talking stick
EVERY VOICE MATTERS

ONE YEAR!

VOICES ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
SUMMER 2023

Talking Stick is an anonymous chat platform that connects First Nations individuals to culture-based peer support and confidential conversations.

We are proud and excited to celebrate the **first anniversary** of the launch of Talking Stick, and we wouldn't be here without our funders, our partners, our collaborators, and of course, our incredible Talking Stick Team!

Message from Chief Bobby Cameron

"As Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, we are proud to witness the resounding success and meaningful impact the Talking Stick program has had on First Nations communities.

We have seen firsthand the power of shared experiences and the healing it brings in just one year. Strengthening and revitalizing our communities, the Talking Stick program is building capacity for our people through unique and culturally grounded approaches. We recognize the tremendous significance our voices hold, and Talking Stick serves as a powerful validation that our opinions matter and, above all, that each and every one of us matters.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have contributed to this remarkable journey. As we look to the future, we remain committed to the continued success of this initiative, knowing that it holds the key to building stronger, more empowered communities. We are encouraged by the incredible impact it has had, not just on the lives of First Nations, but on the very fabric of our society. Together, we are making a difference."

Our First Year – Numbers Talk

Here is what we did:

186
New Jobs

14,400
Unique Visitors

120,000
Total # of Messages

6,657
App downloads

8,147
Chats

10
Language Options

20+
Partners and Collaborators

22
Student Practicum Placements

175+
School and Community Visits

480%
Increase in Chats

1in5
Repeat Users

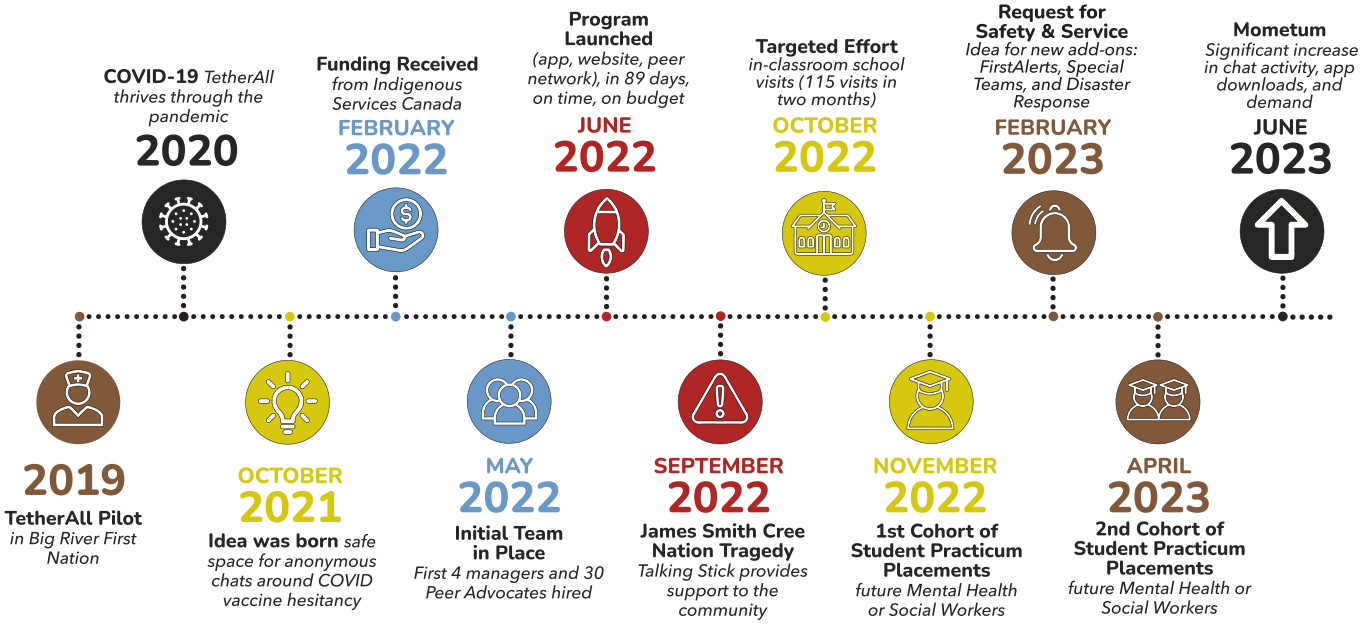
89%
Retention Rate

112,888
KMs travelled

10
Language Options

40%
Chats related to Depression/ Loneliness

How We Got Here: The Talking Stick Journey



In February 2022, amidst the challenges of COVID-19, FSIN sought to empower its communities with a tool to counter the fear, confusion, and misinformation about vaccines.
Teaming up with TryCycle Data Systems, FSIN imagined Talking Stick, a culturally respectful and anonymous app that would allow its community members across Saskatchewan to have their concerns and feelings heard by Indigenous Peer Advocates who would be trained to listen, provide comfort and support.

Three short months later, in June 2022, Talking Stick was launched.
By First Nations for First Nations. Anonymous. Accessible. Culturally safe. Non-judgmental. Reliable. The platform offers Indigenous people the opportunity to connect and share their feelings and questions with trusted, trained Indigenous Peer Advocates, one on one, at their fingertips.

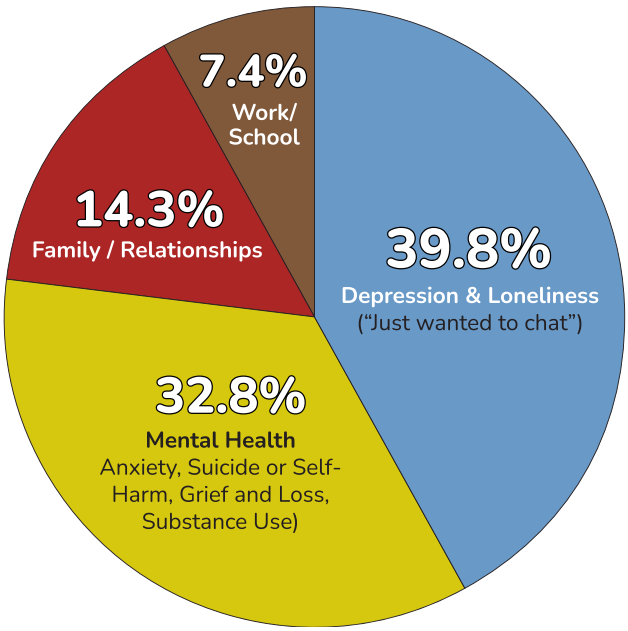
What was not anticipated at the time it was launched was the massive impact that Talking Stick would have in addressing issues completely unrelated to the pandemic.

It turned out that as COVID became less of a concern, guests turned to Talking Stick to seek support for a broad range of questions and concerns. In fact, 40% of all Talking Stick chat interactions were by anonymous guests who were feeling lonely or were simply looking for someone to talk to. Others were looking to chat about family or relationship challenges (14%), mental health and wellness (33%), and issues related to the social determinants of health.

In its first year, Talking Stick grew dramatically, and use continues to trend upwards!

The final three months of its first year showed an increase in use of 480% when compared to its first three months. This growth has led to the need to recruit additional staff. After kicking off with a modest team of 30 Indigenous Peer Advocates, Talking Stick now employs a powerful group, numbering over 180 strong, and boasts a remarkable retention rate of almost 90% - it is a good place to work!

Here's what our guests wanted to talk about:



Tribute to our Team

The Peer Advocates come from all corners of Saskatchewan, with **77% of FSIN Nations having at least one Peer Advocate** employed by Talking Stick. Each receives training and ongoing support from TryCycle's clinical team.

Over 85% of Peer Advocates are female, meaning that women and girls are being offered a unique and unprecedented opportunity to gain and apply important skills to support their communities.

Talking Stick has also tapped into the Indigenous post-secondary education system, offering practicum internships to Indigenous students in social services programs at four institutions in Saskatchewan. Most of these students stay on with Talking Stick as paid Peer Advocates after their internships are complete.

Creating Talking Stick was only the beginning! In order for it to be effective, people had to KNOW about it! Perhaps one of the most important and remarkable aspects of the Talking Stick's growth has been the dedication and determination of the Talking Stick team. Each member of the management team has brought a piece of themselves to their work, using lived experiences, traditional teaching, music, their networks, and a host of innovative approaches to get the word out.

Saskatchewan is vast, and often those that need Talking Stick the most are those who are living in rural and remote communities, "off the beaten track" where other services are reluctant or unable to trek. The team pulled out all the stops to ensure that no community was left out. This meant travel and lots of it. The team covered almost 113,000 kilometres, crisscrossing the province to present in over 175 schools, community centres, and other venues, where they were welcomed with open arms. They even ventured into isolated fly-in communities, connecting with people who otherwise would not have been offered the opportunity to hear about the power of Talking Stick.

Provincial Director Charlene Gardiner with PM Trudeau

Regional Manager Nathan lands in Wollaston Lake

Peer Advocate Tianna at 2023 FSIN Winter Assembly

Peer Advocate Laura working from Qatar!

Our first SIIT Student Interns

What's Next

Talking Stick's mission and success have drawn many important partners into its story. Looking ahead, Talking Stick will only continue to evolve.

Providing access to essential supports, with a commitment to anonymity and cultural safety has resonated with a range of organizations who have thrown their support and encouragement behind the program. These partnerships have driven innovation, training, and expansion into underserved populations while contributing to Talking Stick's sustainability.

The team is committed to continuing its efforts to ensure the program is accessible to ALL Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan. Innovative steps, such as installing Talking Stick on Chromebooks in schools will ensure that support is literally at students' fingertips!

New applications to complement the chat feature of Talking Stick have been created through collaborative efforts with user groups and the FSIN. Look for these new components soon:

TALKING STICK firstalerts

First Alerts will provide the first-of-its-kind emergency alerting system for Saskatchewan's First Nations. Available nationally, FirstAlerts allows communities to deliver vital information to Indigenous Talking Stick users who opt-in while using the app. Alerts may include missing persons, public health emergencies, weather alerts, or public safety warnings.

TALKING STICK DART DISASTER ASSISTANCE RESPONSE TEAM

Disaster Response is a Disaster Assistance Response Team providing a reliable source of support in times of emergency or crises. This feature can activate additional, specially trained Peer Advocates when a FirstAlerts notification is sent out. This can be especially helpful when whole communities struggle to receive and process accurate information, cope with stress, and heal from lived trauma.

TALKING STICK special teams

Special Teams are invited to join Talking Stick and activate existing community resources to offer specialized services quickly and anonymously. Special Teams will provide access to organizations such as NNADAP, Prevention Services, Outreach Workers, Know Your Status Nurses, Counsellors, and other culturally responsive team members, creating a new avenue that counters hesitancy by providing anonymous access to support.

the Burns Way

The Burns Way is a program created using the premise of Talking Stick to connect Canadian veterans to veteran Peer Advocates. This program will assist with mental health and wellness challenges resulting from their dedicated service. The program is anticipated to launch in 2024 and ensure access for ALL veterans through an alliance between Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and Minority veteran service partners.

Word of Talking Stick's impact has traveled well beyond Saskatchewan's borders. Presentations at national events, circulation of the VOICES Bulletin, communications between First Nations, and the moccasin telegraph have all contributed to Talking Stick's story being carried and shared, creating interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm as it is spread.

What People are Saying..

Guest Feedback

“ She was really great to talk too. Was able to help me with my anxiety. Felt good to talk to someone who could relate to me. The Talking Stick is an awesome app. Thank you! ”

“ The advocate offered great information on the app and you could tell she was proud to be part of this great service.”

“ I’m surprised that the people here are not robots and are real people! They are so friendly and nice!
I love using this app to talk! ”

“ This peer advocate was very instrumental in helping me calm the storm in my heart and helped me have peace it felt nice to speak freely and have someone to listen while i vent about my emotions.”

“ This really helped me, makes me think I’m a better person from telling people my feelings before I sleep because that’s when everything doesn’t go my way. thank you. ”

Advocate Feedback

“ Previous female guest came back to let me know she made it to her mom’s place safely. She’s going to rest and check in again sometime this week. I feel very good about the chat with this guest today. ”

“ Guest going through alcohol remorse, needed resources, phone numbers to now open places. our resources are unfamiliar to me as to the times open, and are they receiving calls and sharing their network of resources (those with similar services). ”

“ The guest heard it from a friend and was checking out the app. The guest asked me to explain what the app is about and so I did. The guest opened up about personal issues so I referred resources. The guest wanted to know about treatment centres. ”

Need to chat?
You Talk. We Listen.

- First Nations Peer Advocates are available now.
- Always Anonymous.
- Confidential. Safe. Secure.
- 1 on 1 private conversations.

Download our free app:
Talking Stick-Indigenous

Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google Play

Or go to our website:
my.talkingstick.app

Thank you to our partners

Talking Stick was created in partnership with Saskatchewan’s Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and TryCycle Data Systems.

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