

A Feathers of Hope Graphic Novel



MANIDOO
MAKWA
SPIRIT BEAR



FEATHERS OF HOPE

Manidoo Makwa: Spirit Bear
A Feathers of Hope Graphic Novel
©2019

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FEATHERS OF HOPE

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LETTER FROM FEATHERS OF HOPE

As a newly formed charitable organization with a CEO and a Board of Directors, Feathers of Hope remains deeply rooted in northern Ontario. Our Office is located on Fort William First Nation and our team is spread between north and southern Ontario. We remain a First Nations organization serving Indigenous young people in Ontario and beyond. Our work has equally deep roots in the conversations and work tied to Truth and Reconciliation and the implementation of the 94 Calls to Action. Hope is our foundation and community is the place where we hope to have the greatest impact. We are young people and adults working in partnership with young people. Together we are, Feathers of Hope.

Feathers of Hope has become a celebrated part of the work that Indigenous young people are mobilizing across the country. As the work tied to Every Child Matters and the memory of Indian Residential School Survivors come together in the work of this generation of Young people we see just how much survival matters. As we undertake the work of reimagining Feathers of Hope we also take pause to reflect and remember the work we all must do if we are to realize the Calls to Action. Feathers of Hope is proud that as we step into our new role as a charitable institution we do so just as this country proclaims its; First National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Our work has never mattered more, we have a long road ahead and we plan to ensure that Indigenous young people continue to come together to mobilize the change they want to see in their communities.

We are excited to share an executive summary that includes recommendations made by Indigenous young people to address issues they heard at the Feathers of Hope Culture, Identity and Belonging youth forum.

Betty Kennedy, Feathers of Hope CEO
Karla Kakeagamic, President of the Board of Directors

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LETTER FROM THE AMPLIFIERS



SAVANNA BOUCHER
AMPLIFIER



KARLA KAKEGAMIC
AMPLIFIER



SAMANTHA CROWE
AMPLIFIER



TALON BIRD
AMPLIFIER



RYAN GILES
AMPLIFIER



EDWARD NARCISSE
AMPLIFIER



TRIVENA ANDY
AMPLIFIER



DESIREE TOWEDO
AMPLIFIER



MELINDA HENDERSON
AMPLIFIER



ELTON BEARDY
AMPLIFIER

Feathers of Hope (FOH) invited Indigenous young people from northern Ontario to register to attend a five-day forum in Thunder Bay, Ontario, July 11-15, 2016. The purpose of the forum was to gather and share our thoughts, feelings and experiences about our languages, ceremonies and cultural traditions.

We were overwhelmed with the response. Just over 265 young people responded to the invitation. In the end, more than 100 Indigenous youth from over 59 communities joined us in workshops, conversations, fun activities, and practical demonstrations regarding the topics of culture, identity and belonging.

Discussion was heartfelt and it was evident that everyone wanted to reclaim and learn more about their culture, history and traditions. We heard young people say

they wanted leadership, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and youth to work with one another to revitalize our cultures and keep them alive for future generations.

We heard young people talk about faith, about being traditional, about living on the land, about land-based learning, about being medicine carriers, jiggers, dancers, drum carriers and singers and wanting to be fluent in their language.

We also heard young people speak about the parts of our histories that cause family and community members pain, pain that gets in the way of us knowing who we are, being proud of who we are, embracing our culture and identity and feeling an unbreakable sense of belonging. We heard others speak about the consequences of not dealing with that pain, the racism we experience, and the

conditions in our communities that make it hard to be healthy, hard to be proud and hard to walk in two-worlds—the traditional and the dominant society that surrounds us.

We know there is a lot of pain in our communities and that there are things members of our families and communities avoid discussing. We want to understand. We know those conversations may be hard, but they will be easier if we deepen our connections with one another. To make those connections we need healing, we need our Elders and our communities to teach us about our roots.

We are strong peoples and despite any hardship we have faced, we are still here, our stories and teachings have survived. We need to know those stories and traditions and for the adults around us to live by them and to protect and care for us. Young people who attended the forum feel the pain of not having these things. They were also excited to meet with Elders and to talk with each other about their hopes moving forward. Most importantly, the young people saw a role for everyone at the table.

They want governments to fund language programs. They want systems to see that the costs are high when communities, families and young people do not have access to cultural programs; they do not have a sense of who they are within the context of their community and nation. Most importantly, they feel they do not belong. If the pain and the intergenerational trauma are to stop, then all levels of government must invest in what they historically worked so hard to stop—our cultures, our languages, and traditions. The work must start with us, the children who refuse to be left behind.

In this time of healing and reconciliation, forum participants were clear; they want all levels of government and Indigenous leadership to come together and realize nothing can change until there is common understanding and a shared interest in working together to help our communities heal from the pain and trauma we carry. We need investment from government to create safer, healthier living conditions in our communities, to provide the accessible supports and services, and to help us obtain our education.

In the past, the stories, experiences and recommendations for change provided by young people at the forums were summarized in a report. This time, the Feathers of Hope Amplifiers, working with a youth advisory group, felt that graphic novels would provide a better way to present issues and themes shared by young people at the forum listening table. Each novel presents a specific issue. The copy you are holding in your hand is one of the three we produced so far. We worked with an Indigenous writer and artists to create the images and words.

We hope you will share the graphic novels with others and more importantly, we hope you will use information in the Executive Summary and the novels to shape and inform change for Indigenous young people in this province.

Miigwetch,

Current and past Feathers of Hope Amplifiers


Savanna Boucher


Karla Kakegamic


Talon Bird


Samantha Crowe


Ryan Giles


Elton Beardy


Edward Narcisse

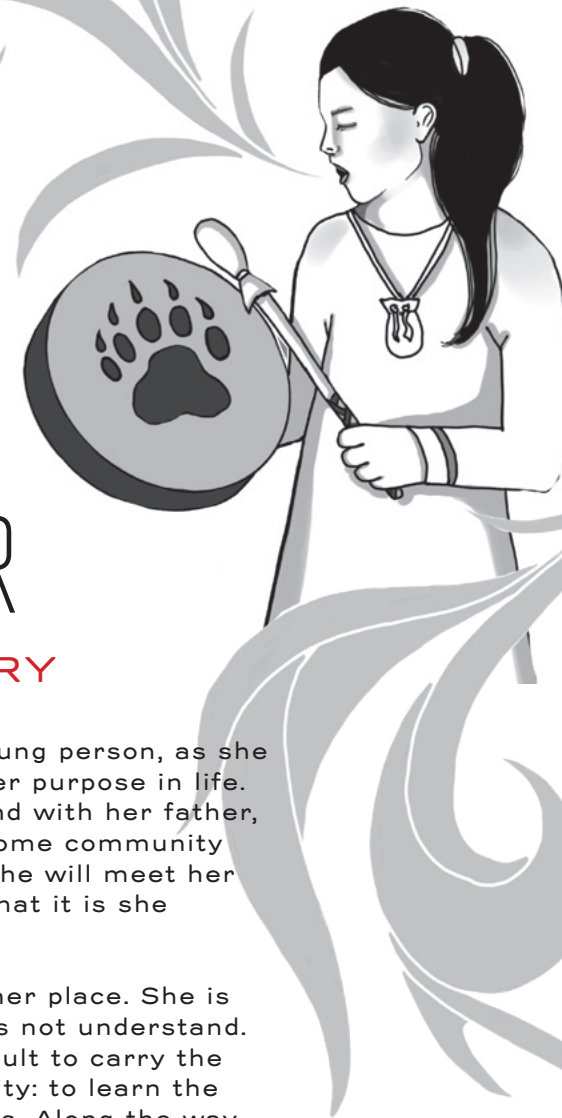

Desiree Towedo


Melinda Henderson


Trivena Andy



MANIDOO MAKWA: SPIRIT BEAR



ABOUT THIS STORY

Join Makwa, an Indigenous young person, as she takes a journey to discover her purpose in life. Having always lived on the land with her father, she travels to her mother's home community for the first time. It is there she will meet her grandmother and discovers what it is she must learn.

But Makwa struggles to find her place. She is thrust into a world she does not understand. Her insecurities make it difficult to carry the weight of her new responsibility: to learn the spiritual ways of her ancestors. Along the way, she discovers that the waters of her community are badly contaminated.

Something has to be done. What Makwa does not yet realize, is that she does not have to do it alone.

Script
Elton Beardy

Illustration
Monique Bedard (Aura)

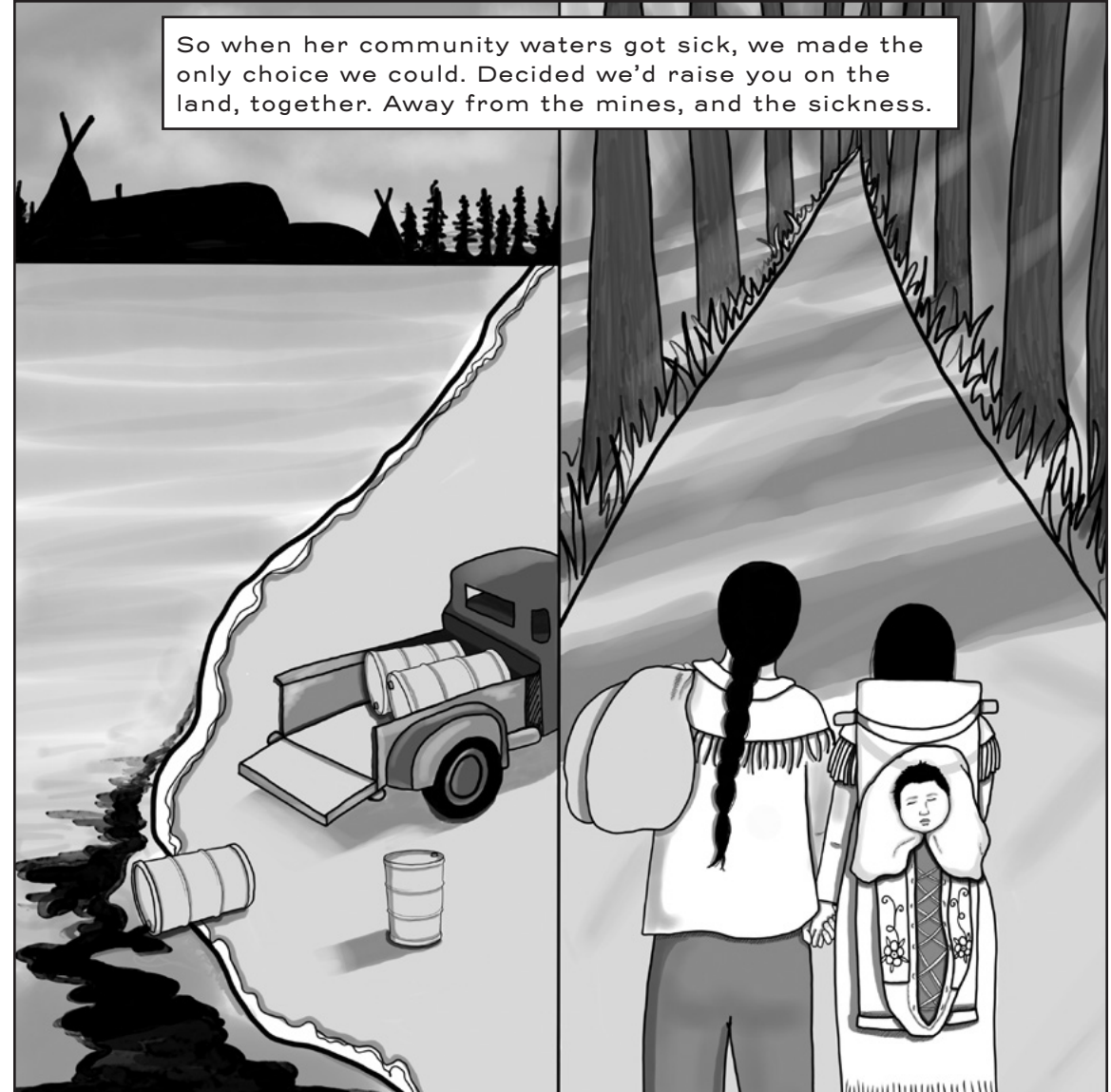
This is one of three graphic novels based on issues raised at the Feathers of Hope Culture, Identity and Belonging Youth Forum held in Thunder Bay, July 11–15, 2016. There are three graphic novels in the series. Each novel deals with one of the three central themes of the forum—Culture, Identity and Belonging.

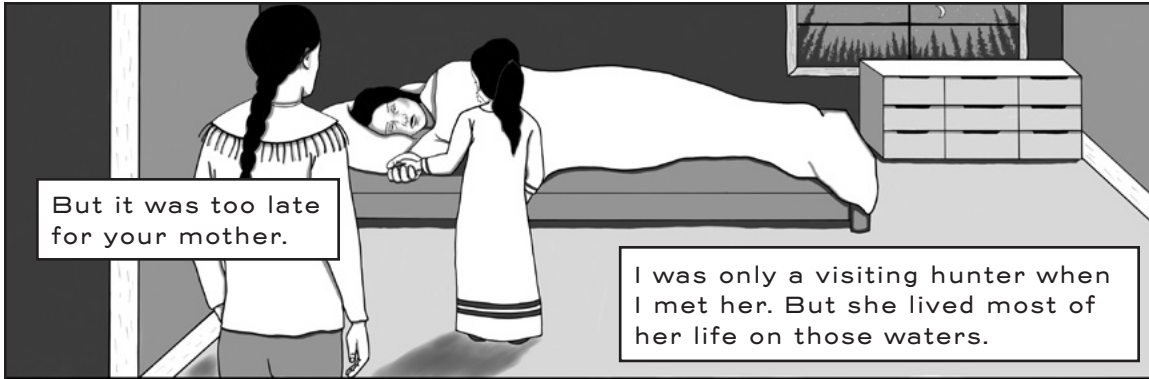
She always said love was a choice, your mother. But I think I just got lucky.



We got lucky, havin' you, Makwa.¹ She always wanted a daughter. Said she'd dreamt of you, even 'fore you got here.

So when her community waters got sick, we made the only choice we could. Decided we'd raise you on the land, together. Away from the mines, and the sickness.





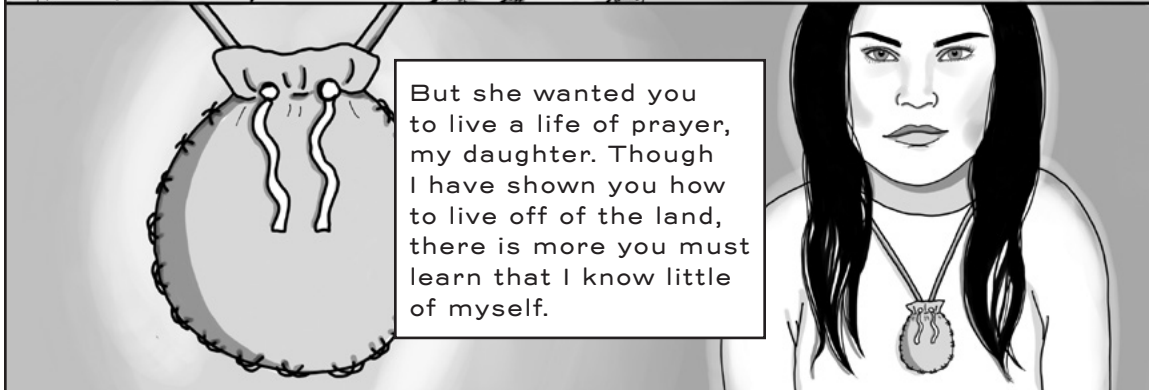
But it was too late for your mother.

I was only a visiting hunter when I met her. But she lived most of her life on those waters.



She wanted you to live our people's old ways of life, on the land.

Not many know these ways, not in this day and age.



But she wanted you to live a life of prayer, my daughter. Though I have shown you how to live off of the land, there is more you must learn that I know little of myself.



Which brings us to now. I have taught you all that I could, and you have learned well.

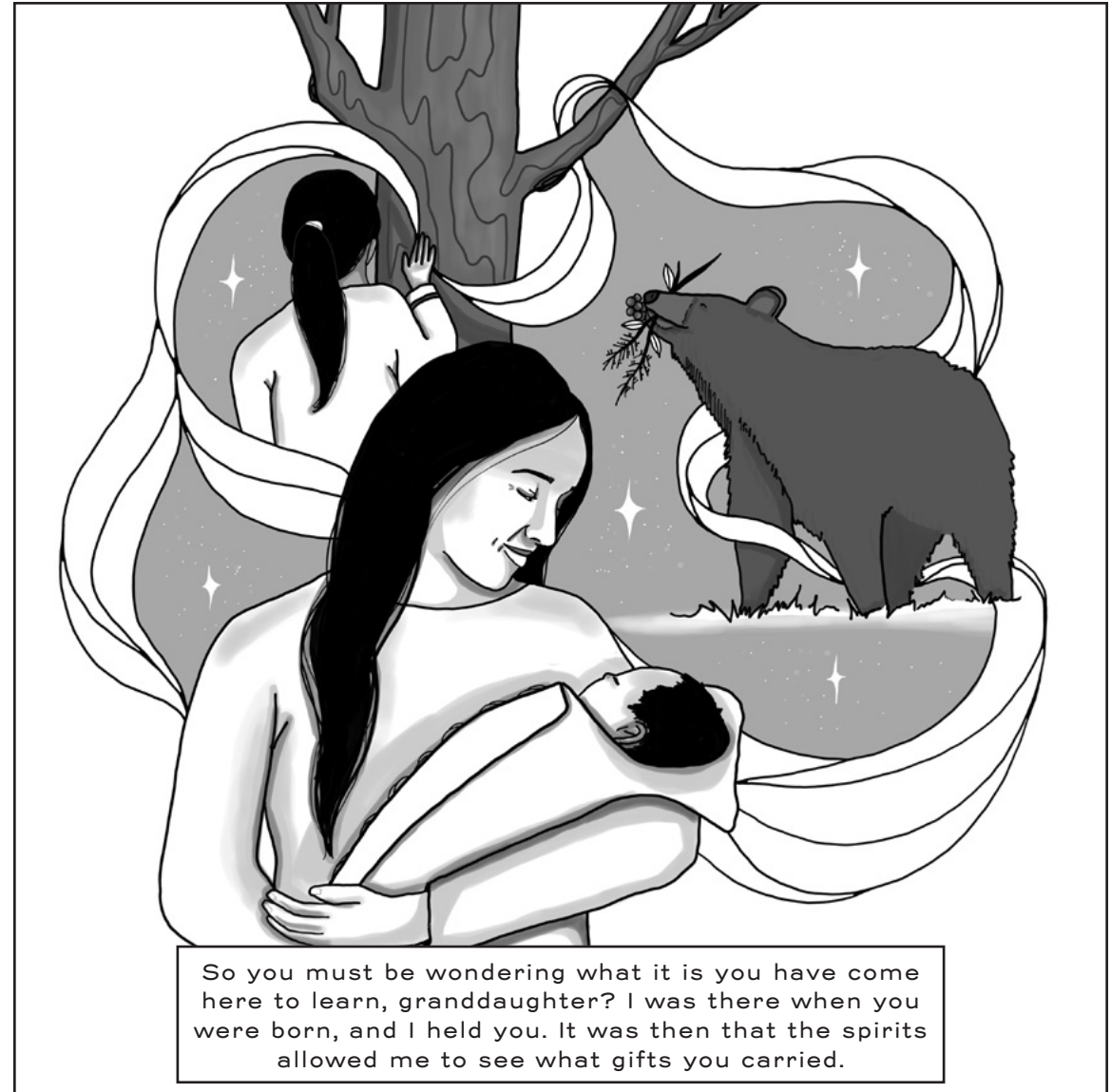
But you must continue to grow.

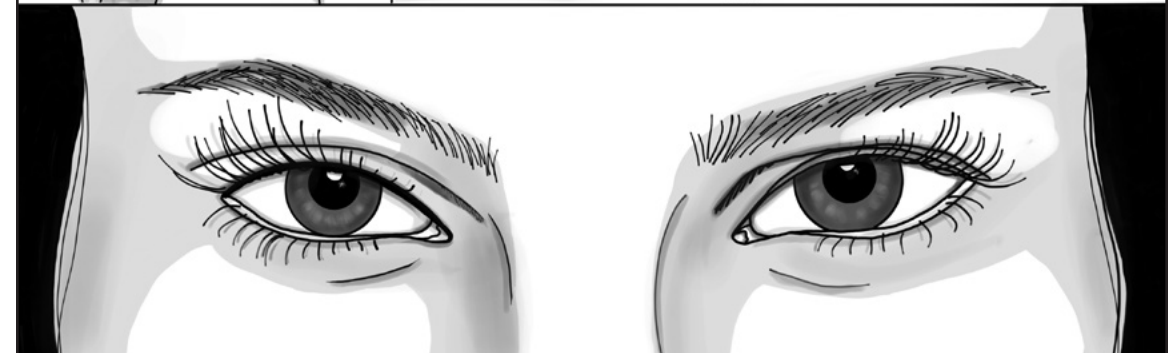
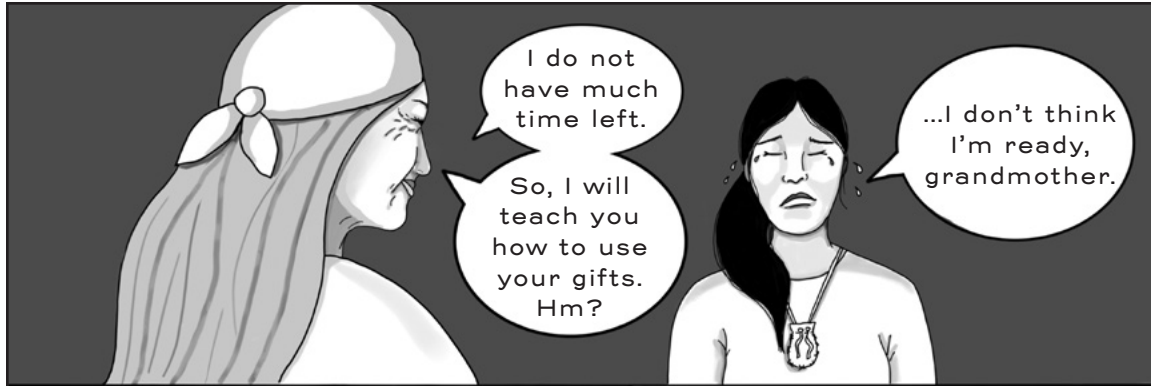


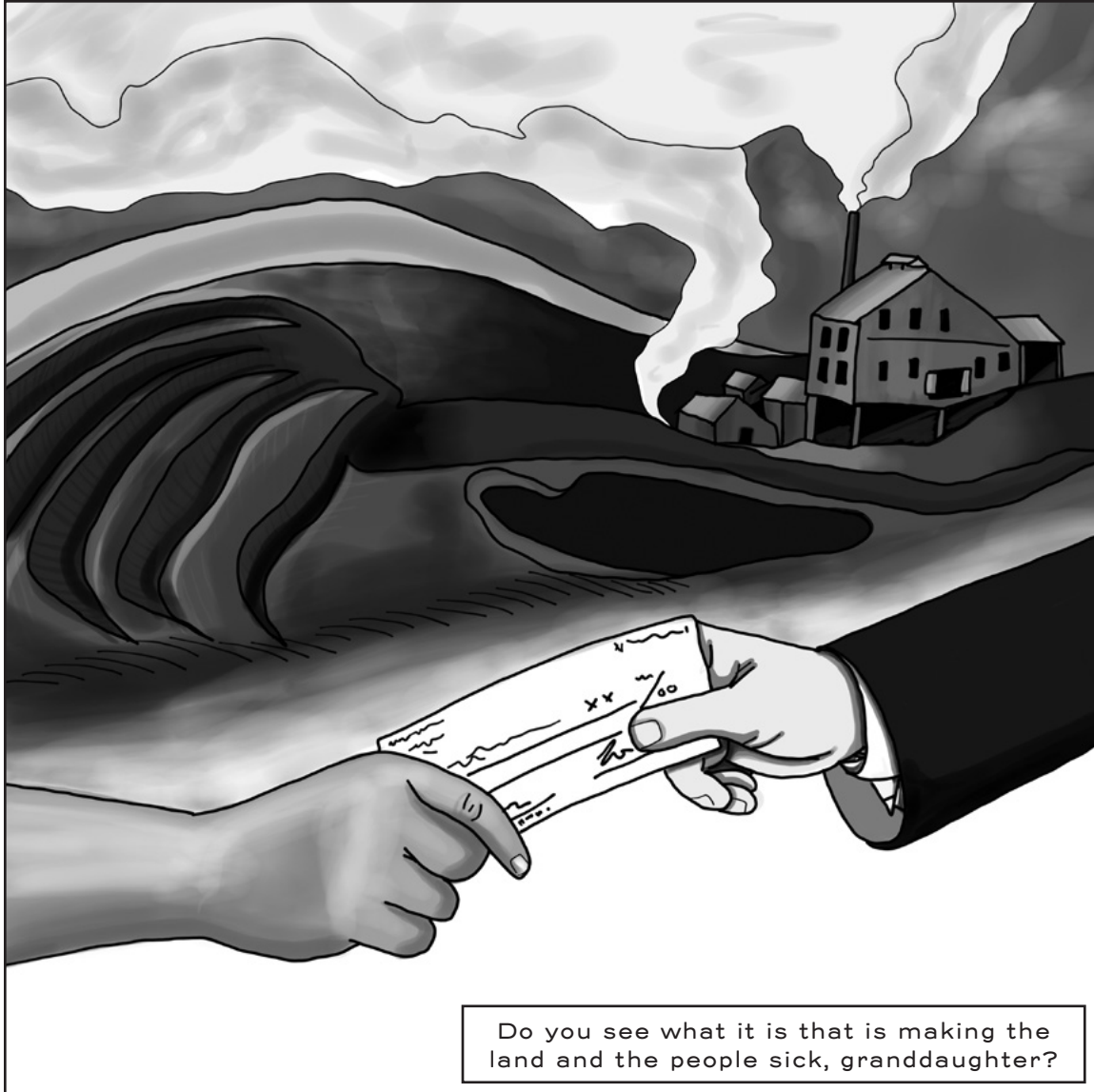
You have a grandmother, your mom's mom.

She understands the spiritual ways of our people. You must go to her.













We fight for the earth, for the waters,
for all living creatures, for our ancestors,
and the little ones yet to come. For life itself.

ENDNOTES

MANIDOO MAKWA

1. **Makwa.** The Anishinaabemowin word for Bear.
2. **Seven Sacred Teachings.** Often called the 7 Grandfather or Grandmother Teachings, they are a set of principles and laws originating from the Anishinaabeg. The Teachings are Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, Wisdom, and Truth. They are a code of moral conduct or a way to live on the earth so that we show respect for all living things.
3. **Water Ceremonies.** Water has significant cultural and spiritual importance to all Indigenous nations. There are ceremonies dedicated to the land and the waters to honour their roles as givers of life. “The Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from Her comes all living things. Water is Her life blood. It flows through Her, nourishes Her, and purifies Her.”*
4. **Laws of Creation.** These laws speak about how First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples are connected to the Earth as their Mother. Each Indigenous nation has laws considered sacred and that teach us to be responsible caretakers of the land.

* Benton-Banai, E. (1998). *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. St. Paul, MN. Indian Country Press.

BACKGROUND
TO THIS STORY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2016, Feathers of Hope hosted our fourth forum in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The purpose of what we called the Culture, Identity and Belonging Forum was to provide a safe space for First Nations and Métis young people to gather and discuss their life experiences and ideas to help connect them to the traditions and customs of their communities. The forum was also a celebration of First Nations and Métis cultures in Ontario.

Feathers of Hope worked with an Elders advisory circle to develop forum workshops to stimulate dialogue on the topics of culture, identity and belonging. We also worked together to create social, recreational and cultural events for the purposes of both entertainment and learning.

During the forum, participants had access to Elders deeply anchored in the customs and traditions of their communities, including an Elder who identified as part of the Two-Spirited or LGBTQ2S+ community. Young people had opportunities to do beadwork, build drums, participate in a sweat lodge, hear longhouse stories and attend a sunrise ceremony each day. The forum concluded with a powwow where young people drummed, danced and taught each other the history of their dances and ceremonies associated with the pow-wow.

Forum activities tied to culture, traditional practices, ceremony and medicines were

The forum created a space for First Nations and Métis young people to gather and discuss their life experiences and ideas to help connect them to the traditions and customs of their communities.

optional as not all forum participants embraced or practised traditional culture. Some young people anchored their feelings of hope in religious faith.

A primary objective of the forum was to create a safe space and help participants give voice to the things that provided them with a sense of hope, a stronger connection to their communities, and a connection to resources they could turn to when they needed to reach out for support. Young people were encouraged to find their own paths and to consider how they might hold faith and traditional life within themselves without feeling they had to choose one over the other.

Three days of conversations and cultural and learning-based workshops culminated in an afternoon of presentations made to



a listening table composed of Indigenous leadership, government representatives, service organizations, police services and other members of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. Participants, many of whom felt overwhelmed and at times afraid to speak in front of a large crowd, found their voices and shared their thoughts and ideas about change with admirable courage.

Many youth shared their concerns about the living conditions in their communities. Others spoke with sadness about the impact on family and community members of decisions made by family court judges and child welfare staff.

There was great concern expressed about the environment, the impact of polluted waterways and the debt future generations will have to pay for decisions made now about their lands by non-Indigenous people. Some spoke about the devastating impact of gender-based violence against Indigenous youth who identify as Two-Spirited or LGBTQ2S+. There was also mention of feelings of emptiness about not

knowing the teachings of their communities, not being able to speak their language, and not having access to Elders and Knowledge Carriers to provide them with information to help them build their future lives.

Many participants believed there were too many barriers blocking access to the supports and services they needed and too few resources available from government to help families and communities provide everything necessary for children to thrive.

There was consensus that racism and discrimination play a central role in their life experiences on- and off-reserve. It was common to hear requests for more access to culturally relevant and accessible educational materials to help young people understand the impact of legacy issues associated with intergenerational trauma, the Indian Residential School system and colonialization and how each affected their ability to embrace and celebrate their First Nations and Métis identities.

Responding to participants' requests for accessible learning materials, the Feathers of Hope team, in partnership with the Feathers of Hope Culture, Identity and Belonging Youth Advisory Group, accepted the challenge and reached out to Elders, youth Amplifiers, an Indigenous writer and artists and Knowledge Carriers to create three graphic novels. Each novel presents an issue raised by young people during the listening table at the Culture, Identity and Belonging forum.

The young men who were part of the advisory group built a grandfather drum and the young women built hand drums under the careful guidance of Elders and Knowledge Keepers.



The Elders and Knowledge Carriers worked closely with the youth advisors to ensure the stories in the graphic novels remained anchored in the history and cultural traditions of First Nations and Métis peoples.

Feathers of Hope is proud to present these graphic novels. We hope the stories in this series lead you to wisdom and inspire you to walk with a good heart.

Responding to participants' requests for accessible learning materials, the Feathers of Hope Culture, Identity and Belonging Youth Advisory worked to create three graphic novels.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Feathers of Hope invited Indigenous young people from communities across northern Ontario to register for a five-day forum in Thunder Bay, Ontario, July 11-15, 2016. In the end, over 100 youth from over 59 communities participated in the event. At the forum, young people participated in workshops, conversations, fun activities, and practical demonstrations regarding the topics of culture, identity and belonging. On the final day, the young people worked in groups to prepare and give presentations to Indigenous leadership, government representatives, service organizations, police services and decision makers. The presentations focused on what they believed was necessary to increase young people's knowledge and understanding about their local culture and traditions and create a stronger sense of identity and belonging to their communities. Below is a summary of the themes and recommendations discussed at the forum to meet their needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Above all, participants at the forum want to see defined multi-year strategies that include a staffing model, activities and deliverables where required so that the recommendations, when implemented, do not just disappear due to funding cuts or changes in government or Indigenous leadership.

AS FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS YOUTH, WE NEED:

CULTURE

Investment in school programs to **teach us our languages and for language instruction** to begin in the early years and continue across all grades.

Opportunities to learn and practice the **grandfather or grandmother teachings and the teachings and ceremonies of our nation and peoples.**

Land-based cultural programming included in all subjects and at all grade levels.

Access to ‘customary care’ or families, relatives or other responsible adult members from our own nations if it becomes necessary for us to be in child welfare care.

Easy access to **cultural and language supports and resources** if it is necessary for us to be in child welfare care.

Use the 94 Calls to Action as a foundation in our work to strengthen the connections Indigenous young people and communities have to Culture, Identity and Belonging.

Access to sport and recreation programs in schools and the community that reflect our cultural teachings and heritage.

Access to music, arts, dance and other ways of expressing our culture through our schools and community programs and for Elders and Knowledge Keepers to lead them.

IDENTITY

Our cultures and history taught, respected, and celebrated through the curriculum of all schools across Ontario and Canada to increase awareness and eliminate stereotypes about Indigenous peoples.

Knowledge about our treaties incorporated into our education and the curriculum of all schools in Ontario and Canada.

Two-Spirited or LGBTQ2S+ young people need access to Elders, resources and services that focus on our inclusion and acceptance in all parts of community life.

Feathers of Hope will work with young people to build and strengthen relationships with communities and leadership so that the work and accomplishments of young people are recognized and celebrated as a vital part of building a strong sense of self.

Our communities to support youth-led and youth-designed activities to promote positive connections among our peers.

Our healing traditions respected and included in services designed to promote and protect our mental and physical health on or off reserve.

The Calls to Action state that educators, social services and justice system personnel working with Indigenous people **must have training and cultural knowledge.**

BELONGING

Stronger connections between youth, Elders and Knowledge Keepers so we may learn about our clan systems, family trees and the teachings, customs, ceremonies and traditions of our communities and nations.

More opportunities to participate in the ceremonies of our nations.

Youth centres and safe spaces where we can gather, be ourselves and speak about our concerns without judgment from adult members of our communities.

More youth councils or opportunities to form closer working relationships with our Chiefs and Band Councils to ensure leadership understands the concerns of local youth.

Our leadership and other adults in our communities to **let us lead or be part of conversations about the things that concern us** as we have the lived experience.

Opportunities to learn about our gifts and to get involved and contribute to community life.

Our communities to hold more public cultural events and celebrations of our history, culture and traditions to build connections among one another and create a stronger sense of community.

The supports and services parents, families and communities need to help children and youth thrive, communicate with one another and feel strong bonds of connection to everyone.

Access to supports and resources to help us understand and **heal from the impact of intergenerational trauma** caused by racism, the Indian Residential Schools, colonization and the displacement from our traditional lands.

Positive, healthy peer and adult role models to instil hope, reconnect us to our culture if that is our wish, and show us that it is possible to break the chain of intergenerational trauma.

Access to supports and services to **address addictions and mental health needs** and to reduce the risk of suicide.

Investment in our communities to create **culture specific or culturally-anchored prevention strategies** to promote positive physical and mental health and improve the health and wellness of all community members.

Programs to reach out to families and provide positive parenting skills.

Investment to create programs to **help those of us who need support transitioning from our homes to care and from care back to our communities.**

Access to cultural supports and services while we are away from our communities attending school.

¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to document the history and lasting impact of the Indian Residential School system on Indigenous students and their families. In June 2015, the Commission released a summary report of its findings about the history and impact of that school system along with 94 “Calls to Action” to address the harmful legacy of the schools and promote reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous peoples.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

MONIQUE BEDARD (AURA)

Culture, identity and belonging are important in my art and all find expression in my work. My art is an extension of my spirit and helps me learn about myself. Through my art, I am able to explore who I am, discover more about my family and community, and express, share, release and spread love. It is not just about my own healing journey, but other people's as well. This is all part of what belonging means to me.

I personally connect to the story of *Manidoo Makwa* and her journey to reconnect with community and family. I especially loved the grandmother in this story as my grandmother helped raise me when I was around the same age as the main character. I learned a lot from my grandmother. I also related to the way that Makwa expressed her emotions, found her gifts and put them into practice.

The story reminded me that trusting your path and your heart leads you to do great things. Creating the illustrations for the story helped me grow as an artist. This is my first full graphic novel and I was able to exercise so many creative parts of myself. I used to dream about creating comic books when I was a child.

I hope this story connects to young people in a way that makes them feel hopeful, empowered and heard. I hope they see themselves reflected in the story and are reminded to access and use their gifts.

moniqueaura.com
[@monique.aura \(Instagram\)](https://www.instagram.com/monique.aura)

WRITER'S STATEMENT

ELTON BEARDY

As a writer, there are stories that come to you and ask to be told. They come as flickers of flame, ready to catch on: this is one such story. It centers on an Indigenous superhero whose 'powers' are from the natural world, gifted by the spirits. It is a teaching in many Indigenous cultures that each of us carry knowledge and gifts that are unique and given to us by our spirit helpers. Gifts that are meant to enrich the lives of not just ourselves, our families, and communities, but the world itself and life as a whole. It was this teaching of responsibility that the youth advisors to the Feathers of Hope forum on Culture, Identity and Belonging wanted to share with the world, through the story of the character they created: Makwa.

Makwa is an Anishinaabemowin word that translates into English as 'bear'. In many Indigenous cultures around the world, the Bear is seen as a medicine carrier, teacher, healer and caretaker of the land. The bear is the carrier of the teaching of 'bravery', which is one of the Seven Sacred Teachings of the Anishinaabeg. The young people of the advisory committee wanted the bear to be present in the story's themes. Manidoo, meanwhile, translates as 'spirit'. Together, the name means Spirit Bear. This was inspired by a traditional Ojibwe drum song of the same name, which naturally fit as Makwa was intended to be a singer and drummer.

The theme of healing is also featured prominently through the water ceremony, where Makwa reclaims her role as a water protector and carrier. Under the tutelage of her grandmother, she gradually begins to grow past the insecurities and doubts of her youth to become a woman capable of uniting and leading her people to protect Mother Earth. Together, they move forward to ensure a happy, healthy, and strong future for present and coming generations.

Just as Makwa found the bravery to discover and live intentionally through her cultural traditions, I hope we can, too.

Miigwetch.

DESIGN STATEMENT

AND ALSO TOO

The stories that make up Feathers of Hope graphic novels were crafted by Indigenous youth through a collaborative design (co-design) process. Over the course of 6 meetings, the Feathers of Hope (FOH) youth advisors and Amplifiers combed through transcripts from the Feathers of Hope Culture, Identity, and Belonging youth forum, drawing out narratives that echoed the lived experiences of over 100 young people representing 59 communities in Northern Ontario. An Indigenous writer and artists then built on this foundation to bring the stories to life.

Co-design, like advocacy, is about centering the voices and needs of those who are directly affected by the issues in question. It is about sharing creative leadership and honouring the knowledge that each person brings to the process. And, like any collaborative undertaking, co-design is not without its challenges. As facilitators of this project, we truthfully did not know at the outset whether it would be possible to co-design a series of graphic novels: Could the stories be written collaboratively? Would it be feasible to develop a shared artistic vision of what the stories might look like?

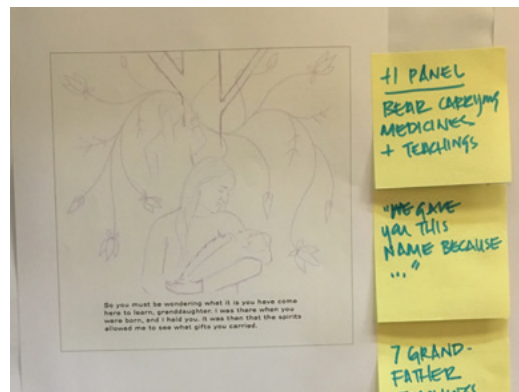
The FOH youth Advisors and Amplifiers did not appear to pause to ask these questions. Instead, they plunged headfirst into the work of speaking these stories into being. They shared with openness their teachings and questions about their cultures. They committed to seeing and lifting up each other's identities and in doing so, they created a deep sense of belonging for everyone involved—us included.

What you hold in your hands or see on your screen is the product of hundreds of hours of collaborative creativity and a remarkable amount of trust in each other through this process. Their commitment to co-creating these stories is a beautiful gift to Indigenous youth, and to young people everywhere.

andalsotoo.net

THE CO-DESIGN PROCESS





RESOURCES

If you need personal support, want to learn more about your culture, or have questions about your identity, you might find the following resources helpful. You can also speak to a member of your family or community, an Elder, or one of the off-reserve organizations below.

HOW TO CONTACT AN ELDER

The best way to contact an Elder in your area is to ask your Chief, a member of your Band Council or your Provincial Territorial Organization (PTO). There are four PTOs in Ontario: Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Union of Ontario Indians, the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians and Grand Council Treaty #3.

PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRES

Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)

Thunder Bay, ON

CALL 1-800-667-0816

WEB www.onwa.ca

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)

Toronto, ON

CALL 1-800-772-9291

EMAIL ofifc@ofifc.org

WEB www.ofifc.org

Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

Gatineau, Quebec

CALL 613-722-3033

613-722-7687

1-800-461-4043 (Toll Free)

WEB www.nwac.ca

National Association of Indigenous Friendship Centers (NAIFC)

or the Local Indigenous Friendship Center
Within your Community

Ottawa, ON

CALL 613-563-4844

877-563-4844 (Toll Free)

EMAIL NAFCgen@nafcc.ca

WEB www.nafcc.ca/

WELLNESS SUPPORTS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)

Thunder Bay, ON

CALL 1-800-692-7692

WEB www.manwoyc.weebly.com

Talk for Healing

*Confidential helpline for Indigenous women,
available 24 hours a day/seven days a week in
14 languages*

CALL 1-855-554-HEAL

CHAT www.talk4healing.com/live-chat

WEB www.talk4healing.com

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line

*Both phone and online options open 24 hours
a day, 7 days a week*

CALL 1-855-242-3310

WEB www.hopeforwellness.ca

Kids Help Phone

*If you need help, whether big or small,
contact Kids Help Phone*

CALL 1-800-668-6868

CHAT During Live Chat Hours:
www.kidshelpphone.ca/crisis

TEXT Text CONNECT to 686868

LIDLAW
FOUNDATION

Feathers of Hope gratefully acknowledges the financial contribution of the Laidlaw Foundation to the Feathers of Hope Forum

A Feathers of Hope
Graphic Novel

MANIDOO MAKWA

SPIRIT BEAR

Makwa, an Indigenous youth, is on a quest to discover her purpose in life. Her journey takes her beyond everything she's ever known, and what she learns reveals a power within her she never knew she had. *Manidoo Makwa: Spirit Bear* is a coming-of-age story with themes of bravery, responsibility, and healing.



FEATHERS OF HOPE

Website feathersofhope.ca

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