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STRONGER TOGETHER

BY STACIE GAETZ | PHOTO BY KRISTY REIMER



The Circle for Indigenous Relations, Airdrie & Area (CFIRAirdrie) is a grassroots community-driven initiative that is bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples together.

The group aims to gather residents of all backgrounds in peace and friendship, to build relationships, learn the truth, increase awareness and work towards genuine reconciliation in the Airdrie area.

CFIRAirdrie was organized by a team of dedicated volunteers in the summer of 2020 when conversations were held between interested community members and the City of Airdrie.

DA-GIIWEWAAT

CFIRAiridrie is participating in the Da-giiwewaat “so they can go home” Moccasin Project (sotheycangohome.com). The group is making baby moccasins as part of a national campaign to raise awareness about the apprehension of Indigenous children in Canada, with the goal of eradicating racism and bringing children home to their families and communities.

If you would like to participate in the making of moccasins, please contact CFIRAiridrie via Facebook or CFIRAiridrie@gmail.com for details. No experience necessary.



“It is all about education and bringing awareness to our culture and who we are”

Sue Methuen is an ally and organizing member of the volunteer-run organization and she says the events and gatherings CFIRAiridrie organizes “provide a means to grow friendships, share culture, learn the truth of our history and current realities and work towards genuine reconciliation activities in our city and area.”

According to Methuen, Indigenous people (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) make up 4.9 per cent of the total population in Canada (2016) and five per cent of the population in Airdrie.

The first official gathering of the group was held in March 2021 when 18 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people came together via Zoom.

CFIRAiridrie has organized a virtual event that included Lawrence Gervais, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta (Region 3) speaking on Métis Nation and Métis history in the Airdrie area.

They also celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day with an informal gathering for the purpose of sharing stories and knowledge about Treaty 7 Territory, its heritage and the people who lived here in the past and who live here now.

Vern Frank is Kainai First Nation and has been an Airdrie resident for 14 years. He says he has been a victim of racism and been accosted because of his heritage right here in the city he calls home.

“It is all about education and bringing awareness to our culture and who we are,” says Frank.

“People are afraid of and lash out at what they don’t know. Knowledge really is power. We just want understanding and to put a stop to all of these misconceptions about First Nations. Let’s work towards meeting on common ground.”

Victoria Scattergood, who is Métis and CFIRAiridrie’s graphic designer, agrees with Frank, saying she wants to help educate those who don’t know better, so her son doesn’t have to go through the challenges she has.

“We need something like this in this city to help educate,” she says.

“It’s OK to change the way you think. You’re not being a hypocrite; you’re learning. Know better, do better.”

Adrian Pruden, who is Métis and an Airdrie resident, says his passion to bring attention to the continuous challenges and racism experienced by the Indigenous population and the recent discovery of mass graves at residential schools in Canada inspired him to take part in CFIRAiridrie.

“There are no quick and easy solutions to correct the horrifying mistakes made over these past generations,” says Pruden.

“The only path forward is to agree on where we want to be in the future and work today to curtail the residual effects experienced and make a concerted effort to move forward in a positive manner for future generations.”

Methuen says future CFIRAiridrie gatherings will include speakers, films, walks, circle talks, educational opportunities, children and youth activities, culture sharing, learning about the land and sacred places, becoming aware of history and current realities.

“We will engage with business, industry and governments to initiate meaningful changes,” Methuen adds.

She says CFIRAiridrie welcomes all people to join them at gatherings and special events regardless of where you are from.

“What I would like people to know about CFIR is that it is open to anyone,” says Ashley Barclay, who is Métis and has lived in Airdrie for four years.

“You don’t necessarily have to be from Airdrie; as long as you’re willing to come with an open mind and an open heart, we will welcome you.”

She adds that the group is always looking to connect with speakers, volunteers and leaders. **life**

For more information on CFIRAiridrie, visit their Facebook page