

## Healing Garden 2023 Report

*“Our vision is to co-create and nurture a healing garden that will bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples together in the spirit of reconciliation. The healing garden will be a place for all to connect with nature, and for reflection, healing, teachings, and ceremonies.”*

The inspiration for the healing garden came from the National Healing Forest Initiative (<https://www.nationalhealingforests.ca/>). The Initiative promotes people and organizations to consider developing a dedicated green space for healing, learning, sharing, and reflection about Canada’s history and the legacy of Indian residential schools. The how where and what of the healing garden is determined through a thoughtful and respectful collaborative process.

The Healing Garden Team consists of representation from Westminster United Church (WUC), the local neighbourhood, and the Indigenous community along with a landscape architect and Elder Lorna Standingready.

The healing garden has been financed through grants (Cathedral Area Community Association, David Suzuki Foundation for National Healing Forest Initiative, and the UCC Justice and Reconciliation Fund); the 2023 Online Auction Fundraiser; and generous support from the congregation and community including donations from the Katherine Dowling Concert and the Cathedral Daycare Lemonade Stand last summer.

May 12, 2023 - WUC sponsored a Pipe Ceremony and feast to give thanks and bless Mother Earth prior to the ground breaking for the healing garden. It was a small ceremony with church council members, healing garden team members, Elder Lorna and several of her family members. This was a key event for attendees to begin their respectful collaborative journey together.

June 13, 2023 – WUC sponsored a National Healing Garden Initiative presentation that was open to the public. The founding members, Patricia Stirbys and Peter Croal, presented and answered questions. The presentation was over Zoom on the large screen in the sanctuary followed by refreshments and conversation.

Volunteers from the community and congregation donated their time and expertise to the development of the healing garden. Beginning with the walking pathway, a generous volunteer donated his time and bobcat expertise to pick up and deliver material, create the pathway and spread excess dirt for future plant beds. There was a community work bee to create the plants beds covered with wood chips, and plant 400+ native prairie plants including three of the four sacred plants.

Richard DuBois, an artist from Pasqua First Nation, was commissioned to create the reconciliation mural. It was completed in July 2023. He chose the four words, Truth, Unity, Growth, and Kinship to represent a path forward to reconciliation. He believes working together and moving forward would be a difficult road without these four components.

A portion of the three-foot high iron fence along the front of the Westminster property was transformed into a gate to allow easy access into the healing garden.

An additional 6-foot backless bench and four 4-foot cedar benches were purchased. The cedar benches are placed in the four directions and surround the location of the future medicine wheel.

September 10, 2023 – We celebrated the opening of the healing garden with a blend of both cultures – a Pipe Ceremony and feast followed by a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony. WUC congregation and members of the Indigenous community attended the Pipe Ceremony and feast. The Ribbon Cutting Ceremony was open to the public with several media representatives attending.

September 12, 2023 – WUC sponsored a presentation by Dr. Blair Stonechild on Indigenous spirituality. Dr. Stonechild is Professor of Indigenous Studies at the First Nations University of Canada. Major publications include *The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality* (2016) and *Loss of Indigenous Eden and the Fall of Spirituality* (2020). The event was well attended by the public and congregation.

## **2024 Plans**

Plans for the healing garden in 2024 will be contingent on successful fundraising. There will be an online auction in June 2024 and we will be applying for grants as well. Please watch for additional information in the church announcements throughout the year.

- completing the medicine wheel
- planting additional native prairie and sacred plants
- completing a “mowing strip” along the grass/plant line
- permanent plaques identifying the sacred plants in English and Cree
- permanent bronze dedication plaque to share the what and why of the healing garden (English and Cree)
- a space dedicated to children – Kindness Rock Garden and Friendship Bench
- incorporate teachings and ceremonies into the use of the healing garden through partnerships with Indigenous organizations

Communication and relationship building are the building blocks to the success of this project. Take the time to build relationships and learn. Elder Lorna envisions this healing garden as a “landmark in downtown Regina”. Something we can all be proud of...together.

Thank you for your growing faith and support in this project.

Submitted by Kathy Tice on behalf of the Healing Garden Team