

**Walking With Our Sisters  
Volunteer Training & “Culture 101”**

## **Boozhoo! (Greetings)**

This document is intended to provide some very basic background information to some of the topics and practices that you will encounter as a volunteer with Walking With Our Sisters. This information will supplement discussions that take place at the Volunteer Orientation Sessions.

Remember that first and foremost, this project is about honouring Indigenous women who have gone missing and who have been murdered. All those who wish to contribute to this honouring are welcome to do so. All contributions, no matter how big or small, are essential to the project.

Any questions or concerns relating to your volunteer commitment can be directed to the Volunteer Coordinators at [wwosvolunteer@gmail.com](mailto:wwosvolunteer@gmail.com).

For other questions around WWOS, please contact [ShingwaukDG@algonau.ca](mailto:ShingwaukDG@algonau.ca).

## **Protocols Specific to Walking With Our Sisters**

### **Vamps**

“Vamps” are also known as “moccasin tops”. For this installation, they represent the murdered and missing women’s unfinished lives. Each *vamp* is represented by their maker and is significant to that individual. We cannot share that individual’s story, we can only absorb the beauty/hurt of their story. Vamps are not to be stepped over under any circumstance. Anyone touching the vamps during installation must smudge first and use gloves. Once the exhibit is open, only Keepers or Grandmothers will touch and move vamps.

### **Elders**

Walking With Our Sisters is meaningfully led by Elders in our local communities, as well as at the national level. The Elders for the Sault Ste Marie WWOS project are Shirley Horn, Barb Nolan, and Brenda Powley. The Elders have been offered and accepted tobacco to guide us all through this work. The Elders advise on all the traditional protocols for the project and provide gentle and loving guidance.

### **Keepers**

In every community that WWOS is hosted, traditional Indigenous women take on the role of keeper. In Sault Ste Marie the Keepers are Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing, Dallas Abitong, and Linda Audette. The Keepers are responsible to keep the bundle and sacred items and ensure all traditional protocols are adhered to as advised by the Elders.

## **Exhibit Helpers**

As an Exhibit Helper, you are not only sitting with the exhibit - you are also holding the space for individuals that visit. Visitors to the space will have mixed emotions. There will be hurt and pain as well as joy, happiness and pleasure. It is our responsibility to create a safe environment for our visitors. We must not judge visitors - we must respect all walks of life come to this exhibit. We must also have humility to ask when we do not know an answer.

If you have a shift at the start of the day, please arrive ½ hour before the opening of the exhibit. If you are working a shift at the end of the day, be prepared to stay 1/2 hour after closing time to help with closing and to debrief. ALL volunteers will need to smudge before each shift.

Three volunteers will be available during regular exhibit hours plus one Keeper or Elder. Health support will also be available on site or on call. Staff of the Shingwauk Residential School Centre will also be on site.

The exhibit will run from Monday May 5<sup>th</sup> to Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup>:

Monday – Friday: 10AM – 4PM  
Plus 6-9 PM, Tuesday and Thursday  
Saturday, Sunday: 11AM – 4PM

## **Health Support**

The Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association will be providing health support throughout the WWOS Sault Ste Marie exhibit. A Residential School Health Support Worker or Cultural Support worker will either be on site or on-call at all times. If they are on-call they can be reached at 705-942-9422.

## **Installation and De-Installation Helpers**

Everything is done observing protocols and ceremony. The installation is very important. It's like building a lodge and the lodge structure is the foundation of the ceremony. So the way the foundation is approached is also important. A team of between 8 to 12 volunteers (at a given time) are needed for 8-10 hours per day for four days in order to install the work.

After the space has been smudged, shoes can no longer be worn in the space (moccasins or slippers are okay).

Installation hours:  
Wednesday April 30: 9AM – 9PM  
Thursday May 1: 9AM – 9PM  
Friday May 2: 9AM – 9PM  
Saturday May 3: 9AM – 9PM  
Sunday May 4: 9AM – 7PM

De-Installation hours:  
Monday May 19: 10AM – 8PM  
Tuesday May 20: 10AM – 8PM  
Wednesday May 21: 10AM – 8PM  
Thursday May 22: 10AM – 8PM

### **Removing of shoes**

Once the space has been smudged at the beginning of installation, shoes can no longer be worn in the space (moccasins or slippers are okay). This applies to all volunteers, helpers, and visitors to the space. If someone cannot remove their shoes for medical reasons there will be shoe covers available (but only if absolutely necessary).

### **General Cultural Protocols & Information**

#### **“Anishinabe”**

The term “Anishinabe” is used in the context of this work to refer to the “Original Peoples of this part of the world.” This is a word in the Ojibwe language of the local area. You may hear the terms “Indigenous” and “Anishinabe” used interchangeably. *Anishinabe* is not used as an exclusive term.

#### **Smudging**

Various medicines are used to smudge (description of different medicines below). Smudging is a cleansing practice. When smudging, you may notice individuals pay attention to their eyes (to see clearly), their ears (to listen well and with openness), their mouth (to speak clearly, with honesty and truth), and their hearts (to be kind and have empathy. Visitors may also need to smudge after walking through the exhibit to cleanse themselves further. Think about smudging as a means to get ready for work or ceremony. We centre ourselves on the work to be done.

When smudging, we only need to use a little bit of medicine.

#### **Four Sacred Medicines: Tobacco, Cedar, Sage and Sweetgrass**

Tobacco is the first plant that the Creator gave to Anishinabe people. It is the main activator of all the plant spirits. Sage, cedar and sweetgrass follow tobacco, and together they are referred to as the four sacred medicines. The four sacred medicines are used in everyday life and in ceremonies. All of them can be used to smudge with, though sage, cedar and sweetgrass also have many other uses.

It is important to recognize the sacredness of these medicines. Each should be treated with respect, kindness, love and caring. It is also important to recognize that each medicine has a Spirit.

## **Tobacco**

Tobacco, or asaymah, was given to Anishinabe as a way to communicate with the Spirit and all of Creation. When an offering of tobacco is made, we are putting all of our thoughts, feelings and prayers into the tobacco. Tobacco is also offered as a way of giving thanks such as when picking medicines, plants or food. We offer tobacco and give thanks for that Spirit and ask for permission to use that Spirit in a particular way before putting it to use or picking it.

When seeking advice or guidance, we offer tobacco along with our question. We also use tobacco to help us speak and find the words we need to share. We put our belief in tobacco and ask for the guidance we are seeking. Tobacco is not a symbol; it is a direct link to the spirit and between spirits. Offering tobacco is not merely a symbolic gesture.

Visitors to the space can choose to carry tobacco with them as they walk through the exhibit. Tobacco ties (a small amount of tobacco wrapped in cloth) will be prepared for visitors to carry with them through the exhibit. They can place the tobacco, filled with their thoughts and prayers, into a bowl when they leave the exhibit. The keepers will ensure the tobacco is offered to the sacred fire at the end of each day.

## **Cedar**

Cedar is recognized as a purification medicine and is used in ceremony, the home, office, etc. It is also used in ceremony to send help send up prayers offered in tobacco. You may notice that there is always a bowl of cedar next to a bowl of tobacco at the sacred fire. Cedar is placed in the fire following the tobacco.

Cedar is gathered and cleaned by women (though men are always welcome to help). Though there is cedar all over the city (you may have some in your yard), when we gather cedar for medicine and ceremony we try to harvest it from a natural place away from heavy vehicle traffic. We always offer tobacco to the spirit of the cedar medicine before picking it.

Cedar “cleaning” will be taking place throughout the installation and probably during the exhibit as well. This prepares the cedar for whatever it will be used for.

## **Sage**

Sage is used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings, as well as for cleansing the spirit, heart, body and mind. It is a purification smudge used to cleanse the individual of anything that might be troubling them.

## **Sweetgrass**

Sweetgrass grows in abundance in this area. It is sometimes referred to as Mother Earth’s hair. Sweetgrass is often used to smudge and assist with kindness. It is also used to light the sacred

pipe, smudge food at feasts, and water at water ceremonies.

### **Sacred Fire**

A sacred fire, Ishkoday, will be lit and burning for the duration from this project (from before installation begins, to when the installation is complete).

A sacred fire is lit in a particular way, drawing on beautiful teachings that are carried by Anishinabe ininiwug (men). Once Ishkode is lit, that spirit is sitting with us to help us with the work. It is never left unattended.

Many men of all ages will be contributing to looking after the fire 24/7. The rest of us, in turn, must also look after the firekeepers. We make sure they are fed, have coffee, tea and water, and are comfortable.

The sacred fire will be burning in the arbour on campus. This is a place that is open for anyone to sit, offer prayers, contemplate and have quiet conversation about their experiences.

### **Sacred Items and Bundles**

Sacred items vary for each individual. They are items an individual holds dear and respects, carried within their personal bundles. These items are recognized as having a Spirit. Each region has its own teachings and practices and it is important to recognize and respect the teachings of the region and the individual. It is also important to always ask before handling someone's sacred bundle and items. Don't be shy to ask what an item is.

Sacred Bundles are items that help individuals and guide them in the work they are called upon to do. There may be one or many items. Each item is sacred and has a Spirit. Some articles are not brought out in public. Each individual carries their own teachings, so you may hear different teachings about the same item but in a different way. It is important to respect the way the individual has been taught.

### **Pipe**

The pipe is gifted to an individual, as a way of communicating with the Spirit. When the pipe is smoked or touched, people are contributing their thoughts and prayers. Pipes are referred to as Grandmother, if carried by a woman; and Grandfather, if carried by a man. It is common for only natural tobacco to be smoked in pipes.

### **Eagle Feather(s)**

The Eagle, particularly in this region, is a Spiritual leader, guider and protector. Individuals

carrying eagle feathers have earned these items as part of their sacred bundles and use them within their ceremony and practice; they are also highly respected and taken care of diligently. There are different protocols in handling an eagle feather, each eagle feather carrier should be asked before anyone handles their feather.

### **Drum**

The drum is the heartbeat of our people; it's the heartbeat of life. We live the first nine months of our lives within our mothers and we listen to the heartbeat. It sets the pattern of existence. There are deep teachings and philosophies about the drum and life. Each individual carries different teachings about their drum and we must respect and recognize those teachings and uplift them when we can. It is best practice to ask *before* handling someone's drum, drumstick, or even their drum bag.

### **Shaker**

The shaker is a sacred item with great meaning. It is understood as the first sound made by the Creator. When a shaker is used in ceremony, it represents the first sound that was heard in the universe. Shakers are made from various types of material, but each shaker is sacred to the individual.

### **Skirts**

You will notice that women wear long skirts during ceremonies. In Anishinabe teachings, women wear long skirts to honour their gifts and roles as Anishinabe quaywug (women). The skirt honours the direct connection between women and Mother Earth. There are many beautiful teachings about the skirt. All women are encouraged to wear skirts in ceremony (including install/de-installation) but it is not a requirement. Extra skirts will be on hand to borrow if needed.

### **Moontime**

You will hear the term "moontime" to refer to the natural cycle of women, grounded in our connection to Nbaw geezis Nokomis (Grandmother Moon). That is a sacred connection.

While the teachings around moontime are expansive, the most important point to emphasize is that it is a woman's time to rest. It is sometimes talked about as all of your grandmothers coming to visit you, so your prayers and intuition are exceptional during moontime. Women on moontime are asked not to work. So while this is difficult to fully accomplish in contemporary life with kids and jobs and other responsibilities, it plays out in ceremony as women will sit back from the work. Instead, they are taken care of. They are served food first at feasts (instead of serving others), we make sure they are comfortable, and we bring them chocolate. Just kidding.

The ceremony work is only taking place during installation and de installation, with the handling

and placing of the vamps. Moontime does not exclude you from volunteering in any way with this project. If you have any questions or concerns you are welcome speak to one of the keepers or grandmothers.

### **Sunrise Ceremony**

A Sunrise Ceremony is a ceremony welcoming the day to come and all the day has to offer. The ceremony is started before the sun rises in the East, and certain prayers are said and songs are shared that welcome the Sun. Sunrise ceremonies are also conducted to welcome/open various meetings, workshops, etc., to bring Spirit to the gathering and to thank all of Creation for looking that way. This ceremony is also conducted in various ways, the individual conducting the ceremony will provide direction and explanation to the participants.