a handful of the 104 projects that responded to the survey indicated their programs did not include any creative arts activities, and more than half of the projects included seven or more creative arts in their healing programs. Reported activities included drawing, painting, carving, beading, sewing, mask making, drum making, drumming, singing, dancing, drama, poetry, song writing, storytelling, basket weaving, building a kayak, making snowshoes, traditional cooking, tanning hides, and making sealskin *kamiiks*.

### **Our Proposed Offering**

While Indigenous businesses are facing many of the same challenges as non-Indigenous businesses, they face some additional unique threats as well. For instance, businesses located on First Nations communities that are close to urban areas rely on off-community customers who travel to the community. As many communities have access restrictions in place because of the pandemic, the customer base for some of these businesses has all but disappeared.

There is no doubt that the arts play a vital and significant role in First Nations culture and communities and as noted, their livelihoods are significantly impacted by their ability to market what has been locally created and potentially sold.

The “driving force” behind Legacy’s proposed program, G.A.I.A Co-op, is to introduce First Nations people to the possibilities that are available to them and to help create strategies that will assist them in overcoming the numerous obstacles that they have been forced to confront.

A first step in providing these opportunities lies in the framework which has been established and shown successful with our GOM (Gift of Music) program. By making available gifted and passionate Indigenous teachers and mentors of art and craft-work, to not only take on and teach new Indigenous artists but also bring other Indigenous artists into a peer network and a place of mentorship where culture and skill can be taught and passed on, and ideas and vision can be exchanged. Youth are given opportunities other than the streets, and all are given a purpose to help pull them out of damaging cyclic patterns of negative thinking, abuse, and addiction.

The main difference between this project and our GOM program is the aspect of supporting the commerce of the project’s outcome, which is its art, thereby providing income for the involved artists and their communities and hopefully relief to some extent from the existing conditions of their poverty. Not only this, but to also generate the above-mentioned processes of healing which accompany engaging in the arts, especially arts which are culture, heritage and history related and tied.

### **Present Infrastructure**

To date we have developed an online website, [www.gaiaco-op.com](http://www.gaiaco-op.com), and a social media presence that is being used to support an essential aspect of this project. The website is now actively advertising and selling the art of up to nine Indigenous artists. Our website aims to be the main arm of commerce for the G.A.I.A Co-op, and a key means of advertisement for all engaged artists.

The website currently has 67 e-mail subscribers which receive weekly newsletters displaying a rotating feature storefront using various forms of media including storefront linked photos of products, videos and links directed to our social media outlets. We also have a “members area” on the site which has room for development and creativity as we grow. There are 43 members currently hosted on the site, 15 of which have opened “seller” accounts and have expressed interest as an Indigenous artist to join the program.

From the websites launch in January 2022 the G.A.I.A Co-op is proud to be able to say it has assisted in sales of over \$2000, and that 100% of proceeds have been directed back to each artist. Being a charity, we are also able to access donations from philanthropic sources in order to further the site growth in many different aspects to further assist in the marketing and sales of indigenous art.

Of particular interest, related to the site, is our ability to also inform buyers and members about the reality and magnitude of social issues that require attention within Indigenous communities from which each artist is connected. Our desire is to create a network of philanthropists who can become a

powerful financial force, dedicated to assisting Indigenous communities in addressing long-standing and devastating social problems that continue to plague these communities.

We also have been actively growing our social media presence using popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and others. So far our Facebook profile has been steadily growing with 1000+ followers and has generated a lot of exposure of each artist's artwork using both paid and organic advertising: <https://www.facebook.com/GAIAcoopART>

Ultimately, we hope to assist Indigenous communities in being able to create their own, home grown Arts Focused Cooperatives where local community members may become engaged in a wide range of functions related arts-based activities. As noted previously, roles such as marketing, sales, tech support, bringing products to market, product tracking, recruiting local artists, training and volunteering/mentoring from local community members and aiding in creating an online presence and strategies to connect with a world-wide audience of philanthropists and ensuring that their donations are fulfilling the needs of the community ...the objective being the creation of a world-wide gifting program and revenue producing opportunities for anyone within the community, including our children and youth.

As far as we know this is a one-of-a-kind undertaking that capitalizes on the passion, talents and the entrepreneurial spirit that exists within Indigenous communities. The world at this point in time is not going to come to these communities, but they have the ability, as noted, to take what they have produced to a worldwide market, through the platforms created by Legacy.

### **Where to start? Small Beginnings/ Your Involvement**

As mentioned previously, we are basing this proposed project on our extraordinarily successful and popular Gift of Music programs. Following on the heels of this success we are excited to be offering opportunities to very talented and passionate Indigenous artists, who are trained in their traditional art form and able to teach and pass on the talent which has been taught by their ancestors. This will bring healing and cultural adhesion, inclusion, networking, mentorship and prosperity to entire communities.

This, however, is only the beginning as we work towards our Vision of assisting First Nations and Indigenous communities in developing community based and lead Arts Cooperatives that will be open to all members of the engaged community and citizens from the surrounding area who will be encouraged to become involved.

To accomplish all of this we require your assistance, specifically we are asking that you:

- Please direct local Indigenous artisans to our program - those who you feel would benefit from being involved, taught a traditional art form and experiencing the benefits discussed above.
- As well we would also require a space if available to conduct the sessions on a consistent basis for the purpose of teaching and creating - the design of the project is very flexible and, in the event, where it is necessary, such as in COVID type measures or just not having a space available, we are able to shift to online forms of instruction.
- Finally, to accomplish our goal, we require necessary funds to support staffing, materials and operating. If you are able to donate or know of someone who might be interested, we would be most grateful...if you wish to donate, please contact the Legacy Office at 403-239-0717.

We are grateful for your assistance in helping to keep the program moving forward. Results to date have been outstanding but we still have lots to do, and we are excited to move to the next phase of creating the Arts Cooperative model, which can be implemented in any interested community.