

# CLIMATE CHANGE & HEALTH IN FORT WILLIAM FIRST NATION



MESSAGES FOR OUR YOUTH

In 2019, Fort William First Nation received funding to support a project called Climate Change & Health in Fort William First Nation. Aims of the project included building capacity for climate change and health adaptation, fostering intergenerational knowledge sharing and relationship building, and sharing our learnings with the Fort William First Nation community and beyond. Working in partnership with Lakehead University, we conducted interviews with Elders and other knowledge holders with close relationships to the land to gather stories and perspectives on the connections between climate change and physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. At the conclusion of the interviews, Elders and knowledge holders were asked to share a key idea or a message about climate change for the youth of FWFN. These messages were visualized on a single square of fabric by an artist and then woven together to create a final quilt.

The quilt represents FWFN band and community member perspectives on climate change. It conveys both symbols and messages to our children and grandchildren about what climate change means to us. Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, the quilt has captured, and woven together, the essence of urgency, resiliency and hope. The title of the quilt is Embraced by Father Sky as the color blue borders alongside other reflections of the four traditional colors of the medicine wheel. This quilt is bound together with messages to future generations entwined with the recognition of resiliency that each individual brought forward in their wisdom.

This book was created as a gift to give thanks to all those who have participated in and supported the Climate Change & Health in Fort William First Nation project.

*Miigwetch.*

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If you want the answers that you are looking for, you should talk to the Elders because they've lived it. They will give you the answers because they watch the land.

That is what the Elders base their lives on.



# AWARENESS



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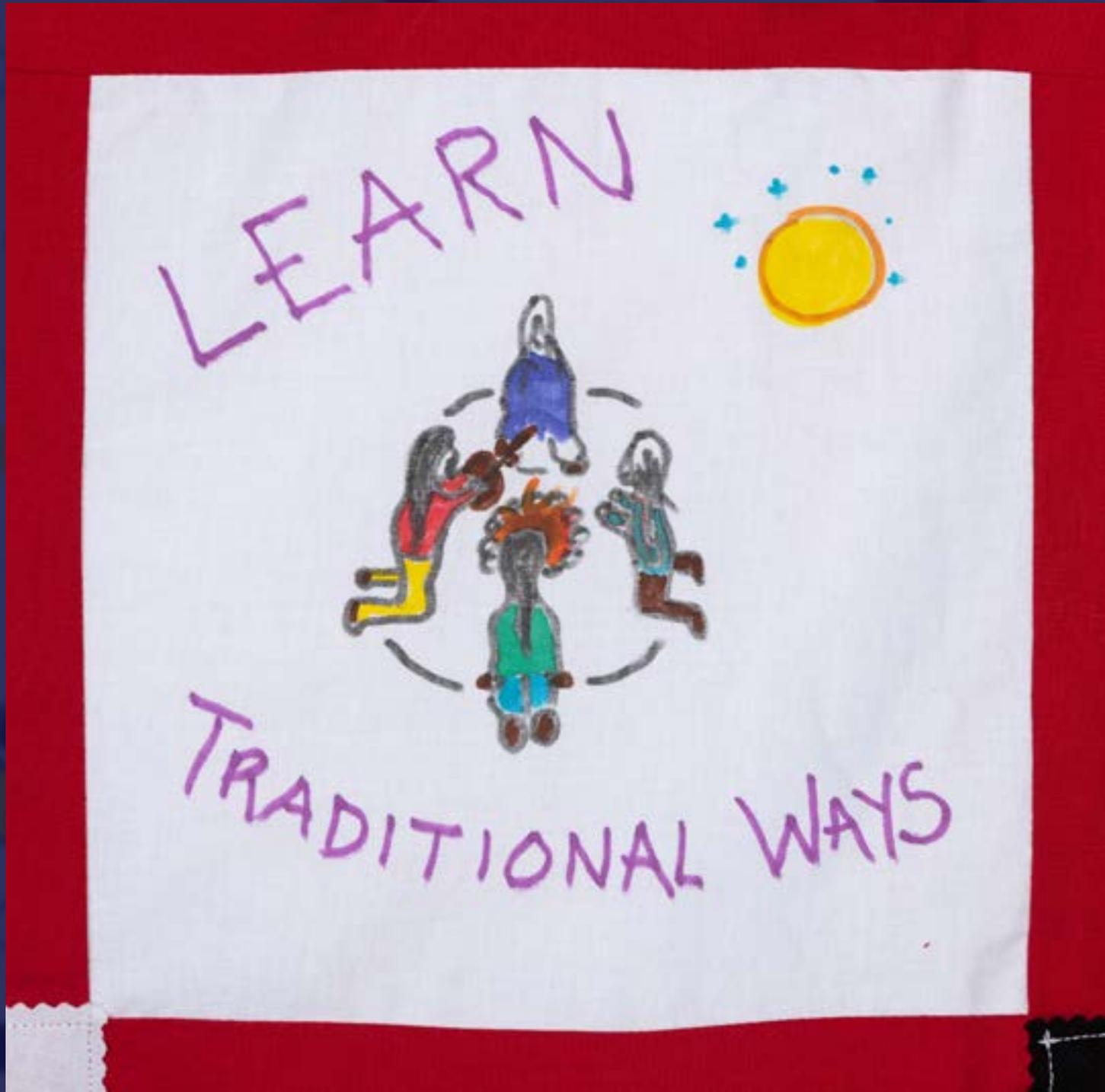
People don't put back what they take.

There are some, but it's very few now that I see wanting to keep the land preserved... more awareness needs to be spread about the importance of maintaining our world.

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The fact now that our children are learning how to make canoes, from scratch. Those are cultural things that they should know - there was a time when Native communities supported their own. You know? And nowadays, you don't have the sharing - ... going on, so it's, become monetary instead of life-giving. I have a vast knowledge of using things from the Earth ... to create culture - things for the member and for gift-giving. Ah, I think too much emphasis has been put on monetary and material things.





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I have come to appreciate the land more because I am connected to my spirit as an Anishinaabe, and in that brings a lot of knowledge, a lot of awareness of what was missing in my life. The history mainly, of not learning all about the land, all about our culture, about our Teachings, about our language and all of that. Even though, my parents spoke fluent Ojibway, but – you know, back then ... because of residential school and the history of that we lost that connection to the land. We lost that connection to our culture, to our language, and everything like that.



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Just go back to tradition. Take care of the land.



HEAL-YOURSELF



HEAL THE-LAND

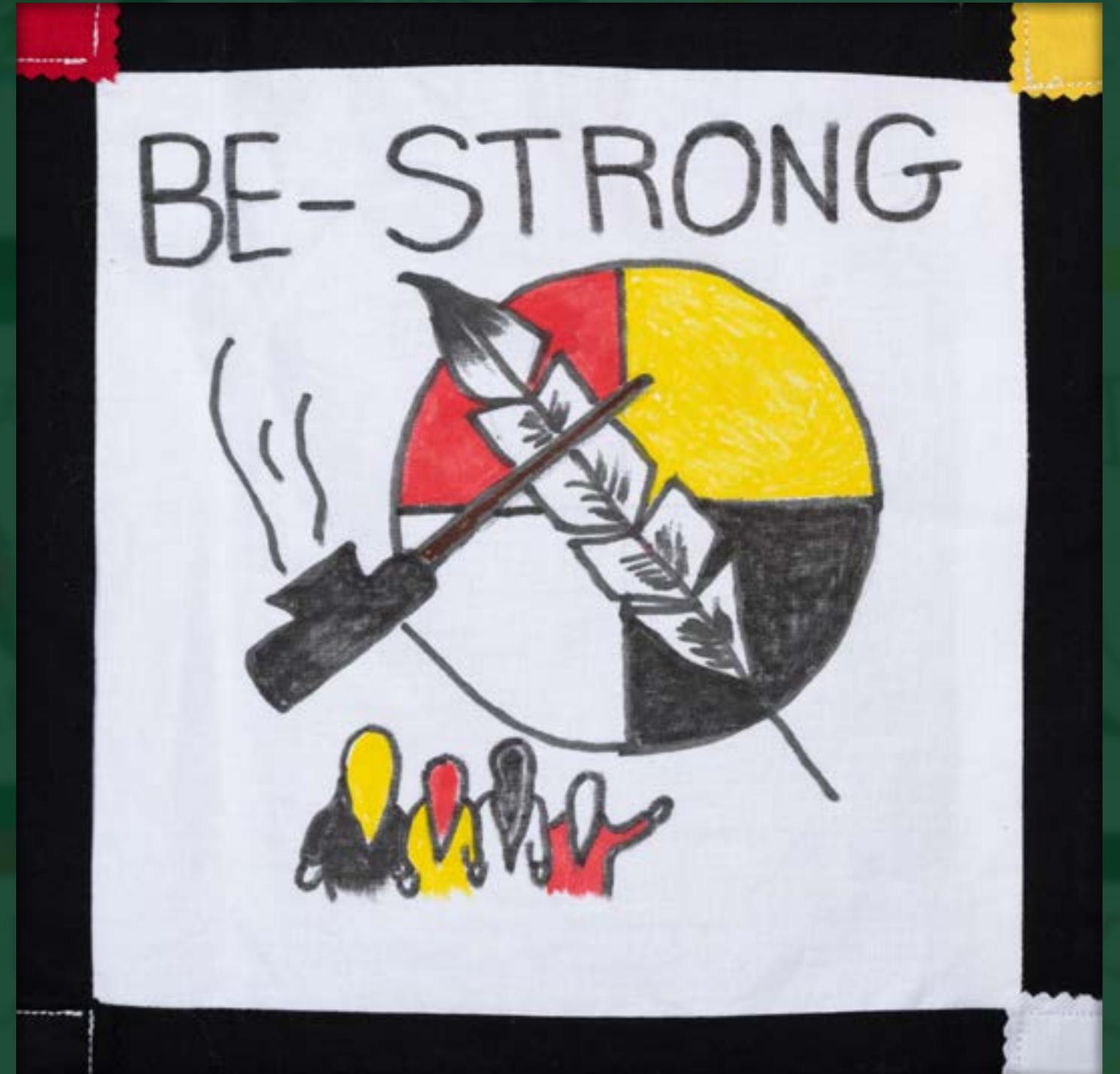
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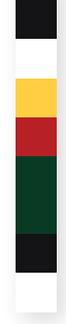
I think the climate is basically, crying for help and it's giving us little clues and if we're blind enough to not see them, then we're not really one with our land anymore. And I think we need to have more healing things like sweat lodges and - you know- retreats that people can go and heal themselves.



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The changes cause worry and upset me, I feel uncertainty about the future.





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Leave the land alone, especially the lands that aren't touched now. So that we have the medicines that are still deep in the forest.

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Do we sit as community and wait for the leadership to do something or do we act as a community first? Right? Regardless of whether our leadership comes along or not, and that's why I say it's a hard question. And with the kids nowadays, I think they care about the environment, they care about how it is treated and how it is looked after. I don't think they know just what to do yet. I could be wrong, maybe I just don't know what to do totally yet either. And I don't see enough action being taken, perhaps, but the willingness, I think is there to change, right? And that's the part where I see big changes are coming, I think. I do feel that. I do feel that we, as a community, are progressing towards that. So, I think a lot of that has to do with the spiritual growth of the community. Let's all get spiritual and hope it gets better.





# CARING



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Climate change is important because it's the future.

That's the future of our people.

That's the future of humanity.



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We got to take care of our land - we've only got one one planet really, what we call home, so we got to take care of it and I think, for a long time, people just neglect, neglect. And we got to keep it sustainable, we got to keep our waters clean, you want the air to be breathable. There's parts in the world where it's not clean, it's not breathable, you know, and that - that - that is a scary thought. And try to find a solution - it's always when our communities come together that you know, good change comes and happens.





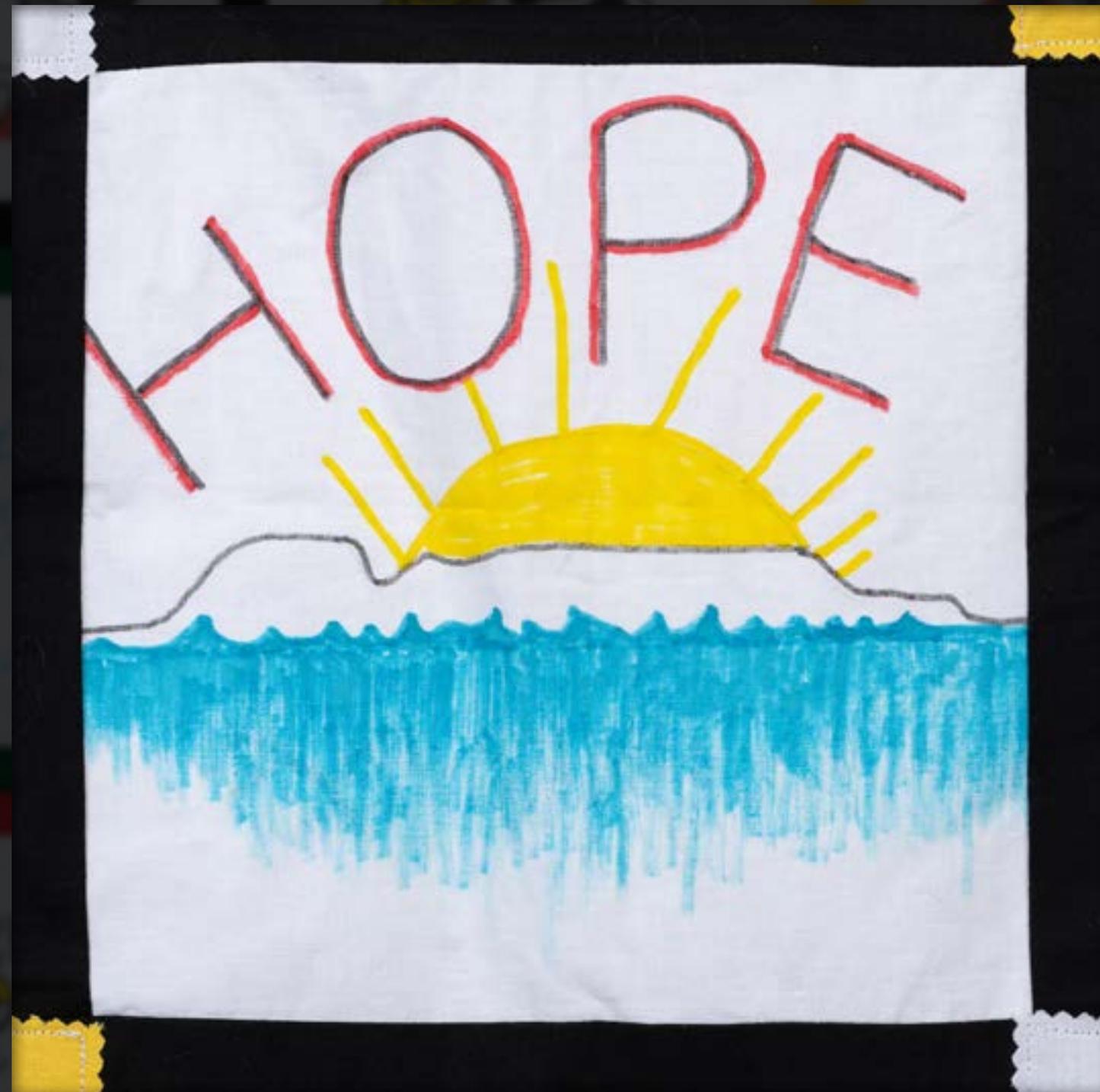
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The way forward is together. By coming together, learning together, working together in response to climate change we can heal ourselves, the land, and Mother Earth.



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My grandpa used to go and hunt for what we ate and now there's no food to even go and hunt for. There's no berries. We can't pick berries. It's all gone, they are ruining the land and don't even realize that they're doing it. We need to get back into our Native way, our medicines. What our Elders taught us.



# RESPECT



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I believe that because we're messing with Mother Earth and stuff like that, it does have a certain effect. There's more mental illness, you know, and there's more drug abuse and alcohol abuse, you know? Like, it's always been there, but it's just - it's becoming more rampant, it's tripled in size as compared to when I was a kid.

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I think Fort William should get Elders in a school and teach them younger generations to learn, you know, the medicines and everything, how to to plant, how to pick, and all different things so that people carry on that generation. Because I feel our generation is dying...I'd also like to see them clear some land and start planting and you know, bringing it back for the youth. For, maybe not my children, but the grandchildren, great grandchildren.

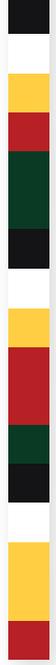




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Land is the place where I was born, in Squaw Bay. It's a beautiful place where I was born.





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Especially in educating their own community, their own people... just the way they did back a hundred years ago. You know, the Elders educated the young ones and then they kind of fine-tuned it with their experience.





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I'm very hopeful that things are going to eventually even themselves out and that Native people, or Aboriginal people, are going to get back to living the way we once did. I see it not as a change that's going to take place over night. I see it as being a process where our people, our Aboriginal people, are going get reacquainted with their environment, and reacquainted with each other, reacquainted with the communities, and reacquainted, most importantly, with their spirituality.





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Land is sacred the world over. Land represents a gift, or has all the gifts that were given by the Creator and we acknowledge this as Mother Earth and she takes care of the land, and the water, and the air. All of the significant contributions for life is taken care of by Mother Earth. And so the land of course is where we used to live on and as Anishinabek we celebrate that land and when we want to occupy a piece of that land we have ceremony and then when we leave that particular piece of land for another piece of land we have ceremony again. We give thanks for the use of that particular land and we ask that it be restored.





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I'm worried about the changes just because of the generations to come. Because our youth are the ones that are going to need to be prepared. So the focus has to also be on the youth. I think they have a very hard journey that they're going to be experiencing, but I also think if they are prepared, and by prepared I mean if they have our knowledge of our Seven Grandfather Teachings, the knowledge of Mother Earth, the knowledge to respect traditional and cultural knowledge that can move forward in a good way to help make changes happen because then they'll care about what is happening.

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For me, it's always about respect. Respect Mother Earth. Don't throw garbage all over the place; pick up your garbage. You treat Mother Earth with respect. With the water, don't throw your pop cans and trash in lakes. And you need to learn about climate change so that you can help – I don't know if you'll eliminate it, but you know, so that you can help to preserve – preserve for future generations, our land, our Mother Earth, our waters, our lakes for future generations. Learn all you can about climate change. Be the one to make change, you know? Educate yourself, you know? And if you see somebody throwing garbage and spitting and you know, just leaving garbage all over, speak up to them and don't be afraid to do that.





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Because the older Teachings tell us too, there is going to be a period when the old ones who are leaving this world are going to stand up with their fists raised and when they do that then the real change will start to come. And so we need to see young people and old people standing up with their fists raised, that's an action. And so that's what I see as what has to happen.

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Grandmothers and Grandfathers are always present, they watch over you and your loved ones. As an Elder advises: *“Grandmothers and Grandfathers got your back”*

Honor and respect this, safe in the knowledge that this is truth.



# LEARN FROM YOUR ELDERS



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Go back to our own roots like medicines, picking medicines...If they don't start now, our next generation will suffer.

## *Acknowledgements*

We acknowledge gratitude to Fort William First Nation Chief and Council members, Rob Pierre of FWFN, quilter Sam and artist Doug for participating in this project. We also thank Lakehead University and Indigenous Services Canada for their support. Most importantly, our thanks go out to the FWFN band and community members who participated by sharing their wisdom and knowledge. It was an honor to be part of this amazing journey that we ventured together. Mother Earth is sacred land that we call home. We must continue to seek ways to protect her, not only for today, but for future generations.

*Miigwetch.*



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**FORT WILLIAM  
FIRST NATION**