



CFUW Owen Sound produces play based on “The Illustrated History of the Chippewas of Nawash”

In the fall of 2016 CFUW Owen Sound Club entered into a collaborative partnership with the Maadookii Seniors Group of Neyaashiinigiing, Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, to produce a play based on “The Illustrated History of the Chippewas of Nawash”, written and illustrated by Polly Keeshig-Tobias.

On September 8, 2018 this play was performed at the Community Centre at Neyaashiinigiing to a ‘sold out’ audience of 250 people. It was, all accounts, a huge success. This is a story of betrayal by the government in relation to land, despite Crown support. It is the story of the desecration of burial grounds and a story of the denial of fishing rights and treaty obligations. It is also a story of intense community involvement and a determination to make it right, a story of success in the courts and the knowledge and evidence of government’s role in denying rights and respect to Indigenous peoples. This is a story that is not widely known by the general population and the community of Neyaashiinigiing. It is an important story that needed to be told.

Despite what Shakespeare said, “the play is the thing”, I beg to differ. The play is not the only thing. The two-year collaboration between CFUW and Maadookii was an incredibly wonderful experience. We met monthly over the two-year period. We applied for numerous grants and received more than \$100,000.00. We interviewed and hired a script writer, project managers, a director, cast and crew. We developed contracts, administrative and financial accountability. Some of the cast were professional actors but most were volunteers from Neyaashiinigiing.

We did all this without ever having done anything like this before. Because none of us had theatre experience, we hired a professional consultant to assist us. None of us had any idea how complex this whole project was, dealing with professional artists, set and music development, contractual obligations, venues, multiple volunteers etc. Imagine, two very disparate groups of people from different cultures, staying together for two years to complete an incredibly complex project, successfully! We never once had a disagreement. All of our decisions were by consensus and our enthusiasm for the project never waned, despite funding denials, time lags and administrative setbacks.

We are now in the final reporting stage to the funders and one of the questions that is asked is: *“is this an emerging issue”.. an emerging issue is defined as one that is newly created or noticed and growing in strength or popularity, becoming known or established.* Our response is that this is indeed an emerging issue, this project is all about Reconciliation and learning. In making new friends we learned so much about the history of Neyaashiinigiing and the complexities of Indigenous culture and by producing the play we were able to share some of that history and culture with the broader community. We would like to believe that Reconciliation is growing in strength and popularity and that the play and CFUW and Maadookii’s participation is playing a role in the notion that Reconciliation is becoming known and established, and an important component in our communities.

As for future productions of the play, we leave that to the more experienced theatre companies. Interest has been expressed and we will be following up with these groups. In the meantime, a video was made of the play and we will be able to make this available to schools and other interested groups...while not the same as a live production, it will still be educative and informative.

This was an incredibly positive and exciting learning experience and I personally look forward to finding other opportunities to work with the Neyaashiinigiing community.

Donna Elliott
CFUW Owen Sound Club