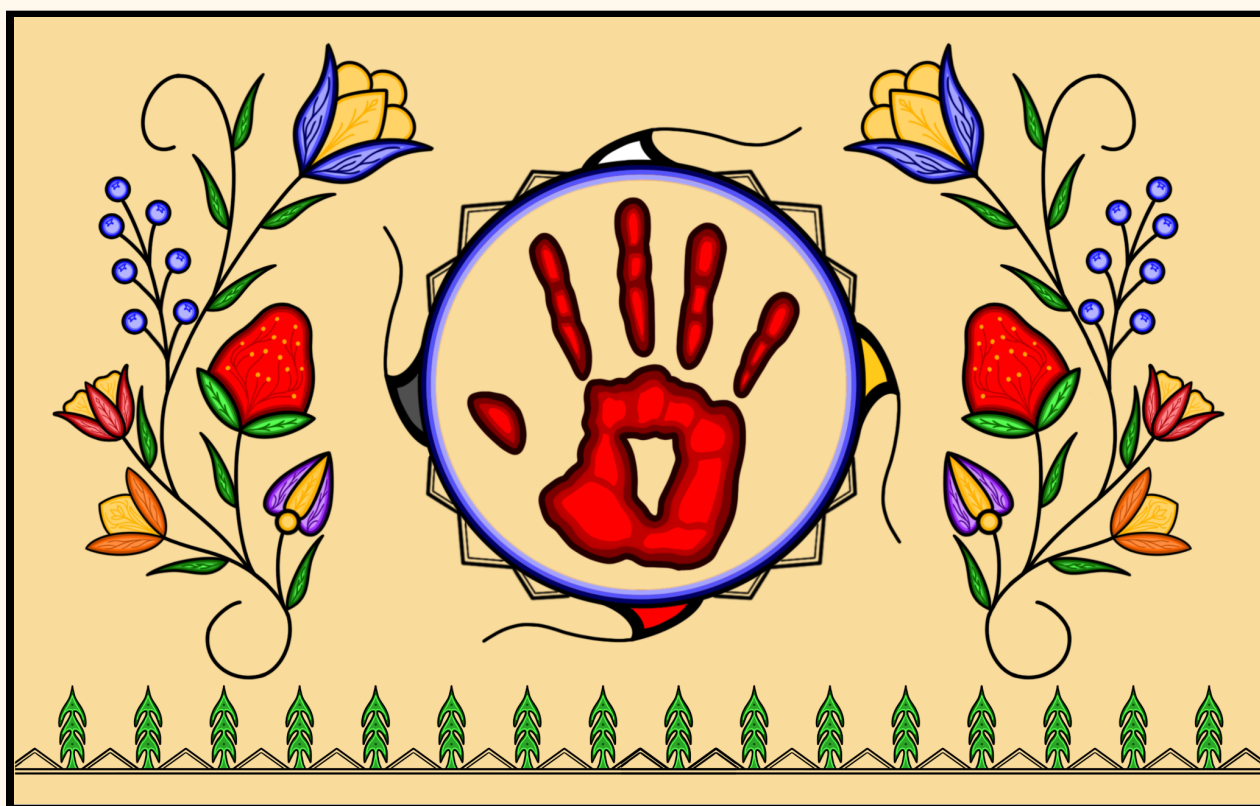


Using Art for Activism

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People

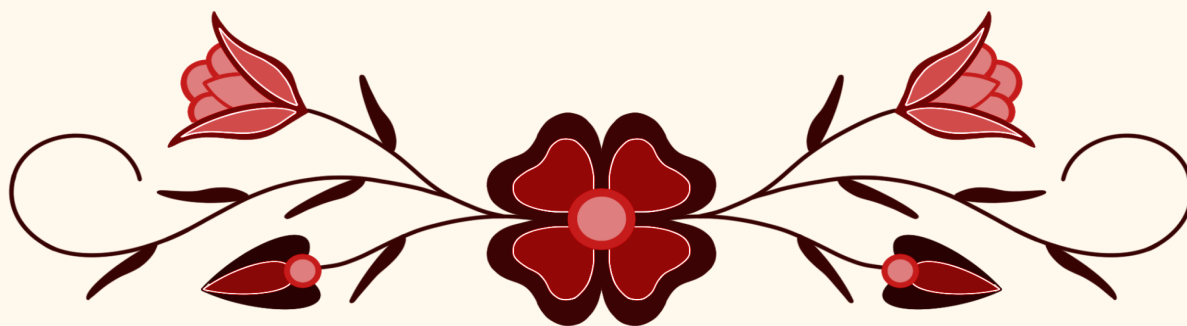
Evynn Ksé:hahiyé Richardson, *Haliwa-Saponi and Nansemond*



Trigger Warning: This toolkit talks heavily on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people and the trauma that comes with these experiences. If you need to take breaks while reading, please do so. Taking care of yourself is just as important as the work you are trying to do.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout all movements there is one common thing that seems to connect and engage people in a more impactful way than just statistics could: art. As Indigenous people, we are natural born storytellers who share our lives, culture, and traditions through various mediums. As a result of this way of life, we use it to spread awareness for social justice issues that heavily impact our people.

During my time as a Remembering Our Sisters fellow with the Center for Native American Youth, I had the opportunity to learn from artists directly tied to the movement. Gaining these new perspectives has inspired me to compile the resources and teachings I was given and pass them along to anyone who is willing to listen and share with respect for the stories we tell through the art we hope to create.

In this *Using Art for Activism* toolkit, you will be able to find various tips and resources that I have collected to help you be more mindful as you use your art to uplift our stolen relatives and spread awareness for the injustices they have faced.



ABOUT THE MOVEMENT

Although we as Indigenous people have fought for our missing and murdered relatives since first contact, the movement has only recently gained traction in the media. As matrilineal societies, we value and honor our women and femme-identifying kin. These practices have not been diminished and are still being revived and practiced to this day. That is why it is critical that we protect the backbones of our tribes and communities. Supporting this movement is safeguarding the entire future of Indian Country.

This growing epidemic of violence can no longer be ignored. It is important that we educate ourselves before we misrepresent the movement in the work we do.

Below, you will find resources that can help you in your efforts to learn and become a stepping stone for MMIWG2S+ stories to be uplifted.

These resource lists are courtesy of the Center for Native American Youth♥

Books

- *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* by Sarah Deer
- *Forever Loved: Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada*
- *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance* by Allison Hargreaves
- *Stolen Sisters: The Story of Two Missing Girls, Their Families, and How Canada Has Failed Indigenous Women* by Emmanuelle Walter
- *Highway of Tears: A True Story of Racism, Indifference and the Pursuit of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*
- *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance*
- *Invisible Victims: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women* by Katherine McCarthy



Films and Videos

- *Finding Ashley: a Native American family's desperate search for their missing relative* <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/feb/25/a-young-woman-vanishes-the-police-cant-help-her-desperate-family-wont-give-up>
- *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* (Netflix)
- *The Search: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdPvONDfMbA>
- *Somebody's Daughter* <https://www.somebodysdaughter-mmiw.com>
- *Highway of Tears* https://video.vice.com/en_us/topic/mmiw
- *Sisters Rising:* <https://worldchannel.org/episode/america-reframed-sisters-rising/>
- *Finding Dawn* https://www.nfb.ca/film/finding_dawn/

Podcasts

- *Missing & Murdered: Finding Cleo*
- *TAKEN The Podcast*
- *Not Invisible: Native Womxn on the Frontlines*
- *All My Relations* (episode title: *Protect Indigenous Women*)

Art Installations/Projects

- *REDress Project* <https://www.jaimeblackartist.com/exhibitions/>
- *Walking with Our Sisters* <http://walkingwithoursisters.ca/>
- *Bring Her Home: Sacred Womxn of the Resistance* <http://www.allmyrelationsarts.com/bring-her-home-2020/>
- *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Trans People Bead Project* <http://www.cannupahanska.com/mmiwqtbeadproject>
- *Seeing Red* https://www.tucsonlifestyle.com/local/seeing-red/article_6af6fe57-b667-552c-b5ff-dc7cbe2b5bfd.html

HISTORICAL CONTEXT WITH PRESENT DAY IMPACTS

The MMIWG2S+ movement hasn't always had a title, but was still a very active fight dating back to first contact with colonizers. In so-called America, only black and brown people have a history of sexual oppression rooted in colonialism. It is these systems that have been put into place for the benefit of white supremacy that continue to make the kidnapping and murdering of Indigenous people an epidemic. The current objectification of our Indigenous relatives in all forms of media is what causes many abusers to disassociate our people from being considered human. Things such as historic lack of funding for Indigenous spaces and programs and systems rooted in racism and oppression are what continue to aid the media's misrepresentation of us.

“Bad people commit these horrible crimes against Native women, but it is the system that allows it to happen generation after generation.”—Malinda Limberhand, mother of Hanna Harris who was murdered in 2013 on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

While this form of violence has been committed by abusers, rapists, and traffickers, it is federal policies and laws that allow these crimes to slip through the cracks. The denial of federal resources and authority on tribal lands allows many abusers to get away with the crimes they commit to Indigenous people, which is not only an attack on the people, but the land and water surrounding us.

For more information, visit these websites:

- *MMIW: Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Crisis Beyond Individual Acts of Violence*
<https://www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine/june-2020/mmiw-understanding-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-crisis>
- *Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women: MMIWG2S*
<https://www.csvanw.org/mmiw>
- *U.S. Department of the Interior: Secretary Haaland creates the MMU*
<https://on.doi.gov/3zBUxFV>

STORYTELLING THROUGH ART

When I first started my fellowship, I asked myself repeatedly, “How can I use art in this movement?” This is a rather broad question that can be answered in multiple ways, depending on the artist. Art can be used as an outlet for healing or even a platform to spread important information. The ultimate goal of art in the MMIWG2S+ movement is to accurately represent and tell the stories of our stolen relatives no matter what medium we may choose.

If you are not telling your own personal story, I highly recommend you ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have permission from the family of this relative to use their story?
- Am I causing more harm by publicizing this piece by using certain symbolism e.g. bloody/red handprints, bruises, any symbols that could be related to violence?
- What is the purpose or my creation?

When speaking on topics as traumatic as this, it is important that we warn the audience that is about to partake in it. Trigger warnings help to prevent further harm from these acts of violence and even giving gentle reminders to practice self care are very helpful.



HOW TO BE AN AMAZING ALLY

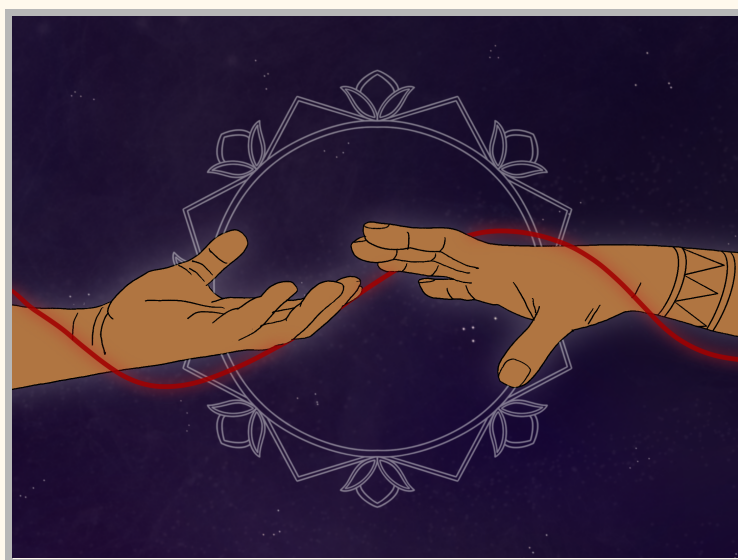
If you have somehow found your way to this toolkit and are not an Indigenous person, welcome! I am very honored that you took the time to read through these pages to learn how you can be a better ally through art. Below, I have listed some gentle reminders on how to not only be an ally to Indigenous people, but take some weight off of our shoulders as well.

If you are an **ALLY**, please remember that:

- You should educate yourself, do not expect free labor
- This movement is about the voices of Indigenous people so you should always give them the mic
- These topics are heavy and you should be mindful of others and yourself as you speak on them
- We appreciate the support you give us and we value you♥

If you are **INDIGENOUS**, please remember that:

- If you do not have the energy to educate someone, you do not have to, because it is not a requirement
- This movement is heavy, take good care of yourself and your relatives
- You are valued, loved, and worthy♥



SELF CARE IN ACTIVISM

One of the amazing women that I was able to be mentored by while in the Remembering Our Sisters fellowship was Dr. Billie Joe Kipp (Blackfeet Nation). One of the things she said that stuck with me is that while working in the MMIWG2S+ movement we are not only working with the trauma of our stolen relatives and their families, but we also deal with our own trauma as Indigenous women. We hurt knowing that there is a target on our backs, but we also carry every ounce of every word that has been spoken to us pertaining to this movement. Vicarious trauma is a very real thing and it will take its toll if not addressed.

As we try to advocate for these important issues, we tend to forget to trade in the super hero cape for our favorite powwow blanket and snuggles with our fur babies. Self care is extremely important in activism and it doesn't matter how you practice it as long as you make the time for yourself. A sister of mine once told me, "You can not give from an empty medicine bag." Take the time to recharge when you feel drained and do not be afraid to set boundaries in your work. "No" is an extremely beautiful word that tends to leave our vocabulary when we get caught up in serving our communities. Do not forget that you can use it.

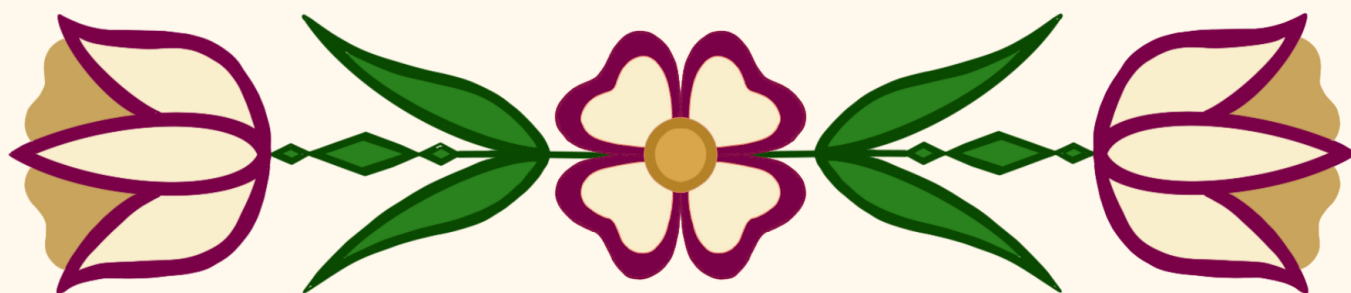
You are **valued**. You are **sacred**. You are **good medicine**.
If you ever forget that, there will always be a community standing behind you ready to remind you.



THE POWER OF MY NARRATIVE

This is an exercise that was shared in my fellowship that I wanted to pass along. This exercise is to provide space to recognize the medicine and strength you carry and recognize where you can grow.

The Good Medicine I Carry What keeps me well? What do I lean on in times of challenge?	My Superpowers What am I great at? What do I find myself teaching others?
Questions I May Have What do I need to know?	Opportunities for Growth What skills, ideas, or interests areas do I want to keep growing?



THE EMPTY SPACE PROJECT

“I could spend a lifetime reading off the names of our stolen sisters, but the empty spaces do all the talking if you take the time to acknowledge them.”

The Empty Space Project is an art campaign I started to share MMIWG2S+ based art and the reasons why those artists created what they did. It is my hope to create a safe space for the healing of our communities and I believe wholeheartedly that art can help us do that. If we take the time to listen to the stories of the people impacted by this issue, we honor the voices of those who were taken too soon from us. Their memories can live on in the artwork we create and it is the goal of this project to create a positive platform for this type of work.

Some of the things I have done to jumpstart this campaign is creating an Instagram to share a piece of the stories we don't necessarily get to hear from Indigenous artists and I also created a Google Drive of free art that can be used by any organization, event, or individual person that may not have access to graphic designers.

If you feel moved to start an initiative, I highly encourage you to lean into that feeling. I never knew the impact I could potentially have until I started on this project and I am grateful for the connections I have made through it. You've got this wita:xe!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit was created to share the knowledge that I gained during my fellowship from other people. I have learned many lessons from amazing women, but none better than the ones I now call my sisters and aunties: Dr. Billie Jo Kipp, Cheyenne Brady, Cheyenne Kippenberger, Cordelia Falls Down, Gracie Aragon, Jennifer Peacock, Kendra Becenti, Lauren Poterek, Lily Painter, Maya Sanchez, and Nikki Pitre. Pí:lahúk/Kenah for always holding space for me, having never ending advice, and giving me belly aching laughs. This whole opportunity was life changing.

Last, but not least, a huge pí:lahúk/kenah to you for reading through this toolkit. I hope I was able to share a bit of knowledge on art and how it pertains to activism when it comes to the MMIWG2S+ movement. Please feel free to share this kit and message me if you would like something to be added! I am always open to learning more from others and would like to share anything I come across with you as well.

Health and Happiness,

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<https://linktr.ee/theemptyspaceproject>

