

The BCBH 2017 Sisters in Strength Retreat was held over the weekend of Friday, October 13 – Sunday, October 15, 2017 at the Sts’ailes Lhawathet Lalem retreat centre in Agassiz, B.C. for Indigenous women who are family members to one of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.



Fifteen First Nations women participants and ten supporters and facilitators joined together for one weekend of healing and strength building.

The weekend opened on Friday night with a Blanketing Ceremony welcoming the women into the beautiful surroundings of the lodge, and creating an instantaneous bond and sacred atmosphere. Facilitated by Janice George from the Sts’ailes Nation, the ceremony included a path of cedar boughs upon which the women stood representing strength from Mother Earth. A local drumming group sang traditional songs as the women gathered for their blessing.



*“The ceremony helped me to get in touch with my emotions and pain of losing a family member.”*

Saturday morning was spent in a Circle of Trust, in which all women shared who they were and some of their personal experiences dealing with the traumatic loss of their loved ones. The sharing lasted more than 3 hours and was full of truth, bonding and emotion.

*“Ceremony is a spiritual connection to our Well Being.”*

Saturday afternoon the women spent in self-care having manicures, shiatsu massage, healing touch and haircuts. Also available in the central cafeteria were arts and crafts. Women stayed up late into the night working on sewing red felt hearts with beads, and decorating puzzle pieces for a project to be revealed the next morning. Others took part in



a drumming celebration in the woods near the centre, around an outdoor fire. Women sang and practiced their traditional drumming songs.

*“Traditional songs shared, healing circle, the laughter shared. SELF-CARE consultants (manicurist, hair designer, shiatsu, healing touch) were essential in holding our women up. Great food too!”*



On Sunday morning, after breakfast, all the women gathered in the meeting room where a fire was burning. Gathered in circle, our main facilitator Angela George led the women through a closing ceremony culminating in the burning of tears in which tissues used for crying were placed.

The decorated puzzle pieces were then revealed as a large heart – a representation that broken pieces can be put together to reveal strength, love and beauty.



*“Being in a grassroots setting with ladies who also understand grief and loss, it brings forth the healing along with strength.”*



*“Helped me gain my balance once again.”*

*“More connected with my heritage.”*