

# **Red Dress Displays: Awareness and meaning (NAIDM 2025)**

**Prepared by the Zonta Clubs of:  
Iron Mountain-Kingsford,  
Marquette, and  
Mount Pleasant**



## **THE HISTORY OF MMIP**

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement began in the 1990's when Indigenous women began marching across Turtle Island, demanding justice for all of the lost and stolen sisters that have been victimized and left without answers, with voices un-heard in the midst of this epidemic. Since the beginning of the movement, the RED HANDPRINT and RED DRESS have become the symbol and beacon of hope and awareness. It is said and believed that the spirits of those who have walked before us can see the color red and by wearing this color we are calling our lost one's home. In 2013 President Obama signed the 'Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013'. With the passing of this bill Congress granted tribal courts the authority to try non-Natives for violent crimes against women. In the years following the passing of the Act the MMIW epidemic gained national attention when May 5th was declared 'National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls' in 2018. Although the MMIW began with a focus on women and girls, it was clear this epidemic affects all Indigenous people. In recent years Tribal communities have started to include lost brothers, fathers and two-spirited people creating the MMIP (Missing and Murdered Indigenous People) recognition to include all those who are lost but not forgotten.

## **What is the REDress Project**

The REDress project began in Canada 2010 by Jaime Black, a Metis artist, as a public art installation created to bring awareness to the epidemic of murdered and missing Indigenous women. The first installation in the United States was at the National Museum of the American Indian in 2019. The project is an installation of empty red dresses intended to draw attention to these violent crimes and to evoke a presence through the display of absence. The hope is that the project will start a community dialogue around these issues that will seek solutions. This project inspired others to use red dresses to draw attention to the large numbers of murdered and missing Indigenous peoples and prompted the creation of Red Dress Day.

## **The Red Hand**

A red hand over the mouth has become a symbol of the MMIW movement. It stands for all the missing sisters whose voices are not heard. It stands for the silence of the media and law enforcement in the midst of this crisis. It stands for the oppression and subjugation of Native women who are now rising up to say #NoMoreStolenSisters. The red hand symbolizes the connection between the physical world and the spiritual world and invokes the help of ancestors and spiritual guides.

## **Developing Partnerships and Gathering Supplies**

- In addition to the local Indigenous community, look to partner with those in the health care field, counselors, those working with the Indigenous community, libraries, museums, those working with sexual assault victims, higher education, businesses, and local community leaders. You don't want too large of a core committee, but the larger group of partners can provide display space, help with promotion of events, and be potential financial sources.
- Collect dresses:
  - Work with local thrift shops to either have red dresses donated or provided them at a reduced cost.
  - Work with public spaces like the senior center, library, or more to act as collection sites for donated dresses.
  - Publicize the need for dresses and solicit donations.
  - Ask that dresses be donated not loaned. Loans require tracking, returning, and ensuring that no harm comes to them.

## **Planning Events Around Red Dress Day**

- Develop a partnership with your local Indigenous community.
- Follow the lead of tribal members regarding the elements and format of the event.
- Smudging, prayer, and drumming are important components of group events.
  - Smudging - a ceremony that consists of burning plant herbs and resins in either a clay or shelled bowl while prayers are being said. This results in a smoke cloud formation that is believed to cleanse the air and those within it.
  - Prayer – the tribal chaplain sets the tone of the event through the spiritual practices of the tribe.
  - Drumming – the drums set the tone of the event and connect the participants to spirituality and the community.
- Speakers may include tribal members who have suffered a loss, those working with tribal members in an official capacity, or those helping with spiritual and emotional support.
- Consider having people on hand who can respond to those who may be triggered by past events.
- Consider tribal norms and interpersonal relationships when planning activities and scheduling speakers.
- Food is an important component of Indigenous events. Consult with your partners regarding food.
- Consider incorporating a MMIP Awareness Walk as part of the event.
- Reach out to family and friends who live in other communities as local supplies of dresses dwindle.

## **Event Enhancements**

- Consider offering a craft table with a relevant craft.
- Consider providing t-shirts, bags or other items that will be distributed to attendees.
- Consider a donation jar or other means of raising money that can be used to establish a scholarship for an Indigenous student.

## **Useful Resources:**

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs—<https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu>

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada - <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs.html>

U.S. Department of Justice - <https://www.justice.gov/tribal/mmip/data-research>

Native Hope - <https://www.nativehope.org/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-mmiw/>  
MMIW Toolkit - <https://www.niwrc.org/resources/toolkit/mmiw-toolkit-families-and-communities>  
Association of American Indian Affairs - <https://www.indian-affairs.org/survivorsresources.html>

**Presenters:**

Iron Mountain-Kingsford – Raquel Reed [raquel\_gagnon@hotmail.com] and Nancy Finch  
[nancyfinch@finchlawfirmmi.com]

Marquette – Lucille Contois [lcontois@nmu.edu]

Mount Pleasant – Ruth Helwig [zontamtpleasant@gmail.com]

## Examples of Flyers and Brochures



# NO MORE STOLEN SISTERS EVENT

**April 24, 2025**

**5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.**

**ART REACH IN DOWNTOWN MOUNT PLEASANT**

Light Refreshments Provided



Example of the program used for the Art Reach exhibit.

**RED DRESS DAY** IS A NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR MISSING & MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN. **THE RED HAND PRINT AND RED DRESS** ARE THE SYMBOLS OF HOPE AND AWARENESS. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE SPIRITS CAN SEE THE **COLOR RED** AND BY WEARING THIS COLOR LOVED ONES ARE CALLED HOME.



### Program

**5:00 p.m.** - Gather and light refreshments

**5:30 p.m.** - Welcome & Opening

**5:45 p.m.** - History of MMIP

**6:00 p.m.** - **Melissa Pamp**  
Tribal Councilor  
Little Traverse Bay Bands



You are invited  
to The Hill Campground  
7525 E Tomah Rd  
Mt Pleasant MI 48858  
on May 5th from 5:00–6:30 for  
a time of remembrance for  
missing and murdered  
Indigenous people



Example of event postcard.

# INDIGENOUS WOMEN FACE MURDER RATES MORE THAN **10 TIMES** THE NATIONAL AVERAGE



**NO MORE STOLEN SISTERS**








FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: BEHAVIORAL HEALTH VICTIM SERVICES AT 989-775-4400 OR [BHVICTIMSERVICES@SAGCHIP.ORG](mailto:BHVICTIMSERVICES@SAGCHIP.ORG)

Example of one of multiple yard and wall signs that were produced.





## No More Stolen Sisters

*A Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous People Event*

**Monday, May 5, 2025**

**Time: 5-6:30 p.m.**

**Location: The Hill Campground**

7525 E. Tomah Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858

- Spread awareness for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) Movement
- Guest speakers
- Light refreshments



Red Dress exhibits will be featured starting the beginning of April, until the middle of May to bring recognition to this powerful movement.

### Locations will include:

- Art Reach Mid Michigan: *The Red Dress* exhibit will run April 1-30, 2025, with a gallery reception and speaker on April 24 from 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- McLaren Central Michigan Hospital
- Central Michigan University Bovee Center
- Central Michigan University Libraries
- Central Michigan University Museum
- Nimkee Memorial Wellness Center
- Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College
- Tribal Operations - Black Elk Building
- Anishnaabeg Child and Family Services
- Soaring Eagle Waterpark and Hotel
- SCIT Behavioral Health
- Ziibiwing Center
- Clarke Historical Library
- Veterans Memorial Library
- Mid Michigan College
- Cup of Joy
- R.I.S.E. Advocacy, Inc.
- SCIT Public Safety Building
- Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort

**More locations will be all throughout Mt. Pleasant.**  
For full list, please email: [BHDVServices@sagchip.org](mailto:BHDVServices@sagchip.org)

**For more information, contact:** Behavioral Health Victim Services at 989.775.4400 or [BHDVServices@sagchip.org](mailto:BHDVServices@sagchip.org)



**Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan**

*"Working Together for Our Future"*

7500 Soaring Eagle Blvd.  
Mount Pleasant, MI 48858  
989-775-4000  
[www.sagchip.org](http://www.sagchip.org)

# Red Dress DONATIONS NEEDED

**Red Dress Day: May 5, 2025**

*National Day of Remembrance for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People*

**No More Stolen Sisters Event: Coming May 2025**

A coalition of representatives from the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, the Zonta Club of Mt. Pleasant, RISE Advocacy, and McLaren Hospital are joining together to recognize the National Day of Remembrance for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People, also known as Red Dress Day.

**In order to create several Red Dress Day displays in our community we need to collect over 150 red dresses.**

- ▶ We are seeking clean, new or gently used, dresses.
- ▶ They can be any size, any length, and any design.
- ▶ They can be homemade or store purchases.
- ▶ If you, or someone you know, has a red dress that is no longer needed, or is willing to sew a simple dress, please consider donating it to this project.
- ▶ Donated dresses will not be returned, but kept and saved for use in future years.



**For more information, please contact:**

**Behavioral Health Victim Services**

**Phone:** 989.775.4400 | **Email:** BHVictimServices@sagchip.org

**Donations accepted until:  
March 21, 2025**

**Drop off donations to:**

- **SCIT Behavioral Health**  
2800 S. Shepherd Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
- **ACFS**  
2585 S. Leaton Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
- **Tribal Police Department**  
6954 E. Broadway, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
- **Trillium Fine Clothing**  
125 E. Broadway St., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
- **ICDC Thrift Shop**  
1008 W. High St., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
- **McLaren Central Michigan**  
1221 South Dr., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858
- **Isabella County Commission on Aging**  
2200 S. Lincoln Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858



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# Red Dress Display

For Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous People

Coordinated by Northern Michigan  
University's Mino-bimose'idiwag & Native  
American Student Association



Join us in raising awareness and taking action in support of  
protecting Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people  
from violence.

#### Mino-bimose'idiwag

- [wpt@nmu.edu](mailto:wpt@nmu.edu)
- [nmu.edu/socialwork/home](http://nmu.edu/socialwork/home)
- [@mino\\_bimose\\_idiwag](https://www.facebook.com/mino_bimose_idiwag)
- Walking the Path Together (Facebook)

#### Native American Student Association

- [cnas@nmu.edu](mailto:cnas@nmu.edu)
- <https://nmu.edu/nativeamericanstudies/native-american-student-association>
- [@nmunasa](https://www.facebook.com/nmunasa)

## Origins

The Red Dress Project was originally created by Jaime Black, a Metis artist from Winnipeg, Canada, as an aesthetic response to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW). There are thousands of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, Two Spirit, and other relatives (MMIP) across the U.S. and Canada, many of which often go ignored by mainstream media and unsolved by law enforcement.

Northern Michigan University's Mino-Bimose'idiwag (WPT), a program through the Social Work Department and Center for Native American Studies, and the Native American Student Association (NASA) organized this display to honor and call home our missing and murdered relatives, educate our campus and community, and call for justice for our people and folks to take action with us.

We remember and honor all Indigenous relatives, regardless of gender, who have gone missing or been murdered due to colonial violence, white supremacy, and negligence.



# MMIW in Michigan

In 2021, the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified 295 cases of human trafficking in Michigan involving 429 victims total, with over 80% of those cases involving sex trafficking. 85% of the cases involved female victims and 26% involved minor children. Respectively, over 5,000 cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children were reported, according to the National Crime Information Center in 2016. MMIP advocates and experts know that this number does not accurately represent the amount of actual MMIW cases. A lack of data collection and keeping of accurate reports, proper and thorough investigation, coordination between governments and law enforcement are just a few of the barriers that contribute to this.

Without a full and accurate record of the cases of MMIP in Michigan it is hard to say just how severe this issue is in our state. With the help of a national project to implement a response plan to better address the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples, some tribes in the state have been able to establish and build databases to get a better understanding of this issue within their own community. Regardless of data, old and new stories of relatives who have been trafficked, stolen, or murdered exist across our communities. History and the continual mistreatment of these cases, individuals, and their families show clearly that violence against Native women, girls, and Two Spirit people is allowed and rarely will justice be served, or proper support given to ensure it.

Michigan was chosen as one of 11 states to participate in a national pilot project to implement community plans to respond to MMIP reports and cases. Six tribes in the state have been part of that pilot project, including two Tribes in the U.P., and have found success in addressing missing persons reports in a more timely manner. While Michigan has observed May 5th as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Awareness day since 2021, more work must be done. It is important that all federal and state governments and law enforcement work collaboratively with tribes to ensure that Indigenous people are protected from violence.

# Future Support

There have been many efforts made by lawmakers to help address the lack of data collection, government-to-government coordination, and reporting process- such as the Not Invisible Act of 2019, Savanna's Act in 2020, and VAWA's 2022 Reauthorization- but more permanent and sustainable support and resources are needed.

The funding provided by the DOJ to establish MMIP coordinators in 11 states and response plans to better address this issue is set to run out this spring. While these projects have been helpful, they have only scratched the surface of addressing issues of violence against Indigenous people that will need continued support, resources, and attention in order to see the end of this epidemic.

Often the burden of justice in these cases still remains on the families and community. We need action and cooperation within local law enforcement, government, and the larger community. We need these cases, stories, and issues amplified and made visible. We need sovereignty and jurisdiction over crimes committed against our community members. And we need committed change to understanding how this type of violence is rooted in colonialism and white supremacy. Understand the signs of human trafficking and the resources available in your area. Share and seek out knowledge about this issue from Native community members. And take action when you see or hear about injustice against our relatives.

## History

The crisis of MMIP is deeply rooted in colonization and the violence experienced by Indigenous communities over hundreds of years, including the lack of legal protections for Native peoples and the systematic erosion of Tribal sovereignty across time. Many of these cases require legal intervention and cooperation from the federal government, wherein they often opt out of participating. The lack of concern and urgency speaks to larger issues of colonization and racism within the justice system.

Violence, particularly sexual and gendered violence, was an integral tool of colonialization throughout history, from initial contact to removal to boarding schools and into the present day.

Indigenous women, children, and Two Spirit peoples were targeted due to their roles as caretakers, leaders, knowledge holders and cultural pillars within the community.

Sex trafficking, rape, and other gendered violence were rare in Tribal communities prior to European contact. Women and Two Spirit people were revered in our community as integral leaders and decision-makers in maintaining a sustainable future for our People. They were viewed as sacred, equal, and essential members of the community. This meant that when this type of violence occurred, the abuser or perpetrator was held accountable. Punishment for rape, sexual or domestic violence could range from banishment to death.

## MMIW Today

4 in 5 Native women have experienced violence within their lifetime.

56% of Native women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.

55% of Native women have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

49% of Native women have been stalked in their lifetime.

The numbers for queer, non-binary, and Two Spirit folks are even higher.

On some reservations, Native women are murdered at more than 10 times the national rate.

Homicide is the third leading cause of death for Native women on some reservations.

(Amnesty International, 2017; Indian Law Resource Center, 2013; National Institute of Justice, 2011)



# References

Amnesty International. (2007). Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/mazrofinjustice.pdf>

Indian Law Resource Center. (2013). Restoring Safety to Native Women. [https://indianlaw.org/sites/default/files/TribalCapacityReport\\_Final\\_1.pdf](https://indianlaw.org/sites/default/files/TribalCapacityReport_Final_1.pdf)

National Institute of Justice. (2016). Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249822.pdf>

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