

# Looking Out For Each Other

A Project Update – January 2019



## LOFEO Media Workshop Event in Halifax

Media and social media play an important role in engaging community when a person goes missing. It can mobilize people to search for a missing person, keep an eye out for them and help see them come home safely. Press releases by police are often shared on social media and can similarly help locate a missing person. And yet, many times the reports on missing persons end up recycling racist stereotypes and reinforcing wrong-headed ideas about Indigenous Peoples. In our sharing circles, we have heard many harrowing stories of media reporting that was less than helpful or even harmful.

As part of the “Looking out for Each Other” project, we want to work with journalists, filmmakers, journalism students and communications experts to learn what

journalists are doing to improve media reporting about missing and murdered Indigenous women, document best practices and facilitate exchanges between families and media. To this end, we have been working with Catherine Martin, a Mi’kmaq filmmaker based in Halifax. In 2001, long before missing and murdered Indigenous women became a nationally recognized issue, Catherine made an important documentary about Annie Mae Pictou Aquash, a 30-year-old Nova Scotia born Mi’kmaq woman who was murdered in South Dakota in 1975. For over three decades, the crime remained a mystery. Catherine’s documentary “The Spirit of Annie Mae” was key to reviving the interest in this case, which ultimately led to the arrest, prosecution and conviction of two co-perpetrators in 2010. You can watch the documentary on the website of the National Film Board. Catherine has remained dedicated to helping families and friends of missing Indigenous people. She joined our project in 2016 and was instrumental in organizing the National Inquiry hearing in Membertou.



(Lawyer Natalie Clifford, Filmmaker Catherine Martin, and APTN Reporter Trina Roache)



On November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 Catherine brought together community members, Indigenous journalists and the “Looking out for Each Other” leadership team for an evening and full day of discussions. Our goal was to make connections, build relationships and develop principles and best practices that can be shared with journalists and journalism students.

APTN reporter Trina Roache shared her experiences working with the Saunders family and reporting on Loretta Saunders’ murder, as well as the preliminary inquiry, the guilty plea and its aftermath. She emphasized the importance of gaining the trust of the people whose stories are reported and noted how challenging it was to engage in responsible journalism in the face of very fast-paced sharing of information through social media.

Nic Meloney, the Atlantic region reporter for CBC Indigenous shared his experiences reporting from the National Inquiry hearing in Membertou. In a colorful turn of phrase he described the journalist’s experience of the National Inquiry as putting your mouth over a fire hose. Nic also noted how much important information is shared informally, away from the hearing over smokes outside or during breaks. He noted that there was a tension between reporting the individual stories and lived experience of participants in the inquiry process and the demands of the national broadcaster for contextual and systemic analysis.

Both journalists agreed that the stories they report on affect them personally and

deeply. The experiences and stories are full of trauma, which can result in very emotionally charged interactions with journalists. They also both spoke about the tension between being too close and not close enough, about the challenges of maintaining a professional outlook on the story while connecting with the real human beings who story it is. A further difficulty arises because news outlets often imagine that balanced reporting requires giving equal weight to what are ultimately unequal perspectives. For example, Indigenous people are only interviewed about Indigenous stories, but white people are interviewed about all kinds of stories, including Indigenous stories as a matter of balance. Trina said that this was less of a problem at APTN because of the clear Aboriginal focus of the broadcaster.

We also heard important advice from Natalie Clifford. Natalie is a lawyer and communications expert who has been working with the National Inquiry. She emphasized that it was very important to educate the public as this was much more likely to have traction in public discourse than telling politicians that they are doing the wrong thing. Natalie suggested that educational opportunities associated with journalism awards may be an appropriate venue for sharing our principles and best practices.

Karen Bernard is a Resolution Health Support Worker working with Eskasoni Mental Health. Karen has extensive experience supporting residential school survivors, families and victims of crime and



violence. It was all the more poignant that at the workshop she had a more personal story to tell regarding the recent death of her niece Cassidy Bernard. Karen spoke to the humility in Mi'kmaq culture, and the respect for family. For her, this meant that the mother's wishes to be left alone by the media should be respected. She was proud of her community's response as people had generally allowed the family to mourn and had not inserted themselves into the story by giving interviews to the media. She was troubled by the description of the surviving infants as "orphans" in recent media reporting, noting that the family and the community had come together to care for the children.

Helen Regnier is the Aboriginal Victim Case Coordinator with the Nova Scotia Family Information Liaison Unit (FILU). She helped us understand how the unit is organized differently in Nova Scotia from the way New Brunswick has implemented the unit. Helen is embedded at the Department of Justice and she noted that this institutional setting sometimes facilitated police and other justice communications.

Key outcomes of the meeting were the identification of the following guiding ideas for journalists reporting on Indigenous stories and issues:

- Building and sustaining trust
- Respect for the people whose stories are reported
- Focusing on communities
- Growing cultural competencies
- Practicing self-care

Participants also agreed to meet again to expand the group. Everybody felt that the meeting had been helpful in beginning the dialogue on better media reporting and journalistic practice. The team is grateful to all participants and particularly to Catherine Martin for convening the workshop.

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## The National #MMIW Inquiry and Our Project

The work being done through LOFEO has been making a substantial contribution to the National Inquiry (NI) into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The LOFEO project team has been involved with several aspects of NBAPC's and the Native Council of Nova Scotia's (NCNS) position as Parties with National Standing during the NI.

The LOFEO project team has contributed to the cross examination of expert witnesses, content and recommendations made in final submission. The NI has provided opportunity as a platform to disseminate information from the project research and has helped raise the profile of the project nationally. NBAPC and NCNS presented the final submission as Parties with Standing on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in Ottawa.

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## LOFEO I'm Listening Project

LOFEO is currently working on a plan to provide concrete and effective assistance to families and friends of missing Indigenous persons. With the help of funding from

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), LOFEO has started a new project titled *I'm Listening* to develop the structure for implementing a telephone helpline service in Aboriginal organizations.

Leaders in our communities have voiced the importance of having navigators who are trained and knowledgeable in the mainstream and Indigenous services fields to support families and friends of missing persons. These navigators would assist families in accessing and navigating resources such as legal aid, media support, police support, housing, mental health and cultural needs.

The *I'm Listening* project will map and list current referrals in the province of New Brunswick. This will help gain knowledge on the scope and location of existing services across the province. With the help of project researcher Janelle Marchand, our next step is to learn from Aboriginal organizations on their valuable expertise in delivering effective and culturally safe services to families and communities.

Marchand says that Aboriginal organizations are experts in providing support to their community members. "Organizations know where the strengths are in current referrals and whether there is room for improvements." Marchand adds that the project will work with organizations to highlight service gaps. "These gaps are going to help the project make recommendations for a strategic implementation plan to make sure the helpline is sustainable."

The *I'm listening* project report will be available in April 2019.



(Gignoo Executive Director Shelley Germaine and Outreach Worker Sheila Williams)

## **RIBBON OF REMEMBRANCE** Gignoo Transition House

The Ribbon of Remembrance Project began as a passion project at Gignoo Transition House, with Outreach Worker Sheila Williams about 3 years ago. The large purple ribbon is covered in over 200 feathers, each representing the identities of a missing or murdered Indigenous woman or girl.

There have been so many names that as they have continued to add to the ribbon it no longer has room. Gignoo has begun to find new ways of displaying the feathers, such as a large dream catcher that was made. The Ribbon of Remembrance is displayed during the week of the Red Shawl

Campaign and the Sisters in Spirit events each year. In the spring, Gignoo wants to raise awareness by bringing the ribbon and the dream catcher to communities.

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## **LOFEO HELPLINE with Gignoo Transition House (Launching Early 2019)**

The LOFEO project, in partnership with Gignoo Transition House, is establishing a helpline (not an emergency line), to be launched this year in New Brunswick. The helpline will serve as a support, information and referral service system. The helpline will be piloted in New Brunswick in partnership with Gignoo Transition House and is supported by a locally adapted resource guide and a package of information brochures, developed through the project. The resource guide contains information to connect families with local and provincial resources for legal, policing, media, housing, and emergency crisis support, which will help families navigate through the various systems. The information brochures guide support workers who are assisting families and friends in their decision to call 911, a non-emergency policing service, and/or seeking legal advice.

Gignoo Transition House is making a meaningful contribution to the project by hosting and servicing the helpline for the New Brunswick Aboriginal community whose loved ones have gone missing. Gignoo staff have been receiving training for operating the helpline, providing them with the added skills and information necessary to help callers. As an organization, Gignoo is experienced and

equipped to offer this kind of helpline, and the staff come with knowledge and sensitivity to trauma. When someone goes missing, navigating policing and legal services, while managing fears and trauma, during such a difficult time can be incredibly challenging. Our goal in creating this helpline is to help families and save as many lives as possible. We want to thank Gignoo, and especially Executive Director Shelley Germaine, for this much needed service.

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## **LOFEO RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: Dalhousie University Naomi Metallic**

Naomi Metallic is an Assistant Professor of Law and the Chancellor's Chair in Aboriginal Law and Policy at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University.

Of her research interests, Naiomi says, "Above all, I am interested in how the law can be harnessed to promote the well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. I approach this issue from multiple angles, from constitutional to administrative law, international law to equality law and human rights codes, to *Indian Act* Band Council bylaw powers. Although some advances have been made since the recognition of Aboriginal and Treaty rights in s. 35 of the *Constitution Act* in 1982, there is still much work to be done.

Indigenous peoples in Canada remain at the bottom of virtually every socio-economic statistic in this country and continue to face discrimination and systemic racism on a regular basis. As legal practitioners and scholars who are concerned about the situation of Indigenous peoples in this country, we have the responsibility to think about the problems facing Indigenous groups in Canada in innovative ways and to convey our ideas in ways that are accessible to the communities they are intended to serve."

Naiomi has begun working with the LOFEO project research team on media cultural competency in MMI cases. Law student Marissa Prosper will be working with assisting her.

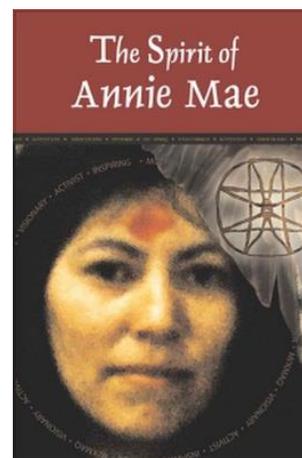
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## Wolastoqiyik Sisters in Spirit

The Wolastoqiyik Sisters in Spirit held events during their Days of Awareness week (October 2018), including a Poetry Slam that our project helped organize as a member of the Wolastoqiyik Sisters in Spirit Committee. Poems, short films, music, and artistic expressions of loss, anger, strength, sadness, grief, resilience, community, and hope, were inspiring and deeply emotional. There were 95 people in attendance at the St. Thomas University auditorium for the event

The space was filled with an outpouring of support for survivors and healers, while honouring those who have been taken. We want to thank Wolastoqiyik Sisters in Spirit



for their important work. We would also like to thank filmmaker Catherine Martin, who presented her powerful film "The Spirit of Annie Mae".



**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**LOFEO Symposium**  
**May 15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup>, 2019**  
**At the Crown Plaza,**  
**Fredericton, N.B.**

The LOFEO Symposium will be held May 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> 2019. We will be bringing together representatives from our partnering organizations, university researchers, community members, and stakeholders on the project. The LOFEO Leadership team will be presenting on what has concluded to date. Researchers from Memorial University, Université du Québec a Montréal and the University of New Brunswick, will present their research from the project. We will also be inviting other researchers to present on what they are working on around the MMIWG2S issue. If you would like to read any of the completed reports, they are available on our website at <https://nbapc.org/lofeo-research-reports/> .

If you have any questions about the Symposium, please contact our Academic Research Coordinator Anthea Plummer - [law-lofeo@unb.ca](mailto:law-lofeo@unb.ca)

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