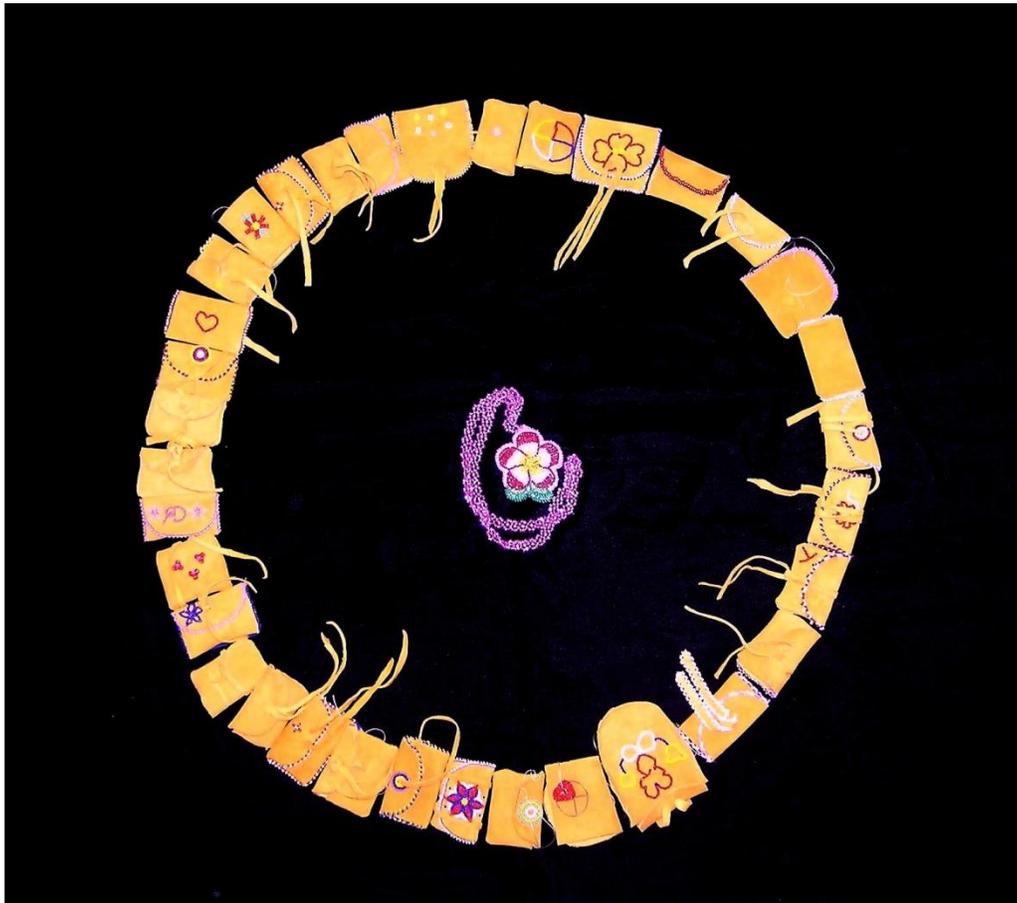


# *Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle*



*Becoming and Growing: 2002-2011*

Prepared May 2011 by Jayla Rousseau-Thomas

## Contents:

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Pgs 2-3   | President's Letter  |
| Pgs 4-5   | Becoming Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle                     |
| Pg 6      | A Project and History Timeline                                    |
| Pgs 7-15  | The History of Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle               |
| Pgs 16-17 | Looking Forward: Strategic and Future Planning                    |
| Pgs 18-19 | Raising Our Voices – Aboriginal Women's Shared Vision Declaration |



## President's Letter

It has been my privilege to have had the opportunity to be involved with Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle since its beginning nine years ago. I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to be involved in the growth and development of WAWC as an organization. Over the last nine years WAWC has come a long way, a feat I am very proud to have been a part of.

It is also important to acknowledge all the women in our community who have contributed to WAWC becoming the organization it is today. Thank you to all the women who have served, or are currently on, our Board of Directors. Also, a huge thank you to the elders and their contributions to our workshops and programming; without their infinite wisdom and the connection they provide to traditional roots and culture, our work would not have been possible. Another group of women deserving acknowledgement are those who made our ideas come to fruition, the staff, past and present, of WAWC especially Executive Director Ingrid Johnson.

To date, the work of WAWC has been accomplished based on priorities identified by Aboriginal women in the community. Through input from the community at Annual General Meetings, meeting with Aboriginal Women, Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits, with our various programming during past years, WAWC has been able to meet some of these needs and provide a voice for Aboriginal women in Whitehorse. By strategic planning, we have been able to keep our views on the horizon and toward the development of significant future projects, including *A League of Our Own: Aboriginal Women's Centre*.

Through the various leadership development work, we have done, it is our hope to empower Aboriginal youth for the future. Our greatest hope is that they will take up the torch to move forward and take their rightful place in society as leaders. I encourage young Aboriginal women to step forward and get involved in their communities. They have the power to shape and determine the future.

I look forward to being involved with WAWC in the years to come, and to continue to advance the interests of Aboriginal women in the community.

Gunalcheesh,

*Adeline Webber*

President, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle



## Becoming Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle

As a whole, Aboriginal Women in Canada have been without a voice, both nationally and in their home communities. Eleven women met on the evening of September 18, 2002 to discuss the necessity for an Aboriginal Women's organization in Whitehorse. At this meeting it was decided that an organization would be formed, to be named Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, WAWC. Starting with the founding meeting in September 2002, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women have gained a voice that has led to a significant impact for women in the community.

Much of the first years of WAWC were spent becoming a fixture in the community. The organization participated in and contributed to many community events, such as National Aboriginal Day, International Women's Day, and others. Another key aspect of the Circle's first years was to build community contacts and relationships with other community organizations. This meant meeting with other non-profit groups, First Nations organizations, and multiple governmental departments.

By spending the time initiating and cultivating relationships with other community organizations, WAWC has worked with a significant number of community organizations. Over the last nine years, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle has had the opportunity to work with a variety of local organizations in multiple capacities. Some of these organizations include:

- Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council
- Liard Aboriginal Women's Society
- Yukon RCMP
- Women's Directorate
- Kaushee's Place
- Victoria Faulkner Women's Center
- Ta'an Kwachan Council
- Kwanlin Dun First Nation
- Northern Cultural Expressions Society
- Sally and Sisters

- Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition
- Committee on Abuse In Residential Schools
- Elizabeth Fry
- Council of Yukon First Nations
- Skookum Jim Friendship Centre
- Mayo Aboriginal Women's Society
- Department of Justice
- Victim Services

WAWC continues to be actively involved with many of these agencies. Through annual participation in events such as the December 07<sup>th</sup> commemoration, Take Back the Night, and the Sisters in Spirit Vigil, WAWC is present to support and be a voice for Aboriginal women.

As WAWC began working on larger projects, the organization decided on certain key components that remain important to any work the Circle does. The following is a list of key values of Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle that are embodied in any work the organization does:

- To involve and encourage youth at every opportunity
- To highlight the strengths and accomplishments of Aboriginal Women
- To use financially responsible practices
- To use Aboriginal Women to develop and deliver workshops for the organization
- To promote capacity building for Aboriginal Women and their communities, and
- To consult *Raising Our Voices – Aboriginal Women's Shared Vision Declaration* for program and workshop implementation

By using these values in all the organization's work, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle continues to remain true to its original mandate to provide culturally relevant programs and services that enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of Aboriginal Women in Whitehorse, YT.





## Project and History Timeline

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Sep 18, 2002: Founding Meeting</b>   | <b>Feb 04, 2004: Activity Report</b>  |
| <b>Jun 21, 2004: National Aboriginal Day</b>                                    | <b>Dec 17, 2004: Policy Forum on<br/>Aboriginal Women and Self-Governance</b>               |
| <b>Feb 11 &amp; 12, 2005: Our Healing Journey</b>                               | <b>Feb 14 &amp; 15, 2006: Aboriginal Women Against<br/>Violence on Breaking the Silence</b> |
| <b>Nov 22 to 24, 2007: Yukon Aboriginal Women's<br/>Summits</b>                 | <b>Mar 7 &amp; 8, 2008 Raising Our Voices:<br/>Leadership Training</b>                      |
| <b>March 28 &amp; 29, 2008: Rebuilding our<br/>Cultural Strength</b>            | <b>Feb 04 to 06, 2009: Developing Our<br/>Leadership Skills</b>                             |
| <b>Mar 19, 2009: Naming and<br/>Claiming our Future</b>                         | <b>Apr 16, 2009: Yukon Hall Commemoration</b>   |
| <b>Jun 13, 2009: June Gathering</b>   | <b>Dec 10, 2009 to Apr 15, 2010: A Natural Path<br/>for Women</b>                           |
| <b>May 2010: Office Move</b>  | <b>Apr 01, 2010: Aboriginal<br/>Women's Advocate</b>  |
| <b>Feb 14, 2011: Website and Online Community<br/>Launch</b>                    | <b>Feb 23 and 24, 2011: For Love of<br/>the Children</b>                                    |
| <b>Apr 2011– Working Together<br/>for Change</b>                                | <b>May 18, 2011 to Mar 31, 2012:<br/>Reclaiming Our Aboriginal Roles</b>                    |
| <b>May 30 &amp; 31 2011: Aboriginal Women's<br/>Mentorship Training Program</b> | <i>The Future- Culturally Relevant<br/>Gender Inclusive Analysis</i>                        |
| <i>The Future- Advancing a League of our Own:<br/>Aboriginal Women's Centre</i> |   |

## The History of Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle

### **September 18, 2002 – Founding Meeting**

On this date 11 attendees gathered to express interest in making a difference in our community of Whitehorse as Aboriginal women. Two questions were asked, and each attendee answered from her own perspective. These questions were: what purpose could we serve, and why is it important to form an organization? At this monumental meeting it was decided that a society would be formed, to be named the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle (WAWC).

### **Activity Report - February 04, 2004**

Much of the initial years of the organization were spent introducing it to the Whitehorse community, and spreading the word on what services WAWC could provide. WAWC's activity report identifies activities of the organization, as well as a variety of partnerships that had been developed. This included meeting with Federal and Yukon Territorial Governmental officials, collaborating with Women's Directorate on a variety of projects, participating in a roundtable discussion regarding Women Entrepreneurs, participating in Take Back the Night marches, and more.

### **National Aboriginal Day - June 21, 2004**

WAWC partnered with Gathering of Traditions Potlatch Society to plan, organize, and put on community events for National Aboriginal Day in Whitehorse.

### **Policy Forum on First Nations Women and Self-governance – December 17, 2004**

As a representative of Aboriginal women in Whitehorse, WAWC participated in this forum with other women's groups. At this forum some women expressed frustrations at feeling excluded in land claims talks, others spoke with passion about inequities for women in the workplace, homes, and non-First Nations populations. From this forum the document "Raising our Voices: Aboriginal Women's Shared Vision" was developed and has become a reference point for all work WAWC does.

**Workshop: Our Healing Journey - Feb. 11 and 12, 2005.**

This workshop, delivered to 42 participants over two days, had the goal to promote capacity building, encourage commonality and essentially advocate the healing journey of eliminating violence, disrespect, and racial discrimination among all races. During this workshop participants had opportunities to identify how their community dealt with violence issues, what skills were lacking in the community, and what skills could be further developed to influence healthy community change. Another focus of the workshop was for participants to explore personal physical, emotional, spiritual and mental care.



**Conference: Aboriginal Women Against Violence on Breaking the Silence - Feb.14 and 15, 2006**



Sixty-five participants from 16 Yukon communities travelled to Whitehorse to participate in this conference. The conference covered an array of topics dealing with issues of violence in the family, communities, and nationally. Conference participants identified key areas requiring attention and

priorities for community, policy and other areas needing change. After the

conference participants identified feeling as though they had opportunities to enhance their awareness of violence, abuse, and bullying issues in the Yukon, as well as the importance of self love, self worth, strength, and importance of self. Participants also identified developing an understanding of the need for action, speaking out, and increasing violence prevention.

### **Yukon Aboriginal Women’s Summits – November 22 to 24, 2007**

As a representative for Aboriginal women in Whitehorse, WAWC participated in the Yukon Aboriginal Women’s Summits, hosted by the Women’s Directorate and Yukon Advisory Council on Women’s Issues. At this conference, the outcomes of the 2007 National Aboriginal Women’s summit were shared, and priorities were determined for furthering Aboriginal women’s equality in the Yukon. From this summit, WAWC has committed to work toward the ideals and recommendations expressed by the 200 plus Yukon Aboriginal women who attended the summits. Another outcome of this project was the development of “Raising Our Voices: Aboriginal Women’s Shared Vision Declaration.”



### **Workshop: Raising our Voices, Yukon First Nations Women's Leadership Training – March 7 and 8, 2008**

In response to a need, as identified by Aboriginal women, this workshop and curriculum was developed to give a better understanding of the land claims and self governance processes through presenting information that is explained in clear, plain language. The goal of this workshop was to enhance leadership skills, to empower, and to build the capacity of Aboriginal women. Workshop topics covered women's traditional and leadership roles, a review of land claims and self government, social policy development, gender inclusive analysis, and leadership as Aboriginal women: what does leadership look like today.

### **Meeting: Rebuilding our Cultural Strength, May 28 and 29, 2008**

During these two days, women gathered to identify the significance of culture. Through a unity exercise, identifying themes that are important for a community, as well as information sharing, and creating an environment that was conducive to information sharing, the workshop allowed women to talk about subjects that normally do not receive a lot of attention.

### **Workshop: Developing Our Leadership Skills - February 04 to 06, 2009**

Delivered over a three-day period, this workshop covered a variety of topics related to Personal Leadership Development. The first day focused on Personal Development, looking at topics such as traditional leadership roles, identifying one's own strengths, recognizing and overcoming barriers, self esteem building and self care. For the second day the focus was on team building, effective communication and working in a team. For the wrap up day this workshop examined Community Needs Assessments, seeking funding, project management and evaluation. While this workshop may have been mostly focused on the individual and developing her skills, through working with Aboriginal women the workshop was also able to work on building capacity in First Nations communities.

**Workshop: Naming and Claiming our Future (youth focus group workshop) -  
March 19, 2009**

Geared towards youth, this workshop was intended to determine what Aboriginal women want for careers and their futures, as well as what barriers there may be to achieve their ultimate goals. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 30, with a variety of educational experiences from some high school, high school diploma, some college to college certificates. Throughout the workshop, participants identified their strengths, dream jobs, barriers, and how to overcome these, traditional roles in work, and where to seek funding.

**Yukon Hall Commemoration - April 16, 2009**

Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Council participated in the Yukon Hall Commemoration event, as past students and residents of the hall said goodbye to the last standing residential school building in the Yukon as it was set to be demolished. WAWC contributed to the event by donating financial support to cover the costs associated with the closing ceremonies for this building.



## **June Gathering – June 13, 2009**

This event was organized by WAWC to have the membership get together, discuss important issues, and share what WAWC had been working on. A total of 26 women participated. Participants answered several questions such as what could be done to build membership, and what could be done to move WAWC forward. The meeting concluded with fun and games, prizes and a prayer.

## **Workshop Series: A Natural Path for Women - December 10, 2009 to April 15, 2010**

A series of workshops delivered over a five-month period, were developed to cover topics of traditional teachings for young women. Topics included family violence, substance abuse, parenting skills, family relationships, men's and women's roles in the family, self empowerment, spiritual connections, and more. The outcomes of this project were to achieve balance in First Nations families and communities, share traditional and cultural knowledge, and reduce other factors that put women and female youth at risk. After the workshops, participants identified the following as skills that they felt would be helpful to them personally: self and self care, traditional roles, mental and physical health, leadership, and traditional culture.



## **Office Move and Set-up – May 2010**

In 2007 WAWC co-located with Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council and set up its first office at 103 -307 Jarvis street. As the organization outgrew the space, in May the office moved upstairs to 202-307 Jarvis street into its current office which has allowed room for the organization to be better able to continue its work with Aboriginal Women in Whitehorse.

## **Aboriginal Women's Advocate - April 01, 2010**

For women who may need support, in a variety of ways, the Aboriginal Women's Advocate has become available as a resource to women in the community. The advocate assists women who are struggling, under-represented, require assistance accessing programs and services, need counselling and emotional support, and assists Aboriginal women in a multitude of other ways. This program is funded through Crime Prevention and Victim Services Trust Fund.



## **Report: Working together for Change: *An Analysis of Barriers & Challenges Facing Whitehorse Aboriginal Women* April 2011**

WAWC was able to conduct research into the services and programs available for Aboriginal Women in Whitehorse. This included an analysis of service gaps, as well as barriers to women accessing the services available to them. For future plans and programming, this report is able to direct WAWC to be able to enhance the services available to Aboriginal Women in the community.

### **Website and Online Community Launch: February 14, 2011**

With the launch of a new website, WAWC incorporated a method for Aboriginal women in Whitehorse to be able to connect with others. By using a discussion forum, the Talking Circle, WAWC created a place for women to be able to chat, discuss, share information, and interact on the web. Current topics include: For Love of the Children, Our Stories, Tales and Legends, and Traditional Roles Today.

### **Conference: For Love of the Children – February 23 and 24, 2011**

This two-day conference was hosted by WAWC to address a few of the residual issues of residential schools in the Yukon. Subject matter focused on three key areas. First of these was to examine and address issues of violence in immediate and extended Aboriginal families. Another focus was to enhance the opportunities for Aboriginal Women to enter the fields of governance, leadership and culture reclamation. The third objective of this conference was to enable Aboriginal women to regain pride in their culture and remove the barriers that prevent them from being self-sufficient, economically independent, and pursue further education opportunities for themselves and their children.



## **Workshop: Aboriginal Women's Mentorship Training – May 30 and 31 2011**

This workshop was created as a component of the development for a professional mentorship and coaching program that would include formal support to professional Aboriginal women and youth. Another objective of this workshop was to encourage the participation of professional Aboriginal women and youth with a variety of levels of education and experience, and to encourage Elder mentorship.



## **Workshop Series: Reclaiming Our Aboriginal Roles (ROAR) - May 18, 2011 to March 31, 2013.**

Based on traditional teachings, the ROAR project has four modules that will help participants identify barriers and challenges that prevent Aboriginal Women from reaching their potential and reclaiming their traditional roles. The overall theme of this project is for Aboriginal women to understand the root causes of violence and learn how to move forward in a positive way.

## **The Future – Culturally Relevant Gender Inclusive Analysis**

As a task from Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summits, YAWC will be developing curriculum and courses for First Nations organizations and governments to be able to develop policies that do not limit or hinder the involvement and participation of women.

## **The Future- Advancing a League of our Own: Aboriginal Women’s Centre**

WAWC continues to work towards establishing a dedicated space for Aboriginal women in Whitehorse. It has been identified, multiple times by various groups, that as a priority to the healing journey of First Nations women, a place of their own is needed. The establishment of this center would also allow for an increase in program availability and accessibility for Aboriginal women.

### **Looking Forward: Strategic and Future Planning**

To ensure the continued sustainability of Whitehorse Aboriginal Women’s Circle, the organization has been focussed on strategic and future planning so that the association may continue to serve Aboriginal women in the community. For organization of WAWC’s goals and to track progress, the Circle has completed several strategic development plans to keep it on a planned path into the future.

“Revitalization of the Spirit of Aboriginal Women: Three Year Strategic Development Plan” was the first of these reports completed by WAWC in 2007, looking forward three years into 2010. This report recognized that not all Aboriginal women required the same type or level of support and programming. It also identified that there is a single resounding, common message of Aboriginal women and that is the “deep need for an Aboriginal Women’s Organization that is proactive on issues that affect our families and communities, that will provide culturally relevant programs and support services that invest in our young women, creates a space and place for Aboriginal women to learn, network, and advance their personal development without guilt or shame, and come together on an annual basis to address issues of common interest, concern, or simply to foster the community of Aboriginal Women.” The report went on to describe current issues for Aboriginal Women, as well as needed supports, services, and programs in Whitehorse. Establishment of the Aboriginal Women’s Centre was the primary concern of this report, something that WAWC continues to work towards.



In 2010, as the first strategic plan came to the end of its scope, WAWC created a second plan that would extend from 2010 on until 2015. Key goals of this report included securing long term funding, establishing community partnerships, initiate a support network for aboriginal women, create appropriate programming to utilize an effective Board of Directors, increase membership, and more. While some of these tasks have begun, the association is continuing to make each a reality.

A final report by WAWC is the Client Report: Action Research Project, completed April 2011. This report was completed to ascertain the current state of WAWC and to establish goals (business, leader and team) for the association. These broke down into:

- 1) Boosting participation of board and members through increasing member alignment to the strategic plan.

- 2) Increasing WAWC's ability to obtain funding.

- 3) Leading the board from an advisory board to a participatory board.

Over the eight months of this report there were several accomplishments. These included creating position descriptions, creation of a past-president position, a new strategy for quarterly board meetings, monthly executive meetings, and review of the strategic plan.

## RAISING OUR VOICES – ABORIGINAL WOMEN’S SHARED VISION



*As Aboriginal women* we embrace love and respect as our ultimate values which must be included in all training, education and self government processes;

*As Aboriginal women* we understand we are not aggressive in nature and communicate quietly when governing and we must continue to develop our own ways of communicating our messages;

*As Aboriginal women* we know that Yukon land belongs to First Nations people and women are the stewards of this Land;

*As Aboriginal women* we acknowledge that we played an instrumental role in instigating Land Claims talks at the outset and we must continue to be involved in future implementation;

*As Aboriginal women* we recognize our need for a sisterhood and a united front that includes validation of each other, and we must come together to discuss our issues at meetings on a more regular basis;

*As Aboriginal women* we see the need to provide support to young women and want to see support to youth councils in each community as this is a critical component to ensuring self government is sustainable in communities in the future;

*As Aboriginal women* we know that community grows from the grassroots and that the voices of Elders as advisories, must be included in all meetings and gatherings that involve First Nations people;

*As Aboriginal women* we know that curriculum development in Yukon schools must include Land Claims, History of First Nations, educational culture camps,

historical events, re-establishing the balance between women and men in communities and the traditional roles of women and men;

*As Aboriginal women* we need to be educated and learn skills that help us to interpret Land Claims documents and then be able to develop constructive and effective ways to communicate to our communities in plain and understandable language-bring our story back to our communities;

*As Aboriginal women* we advocate for changing the Indian Act and Bills, especially Bill C 31 that entrench First Nations people in continued colonization;

*As Aboriginal women* we want to ensure that traditional ways of healing and spirituality are practiced and that we embrace self government within ourselves first as individuals and second in communities;

*As Aboriginal women* we need to understand how the government systems work (Federal and Territorial) and the cultures we work with and take the best from that;

*As Aboriginal women* we must create a long-term vision that includes building traditional healing centres that incorporate traditional knowledge, family traditions; and,

*As Aboriginal women* we need to advocate for a future forum bringing Yukon First Nations women Elders and Youth together to identify a common Mission, Vision, Goals and Values that are important to us.