Returning to their roots: Indigenous Liaison at Luna shares the importance of individual healing

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The work Marissa Salem does at Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Centre as the Indigenous Liaison is important and meaningful. Luna provides resources to prevent abuse, investigate wrongdoing, support healing, ensure offenders are held accountable and build resilience in all communities. BLG is proud to partner with Luna and support the very important work that Marissa and others do through their programs. We recently had the opportunity to speak with Marissa to learn more about her and her valuable work at the centre.

At Luna, Marissa spends her days doing community outreach and one-on-one healing sessions with families through the Indigenous Victim Support program. She can often be found in the colourful and beautifully designed Sacred Space. The Sacred Space is a safe and quiet place for families to share their stories and find support as they cope with difficult times. The space came together through a partnership between the Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY) and was blessed by Elder Kelly Good Eagle. The space was brought to life by the artwork of Nathan Patrick Meguinis, a talented local Tsuut'ina Dèné artist, muralist, Powwow Dancer, YellowHand and Protector. The murals in the Sacred Space have deep and sacred meaning. In Nathan's culture, the colours of the space have strong connections to many things. Red represents Mother Earth, green represents all plant life, blue represents water and sky, yellow represents protection and sun, purple represents Thunderbird, Thunder Beings and ceremonial women, white represents holiness and black represents strength and power.



Marissa understands the perspective of the families she works with. Like many of the Indigenous people who are referred to Luna, she is also a child of residential school survivors. The historical trauma can be deeply felt, including through its impact on families and parenting. Families and caregivers decide what they will share with Marissa. Marissa's role is to listen, understand and provide appropriate support and referrals based on the clients' individual backgrounds and requests.

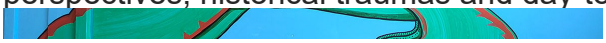
> *"We offer different kinds of healing services," said Marissa. "I'm trying to help Indigenous people get back to their roots while understanding and respecting their unique and individual needs."*

Marissa often smudges with clients. Smudging is a traditional ceremony that creates sacred smoke by burning one or more of the sacred medicines of tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass. The purpose of smudging is to use the sacred smoke to connect with spirit and the Creator. Local Indigenous Elders also offer sweat lodge ceremonies to Luna clients. These powerful ceremonies, which can last many hours, are meant to bring participants back into balance and reconnect them to nature.

At Luna, and through their own healing journeys, Marissa wants people to feel connected to their culture and have a supportive place to turn. She works on understanding their individual needs and providing resources that are beneficial to them.

Through her work, Marissa is building the program and relationships between Luna and Indigenous communities. She engages with Elders and other Indigenous community representatives to build relationships and encourages understanding and support. She also works with local governments, the police and the justice system to advocate for change, educate and work to reduce the stigma around Indigenous people accessing victim's services.

On National Day for Truth and Reconciliation — and every day — Marissa encourages people to learn more about Indigenous people and to work to understand their perspectives, historical traumas and day-to-day experiences.



> *"Trauma is passed down and impacts why many of us do what we do," Marissa said. "I want Indigenous people to feel safe to come forward and heal."*

Luna

The Luna Child Youth and Advocacy Centre plays a crucial role in the Calgary community as a centre of excellence in child abuse intervention and prevention.

BLG and Luna

BLG is proud to support Luna and the work that they do. As a partner since 2016, BLG has made donations, volunteered time and provided pro bono work to their programs and initiatives.

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