

FINDING COMMUNITY AND CREATING COMMUNITY

United Way agencies helped Kiyari form a safe space for Indigenous youth to share their stories and build community. 💎

“Kiyari and her friends started a safe space for Indigenous youth to share their stories and form community.

“When I started high school, that’s where I started noticing a lot of this stuff. I was having a hard time with racism, transience, and mental health and addictions. Chokecherry was actually the space that myself and others came up with, and then a couple of years later we were able to make it come true. It became our break space where we get to talk about these barriers and not have to worry about what other people think about it.”

Kiyari identifies barriers with “education, mental health, transit, and racism.” Recently, she notes, “with the pandemic there have been a lot of overdoses, and it has been difficult to access services.” Exemplified by her experiences from a young age, as she sought to provide community members with an opportunity and space where these issues could be talked about: “Before Wāpahki my friends and I would get together and talk about these barriers and challenges that we have.”

“I wanted to do talking circles for youth within the community. I saw a need in the community, because not many organizations offer programming that gives an opportunity to identify barriers and challenges that we experience,” states Kiyari.

“SHARE YOUR STORY SO THAT OTHER PEOPLE CAN KNOW THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE”

Once Chokecherry Studios and Wāpahki were realized a platform was created to help youth voice their concerns about inequality, modelling the experience Kiyari had when she was younger, just talking with her friends about what was happening in her life: “Talking circles have given us a platform to speak about these issues, especially with people in positions of power. A couple of weeks ago we discussed safe transit with the Mayor.” Since starting the talking circles Kiyari’s life has been changed, as it has, “given me skills, confidence, and agency to address these challenges. It also allows us to be leaders with youth in the community.”

When it comes to racism, mental health, education, and other issues, Kiyari encourages people to “Find your comfort zone, your brave space, where you’re brave enough to confront these challenges and barriers that you experience on the daily, and share your story so that other people can know that they are not alone.”



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