Project Description

“A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then its finished; no matter how brave its warriors or how strong their weapons.” - Cheyenne Proverb

Prior to European colonisation, many Indigenous women were part of tribal societies that were egalitarian in nature. Indigenous feminism involves women’s full participation and inclusion in decisions regarding land, politics, laws, and nationhood that Indigenous sovereignty was traditionally built upon. Following colonisation, Indigenous people have undergone cultural alienation, territorial dispossession, intergenerational trauma, systemic discrimination, and socio-economic marginalization, which together continue to have negative impacts on the lives of many Indigenous people today. The 2017 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Interim Report indicates that Indigenous women often undergo alarming rates of violence and increased interaction with the criminal justice system as both victims/survivors and accused/convicted persons. Indigenous women face murders, disappearances, over-incarceration, coerced sterilization, sexualized violence by police and corrections officers, high rates of human trafficking because of institutional, systemic and multiple intersecting forms of discrimination. There are significant gaps and challenges related to prevention and protection of Indigenous women from gender-based violence, oppression and their resulting consequences such as mental health and substance use issues, poverty, homelessness, and economic barriers that have led to different experiences for Indigenous women as compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

For this Davis Project for Peace, we plan to partner with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northern Alberta and their Indigenous Women’s Program, which encourages Indigenous women to reconnect with their culture and develop a sense of themselves as Indigenous peoples. Funds from this grant would be used towards creating a resource provision centre and wellness space as well as a tech library to reach members in remote communities. These resources and programs aim to empower Indigenous women and help the partner organization in their efforts to reduce the likelihood that these women will come in contact or continue with the legal system. The inclusion of mothers in the detention system (66% of women incarcerated) and the disproportionate representation of Indigenous women in prisons (38% of women incarcerated) can be rectified through a community based approach to reduce further exacerbation of the above issues. By addressing the issues that have been created from Canada’s history of disenfranchisement and devaluation such as lack of access to resources for employment, this project can contribute to correcting the wrongs that have presented barriers to the ability of Indigenous women to support themselves in the current state of Canadian society. We will be working with women of disenfranchised populations throughout the Edmonton and Northern Alberta area to ensure that they have the opportunity to advocate for their reintegration into society and to work past conflicts with the legal system. By involving women in the design of the resource centre, and providing tailored and appropriate resources, our project would positively impact the lives of women who use the extensive and high quality programs and services offered by our partner organization. We want the women who access the Elizabeth Fry Society to gain a deeper sense of safety, belonging, and agency, and have the centre serve as a place that feels like “home”, a bridge to further development.

Proposed Activities:

- Facilitating focus groups with affected Indigenous women and girls in order to tailor the space to their needs, at the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northern Alberta
• Furnishing resource centre
  o Providing materials and upgrades to refresh existing space (computers, literature, workshop materials, furniture, culturally relevant decor, etc.)
  o Providing sanitizing stations and screens necessary for the day-to-day operations of the society and the resource centre, in the context of COVID-19
• Facilitating skill building activities enhanced by the new resource centre, in collaboration with Elizabeth Fry Society’s existing programs

Short-term Goals:
• Hold a series of focus groups with affected women and girls to design the new space
• Establish the resource & wellness centre
• Design opportunities to develop and enhance a sense of community and foundation for wellness that could help lead to later employment and prosperity.
• Hold an opening event in collaboration with focus group participants

Long-term: Goals
• Provide a well-known “safe space” for vulnerable women and girls (tailored specifically to Indigenous women and girls)
• Increase regular access to services provided by the Elizabeth Fry Society
• Enable Indigenous women to represent themselves by having agency over some decision-making in the resource centre
• Ultimately contribute to reduce overrepresentation of Indigenous women in the criminal justice system in Edmonton and Northern Alberta

Indicators of Success:
• 5-10+ regular focus group participants
• 5-10+ remote focus group participants equipped with technology from the tech library
• Beautiful, sustainable resource space, equipped with specifically tailored resources and culturally-specific decor
• 25+ people attending the opening event in person and virtually
• Clients accessing resource centre on a daily basis