



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH**
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WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE

Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH)
American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC)
2024 – 2025 Final Report



Project Description

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit (MMIWG2-S) Awareness Campaign included the production and distribution of five videos designed to raise awareness about the ongoing MMIWG2-S crisis. The five videos identified resources for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) community members. Videos also highlighted several negative health impacts as speakers noted how violence against AI/AN community members is a serious public health issue. The MMIWG2-S Awareness Campaign was authored by the LACDMH AI/AN UsCC Subcommittee and brought to community by So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project (SSSP).

Concept and Development Strategy

SSSP utilized various outreach strategies to generate engagement and gather community feedback while developing the campaign plan. SSSP progressively met with LACDMH and AI/AN UsCC Co-Chairs to ensure planning details aligned with the subcommittee's vision, goals, and branding. Additionally, Eva Powless, Director of Community Relations, attended every monthly AI/AN UsCC Subcommittee Meeting throughout the onset and duration of this project. During AI/AN UsCC meetings, progress updates were shared and feedback was proactively encouraged to support in shaping the campaign. SSSP also created and shared an AI/AN UsCC Feedback survey to foster engagement while developing our initial Concept Document and Development Strategy.

In this stage of the project, SSSP was focused on brainstorming campaign content through various approaches. This included an array of mental health topics and ideas to engage video participants, community, and local/distant viewers. This stage of the project also included generating ideas to include subgroups within our diverse AI/AN community with regard to age, tribal affiliation, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Recruitment and Outreach

SSSP developed outreach materials to recruit 10 community members to participate in the videos. The outreach materials ranged from graphics and email communications that SSSP distributed electronically as well as stickers that SSSP distributed at in-person events. Graphics were intentionally created with culturally relevant symbolism to resonate with community and showcase cultural beauty.



MMIWG2S Awareness Campaign Recruitment Flyer

The flyer background highlights traditional Native designs and imagery. These designs are symbolic in representing AI/AN art, regalia, ceremony, powwows and much more. Red is the color associated with the MMIWG2-S movement for various reasons. Red symbolizes a call for attention. "It has been said that red is a color that transcends the physical world and calls to the ancestors in the spirit world" (StrongHearts Native Helpline). Red also represents the blood of our ancestors, women, girls and Two-Spirit relatives.

The MMIWG2-S logo was created to signify nonbinary inclusion. There are no facial features on the logo to expand inclusivity. The logo aligns with traditional AI/AN cornhusk dolls and teachings, which move away from physical appearances and focus on personhood. The earrings and jewelry details are specific to California Indigenous communities. Lastly, the red handprint symbolizes silencing of our peoples, with connotations to historical trauma, genocide, and ongoing colonization to AI/AN communities.

Pre-Production

The pre-production phase included creative development concepts, script development, script review and approval, development meetings with contractors, and casting.

SSSP initially planned to film 10 speakers in three roundtable sessions. The first two roundtables were planned to engage four speakers per discussion and the third roundtable was to include an intimate intergenerational conversation between an elder/youth or parent/child.

Video 1: *MMIWG2-S: Remember Their Names!*

Video 1 implemented storytelling to explain the MMIWG2-S public health issue and impacts of violence and mental health. In a roundtable discussion, speakers shared direct or indirect experiences honoring the life and/or reunification of a loved one. The video honored missing and murdered relatives and encouraged viewers to remember their names!

Video 2: *MMIWG2-S: Feather Alert Advocacy, Activism and CommUnity*

Video 2 highlights the statewide initiatives in place to support location and reunification of missing relatives. This video discussed the Feather Alert program, California Government Code Section 8594.13, which began on January 1, 2023. The Feather Alert is a resource available to law enforcement investigating suspicious and/or the unexplainable disappearance of an Indigenous woman or person. Once activated, the Feather Alert provides immediate information to the public to aid recovery of missing Indigenous peoples.

Video 3: *MMIWG2-S: Aunties Uplifting our Two-Spirit Indigequeer Relatives*

Video 3 features a roundtable showcasing community aunties advocating for our Two-Spirit Indigequeer relatives in the ongoing MMIWG2-S epidemic. The conversation highlights critical issues in addressing MMIWG2-S such as the lack of research and data focused on Indigequeer relatives. This video was a call for justice and visibility to address root causes behind violence towards Indigenous peoples. This roundtable pinpoints how colonization has impacted our Two-Spirit and Indigequeer community members and demands an end to the violence and oppression towards our relatives!

Video 4: *MMIWG2-S: We Will Not Be Silenced Anymore!*

Video 4 features a dialogue circle in which our speakers share experiences of prevention, intervention, and reunification throughout the ongoing MMIWG2-S crisis. This Indigenous roundtable discussion is rooted in collective, inherent strengths and resilience.

Video 5: *MMIWG2-S: Prevention, Intervention, and Self-care*

Video 5 is a candid call to action, empowering community members to engage in critical safety conversations. The speaker utilizes storytelling to teach us how to stay safe, seek support, and set boundaries. They walk us through examples of navigating multigenerational conversations with loved ones. The speaker reminds us to focus on our wellness and shares ways to care for ourselves through the ongoing MMIWG2-S crisis.

Casting

Project requirements included the development of a flyer and promotional materials to recruit video participants. SSSP needed to recruit a total of 10 community members to participate in the 5 videos. We utilized an open casting strategy when outreaching speakers in various forms such as specific email messaging, promotion via social media, electronic casting form, and by word of mouth via tabling engagements at community events. Our finalized cast of speakers for the MMIWG2-S Awareness Campaign are as follows:

- **Angelina Diaz** is a Dinè (Navajo) and Guatemalan woman who was born and raised in Inglewood, CA. She resides in the Inland Empire County, on Kizh and Tongva territory. As a Youth Fellow Organizer, Angelina helps bring Native and Indigenous youth across California to a safe environment where they can express who they are without judgement of what background they came from. Angelina is also currently an Ambassador with The California Endowment: President's Youth Council. As Ambassador, she brings justice to her Native and Indigenous communities in the California area.
- **Farrah Ferris** is an enrolled member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe (descendent of Yurok/Karuk/Redwood Creek Tribes). Farrah serves to increase equity for underserved communities via roles as an educator, therapist, advocate, and 'auntie'. Farrah promotes whole-person healing, education, and environmental wellness by integrating cultural and community interventions. Farrah also served as the standing DMH AI/AN UsCC Co-Chair at the time of filming.
- **Gina Jackson** (Shoshone and Lakota) is the CEO and Co-Founder of the Return to the Heart Foundation. She has more than 24 years of experience encompassing state/tribal justice, collaboration, policy, and philanthropy including creating a new MMIW/G2S Fund with a vision to bring healing for our nations.
- **Jennifer Varenchik** (Tohono O'odham) is a producer who has over a dozen short films to her credit. Her first feature "In Our Own Hands" is now in development. With this dramatic action film, Jennifer hopes to not only entertain but educate audiences about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People.
- **Keely Linton** is Íipay and Kupa Native from the Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians. She currently lives and works within her community, serving as the Executive Director for the Strong Hearted Native Women's Coalition. She has also worked in the violence-against-women field for over 20 years. Keely is the Chairperson for the Judicial Council of the Intertribal Court of Southern California and Mesa Grande Business Development Corporation. She is devoted to her community and assisting with the reduction in family violence. She hopes to make policy changes within the local tribal governments that she serves to better protect our families.

- **Maya Sanchez** (She/Her) is a Diné and Chicana woman born and raised in Los Angeles. Maya is a Youth Organizer at the California Native Vote Project and has over five years of experience in community work. She is dedicated to empowering young people and advocating for their needs.
- **Monique Castro** is a proud member of the Diné (Navajo) Nation and Xicana, hailing from the vibrant lands of the Tongva people in Los Angeles, CA. Bringing over 16 years of professional experience to the table, she is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, certified professional coach, consultant, facilitator, and advocate. Her leadership journey includes co-founding the California Native Vote Project, So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project, and establishing the Indigenous Circle of Wellness, where she proudly serves as the founder and CEO. Additionally, she is the founder and owner of Monique Castro Coaching and Consulting, LLC.
- **Samantha Thornsberry** is a member of the Cahuilla Band of Indians and lives and works on the Cahuilla Reservation. Samantha is the Program Director for the Cahuilla Consortium Victim Advocacy Program, assisting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human/sex trafficking, stalking, and other criminal victimizations. Samantha is also currently serving on the Tribal Council for the Cahuilla Band. Samantha is dedicated to serving her tribal community and continues to volunteer and engage in all activities that promote the welfare and security of Native people.
- **Somah Haaland** (they/she) is from the Pueblos of Laguna and Jemez. They have a background in storytelling, including a degree in Theatre Arts from UNM and experience working in the film industry. She currently works as a community organizer with Pueblo Action Alliance, a grassroots organization with a focus on climate justice and other intersectional issues that indigenous communities face in the southwest.
- **Tencha Chavez** is Navajo-Diné of the Eastern Navajo Agency in Crownpoint, New Mexico. Her maternal clans are Halt'sooi Diné é (Meadow People) and Tsinajinnii (Black Streak Forest). She is Mexican (Nakaii) from her father's side. She grew up in Los Angeles County (Tovangaar) but has ties back home on the Little Water Chapter Reservation. She recently graduated from the University of California San Diego (UCSD) with a B.A. in Political Science and a focus on Public Policy. She aspires to help make political changes in the White House with Native representation and advocacy. Tencha currently works as the Outreach Manager for California Native Vote Project.

Filming and Post-Production

In the development of our content we intentionally planned the following actions to ensure Native Indigenous inclusion and ancestral traditional elements. We set the tone for our speakers by prioritizing safety and inclusion throughout our production process. We created a safe, Indigenous-led space for vulnerability, connection, and reflection. This helped get to the core of topics and also build relations in the process to help generate long-term change and visibility.

Traditional Regalia

During pre-production planning, we encouraged speakers to wear their traditional regalia as a way of increasing cultural representation and visibility of both our speakers and viewers.

Prayer and Land Acknowledgement

At the beginning of both roundtable filmings, we opened the sessions with prayer and land acknowledgement. We recognized, uplifted, and thanked our Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash relations on whose ancestral lands we reside, gather, and pray. We honored all of the ancestors and their descendants in Los Angeles and the contributions of all of our relatives, past, present and future.

Roundtable Discussions

We staged the videos to be sets of roundtable discussions to uplift the role of diverse community voices. Speakers sat in a circle, much like our ancestors had done for thousands of years. Tribal Nations traditionally uplift respect and diplomacy in decision-making and conversations. We sat in circles to represent connection, reciprocity, strength, and respect. We began each filming session by reviewing SSSP community agreements, providing clear expectations for respectful dialogue when expressing differences of opinions, and creating a safe place for community members to share, teach, and learn from one another. We recognize the critical importance and responsibility to keep our community safe. Safety is a communal responsibility to one another as relatives walking this earth together.

The roundtable discussions were instrumental in speakers voicing their honest thoughts and concerns with the MMIWG2-S crisis. Speakers fed off of each others' energy and conversations flowed from topic to topic. Speakers showcased authenticity, vulnerability, and beauty when sharing personal experiences and connections to MMIWG2-S. The roundtable discussions provided a rich amount of content for our videos which allowed us to extend the videos to 5-7 minutes duration and create social media cuts.

Table of Medicines and MMIP Remembrance

At the center of our roundtable discussions, we uplifted and honored MMIWG2-S relatives who are missing or have passed by inviting speakers to bring a memorial photo. We also encouraged speakers to bring traditional medicines to nurture support, healing, guidance, protection, and grounding while navigating conversation topics. The MMIP remembrance and medicines rooted our discussions in advocacy and intention.

Prior to filming, Eva connected with the family of Forrest Boren Jr. "Os" from the lipay Nation of Santa Ysabel Tribe to request permission to include their photo in our MMIWG2-S Awareness Campaign. Forrest has been missing since 2020. If you have any information, please contact Crime Stoppers at 888-580-8477.

Native Film Crew

When assembling our cinematographers for this project, we focused on collaborating with AI/AN artists to tell our stories through an Indigenous lens. Our speakers shared feedback that an all-Native film crew was empowering and increased safety and comfortability in our filming environment. They also identified the lack of AI/AN cinematographers in previous experiences and within the film industry overall. Our finalized film crew for the MMIWG2-S Awareness Campaign are as follows:

- **Anderson Gould Jr** (Navajo) was our Lead Cinematographer and Editor. Anderson is an artist based out of Southern California and specializing in photography, videography, and graphic design. His creative journey started at a young age where he exhibited a strong interest in design and illustration. Prior to pursuing his passion, he served honorably in the United States Marine Corps. After 10 years of military service, he re-embarked on his creative path and received his B.A. in Visual and Performing Arts from CSU San Marcos. He currently works throughout the Southern California area and is the proud owner of Resilient Wear, a Native focused clothing line.
- **Anthony B. Chase in Winter** (Lakota/Chicano) was our Second Unit Cinematographer. Anthony is a photographer and video producer based in Southern California. His work explores themes of culture, everyday life and personal narratives through a quiet, observational lens. He also occasionally collaborates on projects that support Indigenous and Chicano storytelling.
- **Lauren Begay** (Diné and Laguna Pueblo) was our Screenwriter, Producer, Assistant Director, and Editor. Lauren was raised in Phoenix, Arizona. She moved to Los Angeles in 2018 to pursue filmmaking and still is a freelance filmmaker. She recently has worked with MTV, Vogue, and Visit California promoting Indigenous stories with Indigenous crew. Her most recent project was a collaborative promo with her mentee for “Prados X Lauren Good Day”, which was featured on Vogue for Indigenous People’s Day 2023. Lauren prioritizes Indigenous youth voices in media, specifically working with Outlast Arts and Education, a non-profit that provides film and media arts education to Indigenous and Black youth from rural communities in South Dakota. She is dedicated to providing a non-Eurocentric learning environment for Indigenous youth to foster their creativity and see their stories come to life. She currently serves as a Project Coordinator at SSSP. She believes in supporting the Indigenous community on multiple levels, from filmmaking to community event programming.
- **Eva Powless (Oneida)** was our Co-writer, Co-producer, and Director. Eva is Ukwéhu-wé, born and raised on the Oneida Nation Reservation of Wisconsin. Since a young age, her goals have been to uplift, strengthen, and empower Native voices. Eva earned her Bachelor of Social Work degree at University of Kansas and her Master of Social Work degree at University of Southern California. Throughout her career, Eva has focused on servicing children, youth, adults, and multigenerational families in diverse

roles as a Floating Case Manager, Child Protection Specialist, In-Home Outreach Counselor, and Mental Health Clinician. Eva centers ancestral teachings and trauma-informed approaches when supporting communities in healing. Eva is currently an Associate Clinical Social Worker in California.

Campaign Implementation and Project Results/Outcomes

SSSP implemented diverse promotional strategies to generate engagement and reach viewers. We distributed the 5 videos during Human Trafficking Prevention Month in January 2025. We utilized different methods of promoting materials based upon each social media platform. We developed both full length videos and shortened versions/social-cuts for distribution on Instagram, Facebook, and Tiktok. Instagram reels can reach up to 1 minute and 30 seconds in duration whereas Youtube holds hour-long videos.

Email Distribution

We distributed each of the videos through personalized emails to community members, cultural leaders and staff at local Native community-based organizations (CBOs) and wellness spaces. In these emails we shared DropBox links with posting details including individual videos, a caption with the description, and hashtags to support outreach efforts.

Social Media Direct Messages

When posting, we directly messaged local Native CBOs, nationally recognized, trusted Native organizations, mental health leaders, and Indigenous-Owned/Operated accounts. This engagement strategy was effective in boosting the Campaign as we collaborated with large platforms, such as Red House Project and Indigenous Intentions, on Instagram and Facebook posts.

Visuals



SSSP included a trigger warning in the five full length videos. The trigger warning was timed for five seconds at the beginning of each full length video.



Speakers from left to right: Somah Toya Haaland, Keely Linton, Tencha Chavez, Maya Sanchez, Angelina Diaz





Speakers from left to right: Farrah Ferris, Gina Jackson, Jennifer Varenchik, Samantha Thornsberry



Pictured from left to right: Jennifer Varenchik, Gina Jackson, Samantha Thornsberry, Eva Powless, Lauren Begay, Farrah Ferris



Video 5 Speaker: Monique Castro

RESOURCES

WOMBAT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

(909) 529-8965 | wombatmhs.com
1042 N. Mountain Ave., Suite B 560 Upland, CA 91786

STRONG HEARTS NATIVE HELPLINE 24/7 CRISIS INTERVENTION

1-(844) 762-8483 | strongheartshelpline.org

STRONG HEARTED NATIVE WOMEN'S COALITION

(760) 644-4781 | Valley Center, CA 92085 | strongheartednativewomen.org

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS MISSING & MURDERED UNIT

1-(833) 560-2065

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH 24/7 HELP LINE

1-800-854-7771

SSSP included a resources page in each of the full length videos.

MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE

Contact 988

AMERICAN INDIAN COUNSELING CENTER

(562) 402-0677 | 17707 S. Studebaker Rd., Suite 208, Cerritos, CA 90703

INDIGENOUS CIRCLE OF WELLNESS

(626) 782-5570 | 5800 S. Eastern Ave., Suite 500, Commerce, CA 90040 | www.icowellness.com

UNITED AMERICAN INDIAN INVOLVEMENT SEVEN GENERATIONS CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

(213) 202-3970 | www.uaiisevengenerations.org

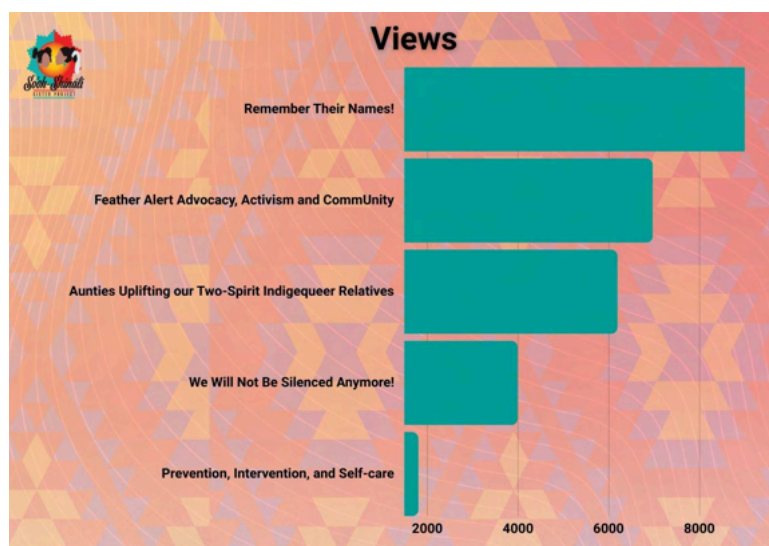
Main location: 1453 W. Temple St., Los Angeles, CA 90026

Satellite office: 1529 E. Palmdale Blvd., Suite 208, Palmdale, CA 93550

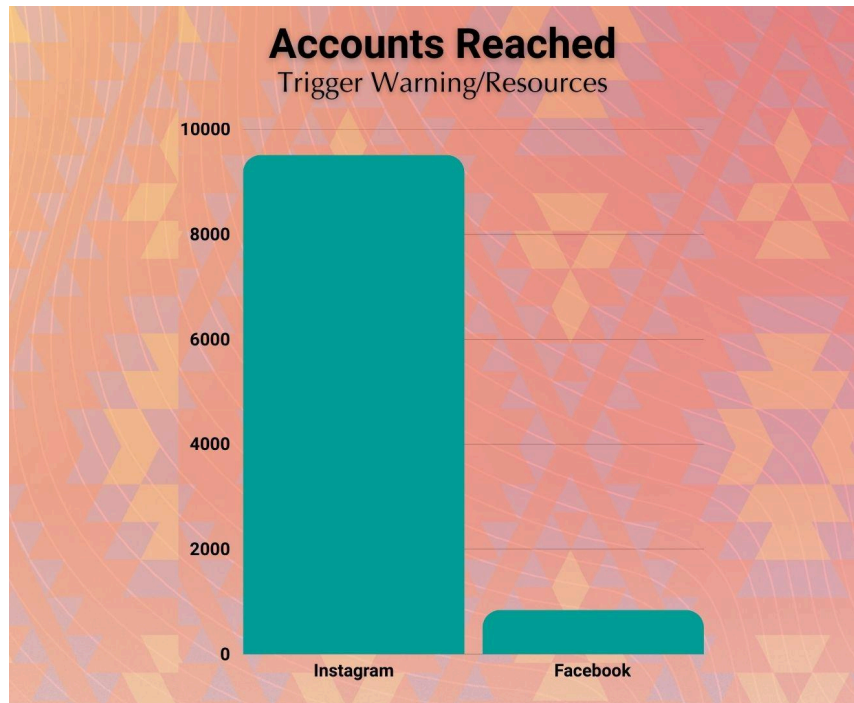
SSSP included a mental health resource graphic in each of the full length videos.

Engagement Data

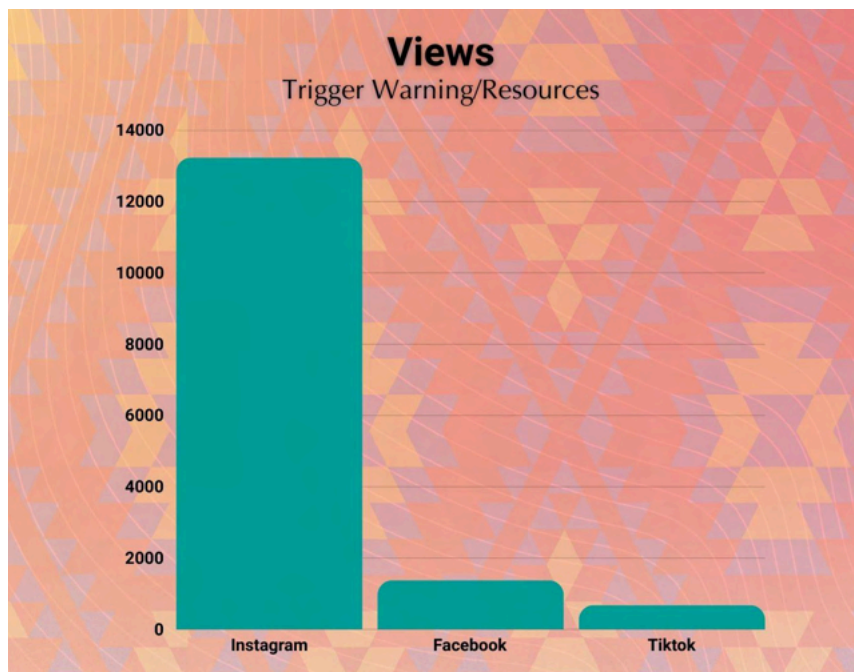
The MMIWG2-S Awareness Campaign totaled 12 weeks of outreach and engagement efforts. We started distributing resources and campaign materials on Tuesday, January 7, 2025. As of April 7, 2025 the campaign reached a total of **85,630 engagements** (refer to engagement data spreadsheet for finalized metrics). We reached a total of **33,468 accounts**. There were **4,257 impressions** and **43,629 plays/views**. We engaged **1,426 accounts** with a total of **2,328 likes**, **38 comments**, **161 saves**, and **323 shares**. The graphs below show a breakdown of our social media metrics and engagement.



There were a total of 28,340 views for all five videos.



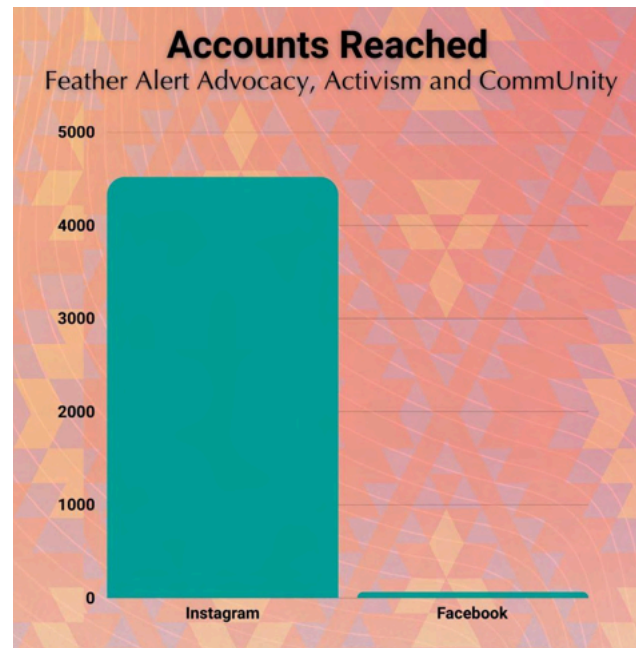
The “Trigger Warning/Resources” post reached a total of 9,513 accounts on Instagram and 840 on Facebook.



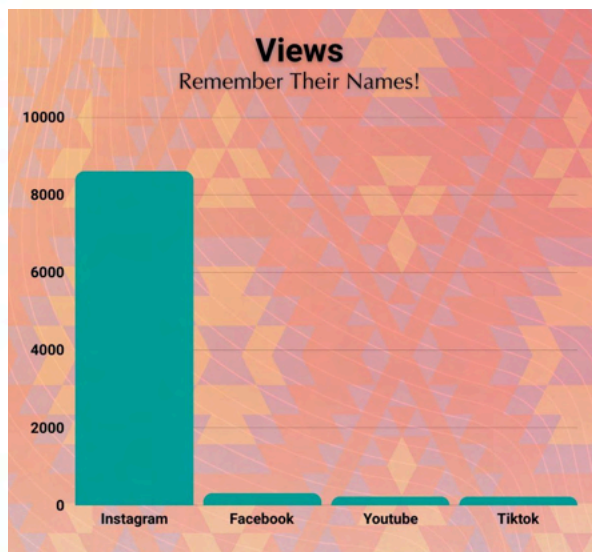
There were a total of 13,232 views of the “Trigger Warning/Resources” post on Instagram, 1,378 on Facebook, and 679 on TikTok.



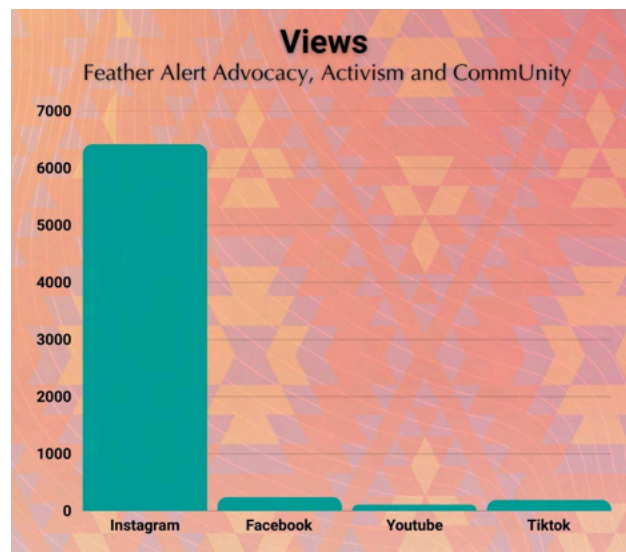
A total of 6,066 accounts were reached on Instagram and 87 on Facebook.



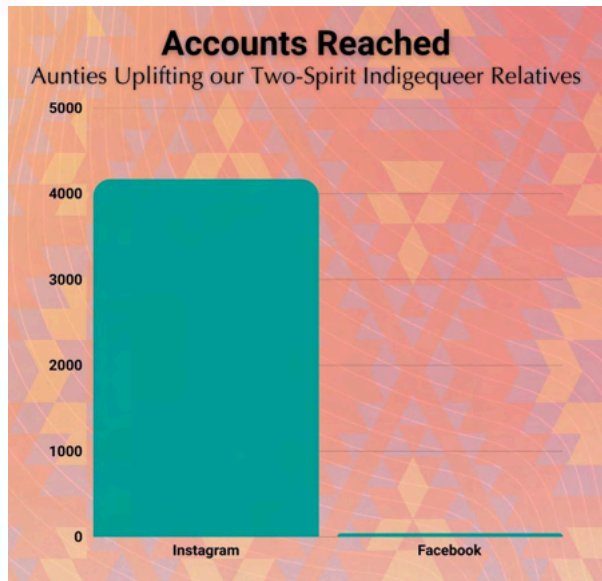
A total of 4,522 accounts were reached on Instagram and 66 on Facebook.



There were a total of 8,611 views on Instagram, 317 on Facebook, 228 on Youtube, and 225 on TikTok.



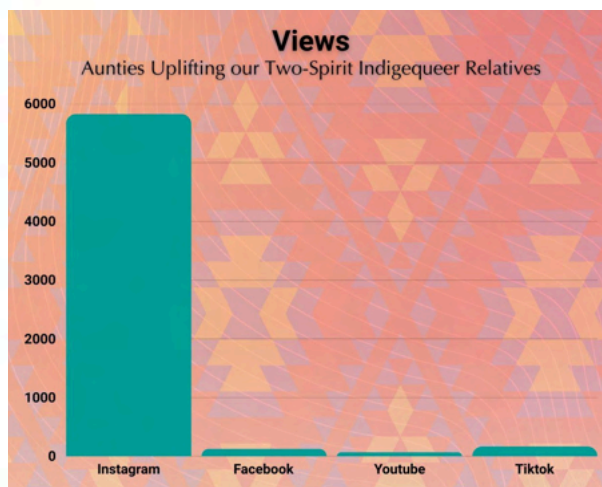
There were a total of 6,416 views on Instagram, 245 on Facebook, 114 on Youtube, and 193 on TikTok.



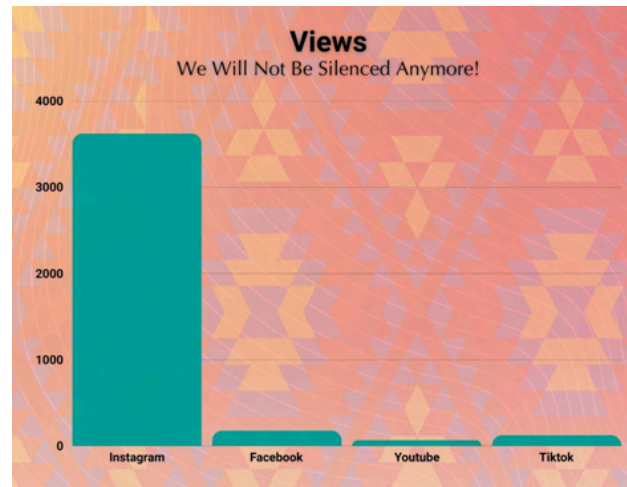
A total of 4,173 accounts were reached on Instagram and 45 on Facebook.



A total of 2,355 accounts were reached on Instagram and 54 on Facebook.



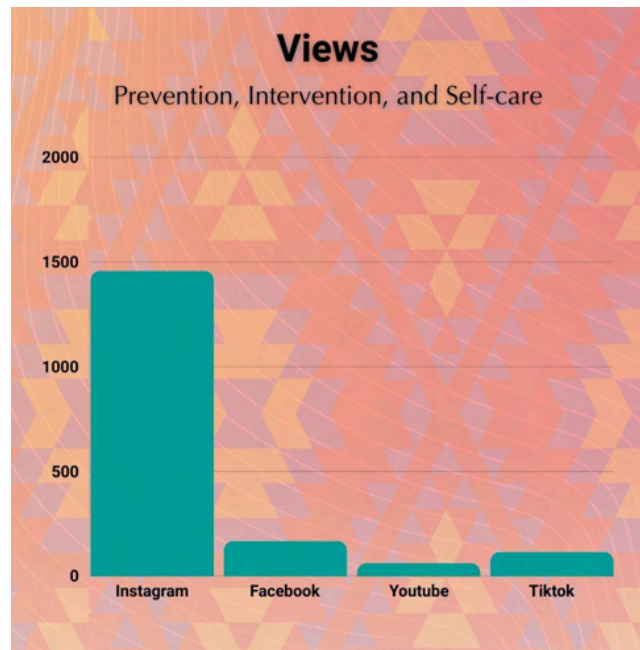
There were a total of 5,828 views on Instagram, 128 on Facebook, 69 on Youtube, and 168 on TikTok.



There were a total of 3,625 views on Instagram, 178 on Facebook, 66 on Youtube, and 124 on TikTok.



A total of 886 accounts were reached on Instagram and 39 on Facebook.

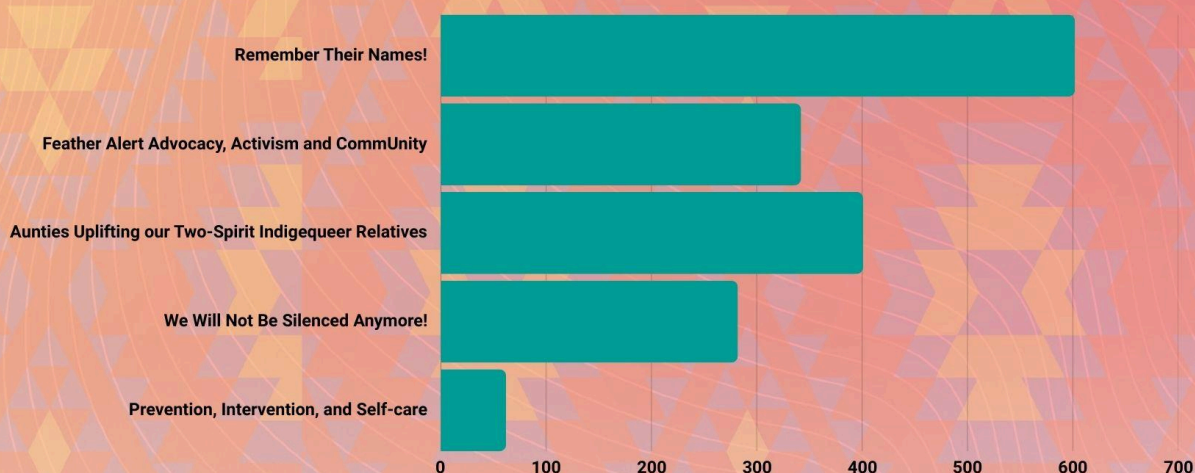


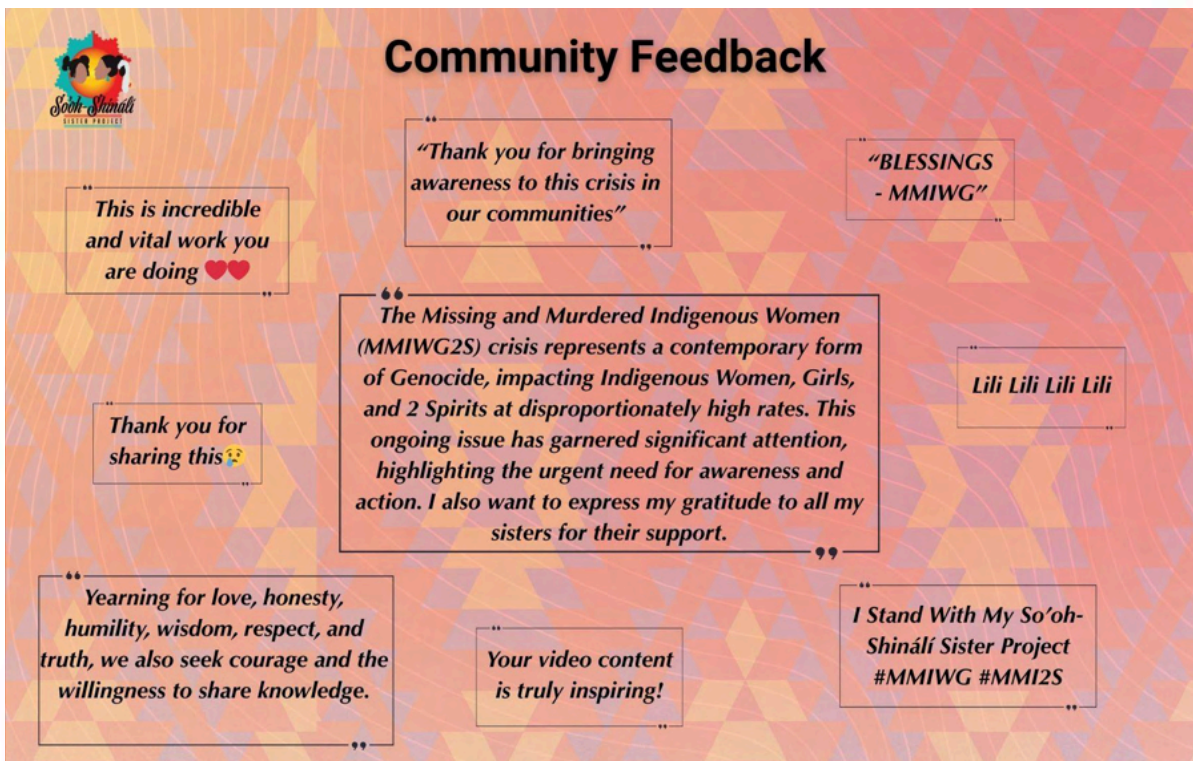
There were a total of 1,458 views on Instagram, 168 on Facebook, 63 on Youtube, and 116 on TikTok.



Engagement

Likes, Comments, Saves, and Shares





Lessons Learned

Community Excitement

This project received high levels of meaningful, passionate, and enthusiastic support from our community. The community interest and input helped raise awareness, with strong engagement through emails, social media, and phone calls.

Lack of MMIWG2-S Services

There are not enough MMIWG2-S resources and services in LA County. It's difficult for the community to access support because there is no main center or website in LA specific to MMIWG2-S needs.

More Outreach

There is a need for more intentional outreach and engagement focused on our youth and Two-Spirit Indigeequeer relatives. This could include special flyers, graphics, or messages during the casting process. A goal was to uplift young voices but we experienced challenges confirming youth speakers due to timing. Filming was in August and September, which created a barrier for students to take part with the new school year or semester just starting. The filming release form added another step and layer of discomfort, the need for a parent or guardian signature created an additional hurdle for youth participation.

Triggers and Trauma Sharing

The topic of MMIWG2-S can be deeply triggering for community members. Several community members shared personal and traumatic experiences throughout the casting process. Some people presented with emotional distress during various stages of the project. We also received critical feedback that the casting process may not be fully trauma-informed or appropriate when engaging survivors of violence. During filming, we prioritized emotional safety to ensure speakers' vulnerabilities were honored and not exploited. These key learnings highlight the need for more survivor-centered approaches in future projects.

Need for Native and Indigenous Mental Health Providers

There is a great need for more Native and Indigenous mental health providers and support in the LA community. We also need a referral process to help connect people with providers who specialize in MMIWG2-S.

Editing Delays

Due to the short turnaround time of filming, video editing, and soliciting community feedback, we experienced delays in the campaign distribution timeline.

Identity-Policing

Sociopolitical nuances can create challenges and barriers for speaker participation. There were a number of speakers not approved for casting because community members questioned Tribal identities and affiliations.

Campaign Distribution during Unprecedented Circumstances

The MMIWG2-S Awareness Campaign rolled out in January 2025. This month was full of historic events, ranging from the LA windstorm and wildfires, United States presidential inauguration, and political propaganda surrounding Tiktok. This impacted social media usage, algorithms, censorship, viewership, and sharing rates.

Recommendations:

- Always include Land Acknowledgement in future video campaigns. We started filming with Prayer and Land Acknowledgement but did not include Land Acknowledgement introduction graphics in each video.
- More flexibility in requirements for the number of video participants. Empower vendors to decide the amount of speakers in campaign because:
 - Reducing the participants from 10 to 5 speakers could provide more intentional messaging per video.
 - Decreasing the number of speakers to 5 can improve the quality of each video, delivery of topics discussed, and intentionality in the production process.
 - Recognizing the impact of adding more speakers also causes financial and administrative strain if the amount of speakers is too large (stipend requirements).
 - The challenges of coordinating the schedules of 10 speakers (life events).

- Specific and targeted casting outreach materials designed to engage our Two-Spirit Indigeneous Relatives.
- Specific and targeted casting outreach designed to engage youth.
- More investment in MMIWG2-S resources and services in LA County.
- Continue MMIWG2-S campaigns and capacity-building projects.
- Develop a MMIWG2-S resource guide specific to LA County.
 - Provide an instructional step-by-step guide in the case that a loved one goes missing in LA County.
 - Provide a directory of MMIWG2-S speciality service providers.
- Develop MMIWG2-S prevention, intervention, and aftercare services for survivors and families in LA County.
- Implement MMIWG2-S community listening sessions to assess needs in LA County.
 - Provide on-site mental health support.
- Implement MMIWG2-S community wellness events throughout LA County.
- Include trigger warnings in all future MMIWG2-S outreach such as social media captions and graphics included at the start of each video.
- Increase in project funds.
 - Contracting graphic designers and film industry professionals can be costly for 5 videos, editing, etc.
 - Enhance promotional strategy (ads, television commercials, etc.).