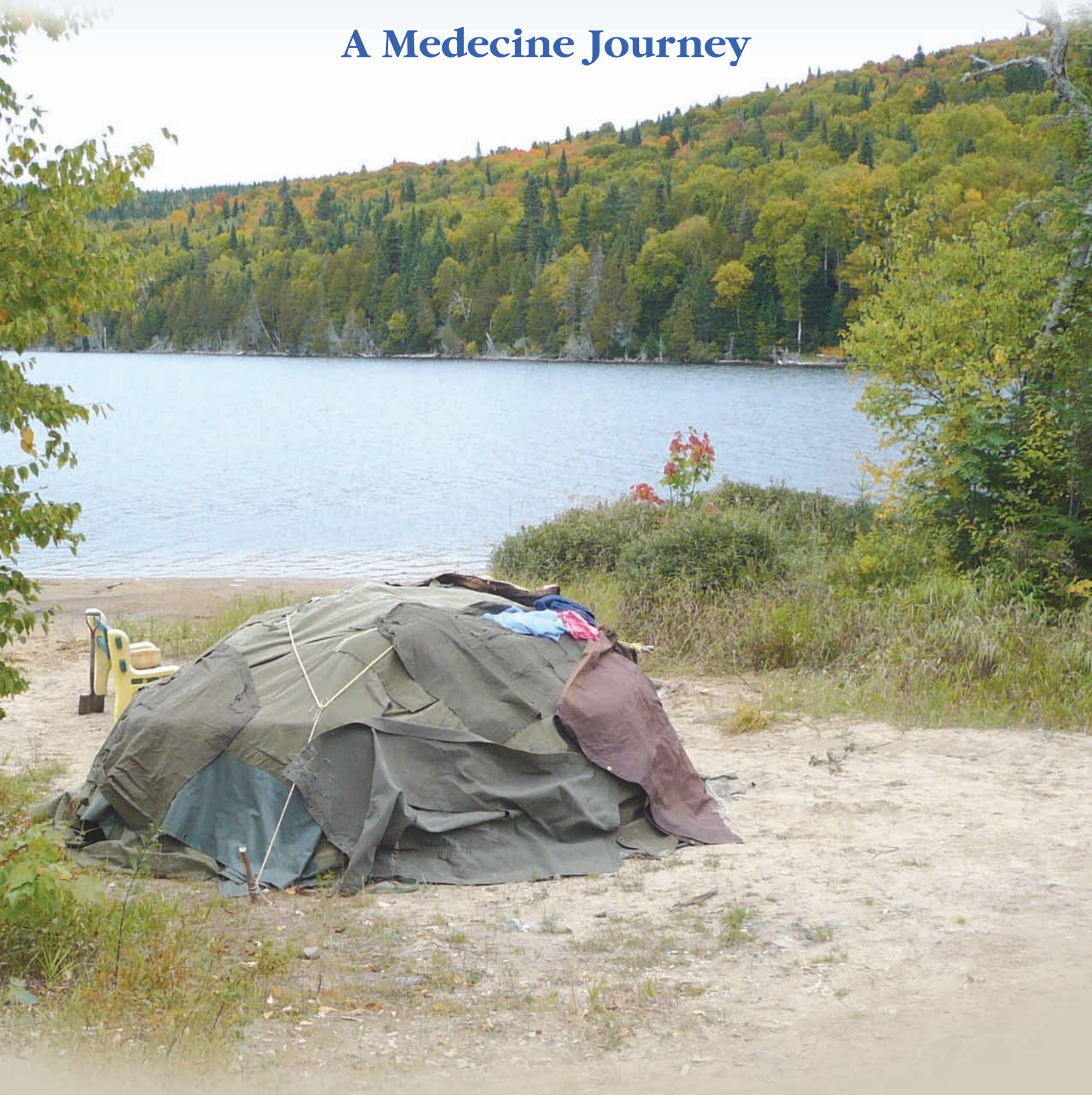


# WASESKUN CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS

## A Medecine Journey



**An experience in Aboriginal Sensitivity training  
for frontline workers**



## A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

### **Caring for the Caregiver: An experience in Aboriginal Sensitivity Training, Networking and Personal Care for Frontline Workers**

On September 22- 24, 2010, Waseskun Healing Center, in partnership with Maison Crossroads ( Maison St. Leonard's) organized and hosted a session of "Caring for the Caregiver." Located at a camp near St. Zénon, the event involved participants from Correctional services Canada, Correctional Services Quebec, the RCMP, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Aboriginal Employment Services, and different Aboriginal communities. Elders, helpers and other resource people were available to run sweat ceremonies, drumming, healing, teaching and women's circles, massage therapy sessions and were on hand for individual support for participants.

The Waseskun Healing Center has a long history of organizing conferences, spiritual gatherings, Aboriginal (Native) cultural sensitivity training sessions as well as other training sessions. The blend of networking and sharing of knowledge and cultural experience is essential for working with Aboriginal offenders. This is especially important as we move into an era of increased numbers of offenders in the prison system and an escalation of violence amongst the prison populations. The development of additional Pathways units in federal institutions will ease the transition from medium to minimum security levels and pave the way for transfers to healing lodges and re-integration into communities. Training and communication through networking - such as the recent Caring for Caregivers session will help facilitate the process.

Other sessions at the new center are planned for the new year. Participants had expressed a strong interest in attending more sessions and their comments and suggestions will be included in this newsletter. These comments and suggestions have helped us in our planning of the new sessions.

*Stan Cudek  
Director*





## CARING FOR THE CARERGIVERS AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVENT

**Opening Ceremony:** A sacred fire was lit and would last for three days. Thanks were extended to the Elders and helpers who attended this three day journey and also for all who were present. Dennis, a helper, expressed gratitude in his Mohawk language for all that we receive everyday and thanked the grandfathers (spirits) for all the living things that surround us (trees, fire, water, animals, sky, etc.). He offered tobacco to the fire, thanking everyone and inviting all of us who wished to give tobacco to the fire and to pray.



**Blessing of the food:** The elders prepared a spirit plate with pieces of all the food that was on the buffet. They then prayed and thanked the grandfathers who accompanied us on our journey. The food and the tent in which we would be eating was smudged to give thanks and to purify what we were receiving.

**Sweat Lodge:** Madonna gave us teachings in the women's moon lodge. There was also a man's sweat lodge and a mixed sweat run by Raymond Ballantyne and Fernand Niguay. This was a first time experience for many of the guests and although they started late, the sweats were an experience to be remembered.



**Morning Circle:** Each day was started with a smudge. This is when sweet grass, cedar, sage or tobacco is burned to cleanse and purify our spirit by bringing the smoke over to us, to sooth our thoughts, to ease our pain, or for anything that can help us get through the day.

**Women's Circle:** Madonna shared with us about her life, the bad experiences and the good. She told us about how women have duties throughout their lives; such as mothers, wives and grandmothers. She said that everything happened for a reason, but the most important one of all was to think of ourselves first. We must learn to forgive ourselves first and only then can we start thinking of others and to forgive them. It is important to look at our reflection in the mirror and to tell ourselves that we love ourselves. That is the most important thing of all.





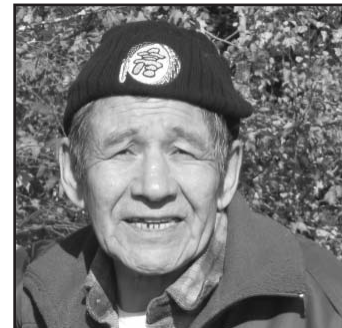
**Storytelling Circle:** Albert Dumont, a poet and an elder told us stories of his life and of how he interpreted each memory that he had. He gave teachings on how we must live life now and that the first thing we must do is to review our life and learn from it. We must move on and we must respect all things that roam on Mother Earth.



**Circle for Native Drums for Women:** Veronica Johnny, a Native American Singer taught us the traditional hand drumming that many Aboriginal women do. The drums are very special drums that are made out of animal skin. They can be used for ceremonies and for healing the spirit and is usually played with Native singing as this helps the drum to bring its true form of healing from inside our souls. She told us that drums are sacred, and are to be treated like babies. She also told us about the four medicines: tobacco, sweet grass, cedar and sage.



**Elder's Circles:** Fernand Niguay and Raymond Ballantyne, assisted by Madonna told us about the work that they do. They help people along their healing journeys and help them to have a better life. People go to them so that they can get answers and understand why things are as they are. Elders help people to heal and to find themselves. They usually have to look back into the past in order to help them.



**One on One's :** Our Elder, Sonny Mayo was available to do individual sessions as needed. The helpers were also available for individual support to participants who felt the need to share some of their own issues which may have surfaced during the event or before.



**Closing Ceremony:** in the last part of this 3 day journey, Dennis thanked the Earth again in Mohawk. We all held hands and prayed for the Creator and Mother Earth. The final event was the hand drumming by Veronica Johnny who asked to be accompanied in her singing by all the women who had participated in her circle. It was a very moving and touching moment, the women's voices echoing peace and serenity.





## Our Elders



**Madonna**



**Raymond**

Raymond and Madonna are no strangers to events in which they have to work with their brothers and sisters. They are often called upon to explain the native culture and to inform the public on the importance of prayer, on the smudge and why food is laid out on a spirit plate. They easily explain about the medicines, sage, tobacco, cedar and sweet grass, the reason for the smudge and why pictures are never to be taken during a smudge. This can cause people to lose the gifts that were given to them by the Creator or to become sick. It is so important to protect everything that you receive.

They teach about life's important values such as humility, love, honor, trust, faith and understanding.



For them, this event was an excellent opportunity to share their time and energy for a good cause, taking the time necessary for caregivers to reflect on such values in an environment so close to nature and without being disturbed by telephone, TV and video games. Every person in attendance has an important role as a caregiver and needs to pay attention to their own sources of energy and wellbeing. They are grateful to Waseskun and all the volunteers for involving themselves with such a good cause.

Thank you Waseskun for providing us with this opportunity for people to learn about the culture, to experience the culture and to live the culture.

**Our Elders, Helpers and Healers were available for individual counsel.**



## STORY TELLING

Albert Dumont is a Traditional Teacher, born and raised in the traditional Algonquin territory of Kitigan Zibi. He has dedicated his life to promoting Aboriginal spirituality and healing and to protecting the rights of the Aboriginal people. A recognized poet and story teller, we were privileged to welcome him among us to this event. A bricklayer by trade, Albert had a serious accident many years ago. He feels that his belief in strong will and getting back on your feet made it possible for him to overcome the serious nature of his injuries. Albert shared with us about spirituality. Everything sacred to the Native people is in the form of a circle: the sun, the moon, the earth. The eagle wing represents truth and God's messages that impact us in a special way. It is important to prepare yourself for the spirit world. We plan ahead for many things like vacations or retirement, so it makes good sense to prepare and plan carefully to enter the spirit world. Its eternal, so good planning is essential. We should back away from those who complicate spirituality. We are nothing more than a flash of a firefly in the night. He urges everyone to review their life and to make apologies for the wrongs that they did and to work on how to become better human beings. Our ancestors learned how to be better human beings by looking at the nature around us. Here are some of Albert Dumont's teachings.



- If there are complications or conflicts, we must back away.
- Learn by watching nature (partridges who wait for berries to fall-teach us patience).
- Acknowledge everything around us.
- Some are easily fooled, others are not.
- Communication is very important.
- Prayers are always received in beauty and in eloquence.
- Circle + fire= peace.
- Stories are tools to teach our children with .
- Do not overreact (conflicts in families are a result of overreaction).
- Addiction is a like lion, unpredictable and dangerous.
- You do not need Elders to do something. You need common sense and understanding.
- Dead tree is an ancestor of ours. It represents protection by our ancestors.
- We will be ancestors one day, we will go when we are called.
- The power of words can heal somebody, make somebody strong.
- Spiritual reaction= physical reaction.
- We must be determined.
- What fits today may not fit tomorrow.
- Life is like a river, it has rapids and bends.
- We must all have a special healing place where we can be alone.

*Please accept our sincere appreciation of your presence with us. The wisdom of your words has enriched our lives.*



## WOMEN'S DRUMMING

Veronica Johnny, a Native American Singer taught us traditional hand drumming done by many Aboriginal women. These very special drums are made out of animal skin. They can be used for ceremonies and for healing of the spirit. They are usually used along with traditional Native singing as this helps the drum bring its true form of healing inside of our souls. She told us that drums are sacred; they should be treated like fragile newborns. Veronica beat the drum and asked each one of us to touch it and to feel the vibration that flowed from it to each one of us connecting our energies. She taught us a song, encouraged us to sing along with her and guided us through this very unique experience.



She also told us about traditional medicines and traditional dress. She explained the meaning of the smudge and its cleansing power., explained the purpose of all the items which she brought along with her and told us about what she wore and the special meaning that everything she wore had for her. It's all about feeling the energy of everything that we love and care for and about respecting the purpose of everything that we have. It was all about the spiritual meaning of things irregardless of material value...



*Thank you Veronica for these teachings. You looked at us with the eyes of the ancestors and saw each of us for who we are. You so gently brought us deep inside of ourselves and touched our hearts our spirit and our soul with love.*

**Miigwetch**

## Energetic Harmonisation

A workshop of energetic harmonization allows an individual to increase their capacity to remain well centered and in control in regards to their lives. Through it, a person can access their personal power to make good and efficient decisions, to deal with stress, to improve their concentration, and to reach global peace that reaches far beyond the workshop. Many who attended Mrs. Belanger's workshop came out of it having attained better knowledge of the energy in their bodies and why it is so important to take care of it.





## THE SWEATS

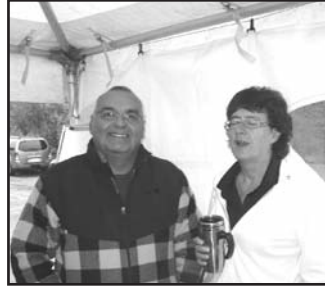


## A HEALING EXPERIENCE



Our Care for the Caregivers gathering was organized with cultural sensitivity in mind and hopes for a healing experience for the participants. This was not a “normal” training or teaching session, it became much, much more. We were able to absorb native culture and healing on an experience level. On Sept 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. I was honored to take part in moon lodge ceremonies with my good friend Madonna. As I work with men my sweat lodge experiences in the past few years have been in mixed sweats. I was so pleased to have the opportunity to bring the women’s teachings and moon lodge experience to so many women, some of them for the first time. We had the opportunity to honor together our differences, our strengths, our responsibilities and our roles as women. The gathering was such a success that we are planning more in the future with smaller focus groups.

## HELPERS AND GUESTS



### THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS !

Marvelous event. People were warm and approachable.

Very well organized.- Timing was good. Groups well organized.

Great schedule for the workshops. Great initiative and initiation.

Helped us get to know Waseskun staff better.

Appreciated the Women's Drumming with Veronica.

A growing experience both clinically and spiritually.

I felt that I learned about myself and grew as person.

Excellent presentation of workshops.

Great initiative towards understanding culture and spirituality.

Appreciated the warmth and wisdom of all the Elders and especially the workshop about finding inner peace.

Great networking and healing.



Workshops were extremely beneficial and left participants wanting more.

Workshops were well structured

I was made aware of many traditional Native ceremonies and rituals that I had often heard of but was unable to grasp.



## COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS



The Caring for Caregivers was definitely a nourishing experience. I am proud to have been part of this event. When I was approached to partake in this event, I didn't hesitate for one moment. I am so glad I jumped at the occasion. I enjoyed every minute! The first night, I was present at the opening fire. Even though I was not too close to the fire and feeling chilly, everyone's positive energy made me feel warm. Also, listening to Dennis was simply music to my ears.

My career as a massotherapist has brought me to open up and enjoy the experiences brought to me. However, an experience like this one will never be doubled. I jumped to the occasion because I wanted to share my passion with people who tend to lead a stressful life. If I could bring a few people to enjoy what it is to relax and have a few minutes of peace, then my work is done. I was glad to give of my time because I learned so much and truly opened my heart for the new experiences. I am so grateful for all the wonderful people I met because every person taught me something. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Waseskun for trusting me and, because of you, I got the chance to take part in this amazing experience.

Claudia Nigrelli  
Massotherapist



The experience during the three days was very emotional for me. It seemed like I was on a spiritual journey but one in which I had to understand how Aboriginal Spirituality is strong and powerful. The teachings that were given and interpreted had stories behind them. They could be personal stories or stories about the animals that Natives have respect for. It was interesting to see that the Elders and helpers who would give me and others these teachings were profound, as if they were aiming for our heart, mind and soul. I would cry on the Inside of me because it touched me spiritually. It gave me a sense of belonging. I find it was good for me to reach out and experience this journey because it can help me find who I truly am. This spirituality has existed for centuries and it has not disappeared. I find this to be quite unique, because life and/or man have destroyed so many things in their path, and filled life with war and hatred towards many human beings.

I always had an interest for Aboriginal Spirituality because of the respect and dignity that they have for the life that was given them. They know how to live a fulfilling life even with the bad. They have not caused any pain, they have not caused any war, and they have lived to rejoice with other beings such as the animals and mother Earth.

I saw my boyfriend on the final day and I cried in his arms. I cried because of all the pain that was brought to the Aboriginals. I cried because of the teachings that touched my heart in a way that I would never have imagined. I cried because when I felt the song which Veronica Johnny sang with her drum, it made me understand much more than I already knew. It is not easy to say when something had touched you so deeply. I could feel and understand all that was given to me, taught to me, and said to me. It was an understanding of how to live day by day with all that lives inside of us such as pain, anger, hatred, pity, love, sadness and so much more.

Stéphanie Rosende



## COMMENTS FROM STAFF

I would like to thank the volunteers from St Leonard's who assisted greatly in any way they could with a smile and a willing hand. "Many hands make light work. Community forms when all contribute."

I was happy to be a part of this gathering. It gives us a sense of hope to see that our ways as helpers and caregivers are still very strong. I thank all who participated to make this a successful and uplifting part of our journey.

It was a great honor and privilege to be a part of such an enriching and unique event! The positive energy was so intense and palpable that it is within me even to this day. Looking forward to doing it again!

It was great seeing all the new faces and old ones. I hope everyone learned the importance of self maintenance and connection with that individual life force inside each of them. It was a honor to give a little of my energy for others to benefit from. I also want to thank my colleagues and other volunteers for their input and energy to make this an enjoyable three days. What an event!

From the beginning, I was enchanted by the idea to take a pause and look after ourselves. It is so easy to lose sight of ourselves and to look after others. However, when we do so, we expose ourselves to professional exhaustion, psychological distress and dysfunction. The beautiful speech about the importance of being well balanced is not always easy to put into practice. We must take the time to pause, before our bodies and our spirit force us to do so. I was also thrilled that many of you accepted the invitation. This demonstrates your interest and your respect for the native culture and its medicines. My work consists in part to explain what healing and readaptation is at Waseskun but what better way to do so than this experience to better help you understand the process.

I feel privileged to work with a team of Helpers, elders and that we have had this opportunity to benefit from their knowledge, wisdom, and their great generosity. In the hope that the success of this event will be a call for another, I say goodbye and see you again. In the meantime, take care of yourselves.

I have been at Waseskun for almost a year and going through the process of coordinating this event with my co workers has been a humbling experience. I truly believe that the transparency of our efforts to better the lives of our residents came across through our presentations events, and from every Waseskun team member that was at St-Zenon. I personally gained a lot of knowledge and was moved by Albert Dumont's storytelling. I also want to thank once again Waseskun for giving me the opportunity of being part of this enriching event.

It was a great way to meet and to connect with people on a different level. It was enriching to say the least. Caregivers need care and deserve care themselves. Who knows better than them how it can go a long way.

This was an excellent experience, one that should be repeated. Thank you to everyone who helped make this event a success.

It was wonderful to celebrate this event with everyone. A great occasion to meet new people and get to know who we work with in a different setting.

I hope that we will be able to do this again soon.





## **ATTENTION**

We are planning more events such as these in the coming year. We would like to thank all of our guests for their comments and suggestions and we have taken them into consideration. Those will help us to make these Aboriginal sensitivity training sessions more and more rewarding in the months to come.

If you are interested in attending more of these sessions or if you know individuals or groups who would be interested in attending one of our events please do not hesitate to call us or fill out the application form below.

We will communicate with you to let you know the dates and location as soon as possible.

450 883-2034

<b>RESERVATIONS</b>
<b>Contact Name:</b>
<b>Tel. no.:</b> (     )
<b>E mail address:</b>
<b>Group or organization:</b>
<b>Number of individuals:</b>
<b>Availability:</b>
<b>Comments:</b>



THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR SHARING THIS  
TIME WITH US AND FOR WALKING BESIDE US  
IN THE BEAUTY OF MOTHER EARTH!



**”BEFORE WE CAN HELP OTHERS,  
WE NEED TO HELP OURSELVES.  
WE NEED HEALTHY BODIES,  
CLEAR MINDS  
AND PEACFUL SPIRITS”**