



**Reconciliation Ally Toolkit**

**Ohkanaomowoo Sikóóhkotok  
| Gathering in Lethbridge**

## Reconciliation Ally Toolkit

1

**Káínai**  
(Blood Tribe)

12,800 members

2

**Aapátóhsipikáni**  
(Piikani Nation)

3,600 members

3

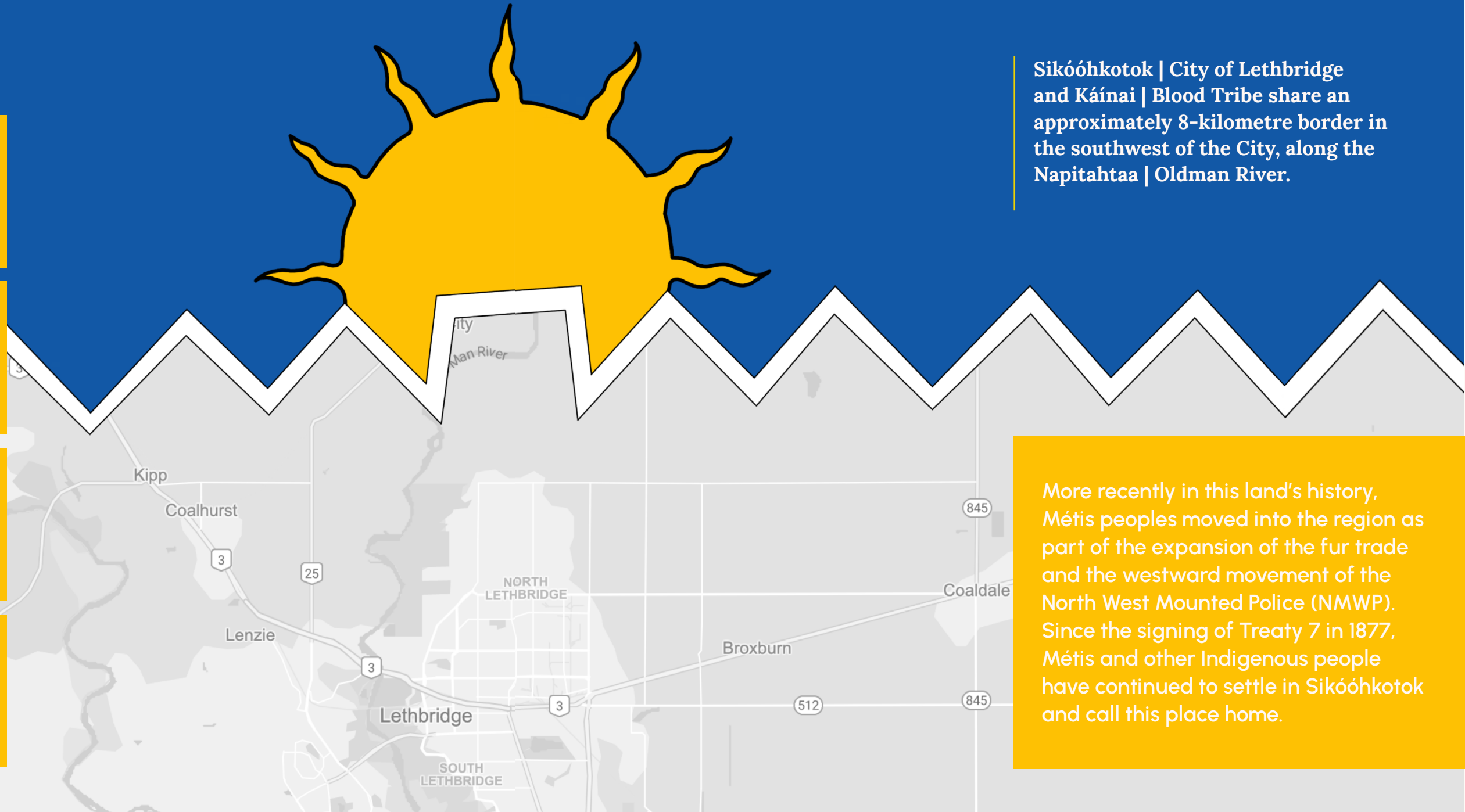
**Siksiká**  
(Siksika Nation)

7,800 members

4

**Aamsskáápipikani**  
(Blackfoot Tribe/USA)

17,321 members



Sikóóhkotok | City of Lethbridge and Káínai | Blood Tribe share an approximately 8-kilometre border in the southwest of the City, along the Napitahtaa | Oldman River.

More recently in this land's history, Métis peoples moved into the region as part of the expansion of the fur trade and the westward movement of the North West Mounted Police (NMWP). Since the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877, Métis and other Indigenous people have continued to settle in Sikóóhkotok and call this place home.

**Sikóóhkotok, also known as the City of Lethbridge, is located within Siksikaitsitapi kitao'ahsinnooni | Blackfoot Confederacy territory.**

The Siksikaitsitapi | **Blackfoot Confederacy** brings together four Blackfoot First Nations from both sides of the Medicine Line (US/CA border) who have lived on these lands since time immemorial.

Káínai and Aapátóhsipikáni are the closest neighbouring Nations to the City of Lethbridge.

*Siksikaitsitapi have called Sikóóhkotok their homeland for thousands of years, ootaohsoowah, or as Elders often describe it, since time immemorial. Sikóóhkotok is a reference to the black rock that the Niitsitapii | Real People use to make pipe bowls.*

*In more recent history, Sikóóhkotok also refers to the coal deposits found in the area. Elders tell us that, iitaokiikiyaa'wa, there were seasonal*

*tipi camps in this area long before the railroad was built, the arrival of the settlers, or the construction of the Fort by American traders. Each Siksikaitsitapi Nation was comprised of many clans and bands, who set up their camps not only in the valley of the Napitahtaa | Oldman River, but as well at the top of the coulee banks – where the City of Lethbridge is now built.*

(Source: Mike Bruised Head)



# Siksikaitsitapi Kitao’ahsinnooni | Blackfoot Territory

Acknowledging the lands that we live on today is an important ceremony that through meaningful repetition reaffirms our connection to the Siksikaitsitapi, our shared history and our own connection to this place we call Sikóóhkotok | Lethbridge.

**“The City of Lethbridge acknowledges that we are gathered on the lands of the Blackfoot people of the Canadian Plains and pays respect to the Blackfoot people past, present and future while recognizing and respecting their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship to the land. The City of Lethbridge is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.”**

For thousands of years Niitsitapii | Real People (Blackfoot) have lived and travelled across large areas of present day Alberta, Saskatchewan, Montana and North Dakota, and beyond. Blackfoot territory is generally described using these landmarks:

- Niitsístakiimistsi or Mistakiists | Rocky Mountains to the West
- Pónókaisissa’ahta | Elk or North Saskatchewan River to the North
- O’maksspa’tsikoi | Sand Hills to the East
- Ootahkoitahta | Yellowstone River to the South

To this day, Niitsitapii continue to live and travel all parts of their territory.



## Two Stories of Sikóóhkotok | City of Lethbridge

Our shared history, that being the true story of the early relationships between Siksikaitsitapi and European settlers in southern Alberta, is challenging to reconcile.

The settler story of Sikóóhkotok | City of Lethbridge follows a timeline that skips over the traumatic and cumulative impacts of colonization, settlement and residential schools, as well as federal policies designed to contain and destroy the Niitsitapii.

### Niitsitapii Truth-Telling

Niitsitapiisinni - A way of life based on ceremony and generosity that had sustained Niitsitapii for thousands of years.

Enforced land boundaries limited encroachment by other Indigenous groups.

Niitsitapii had established trade routes with other Indigenous peoples. European fur-traders traded European-produced goods for furs.

Niitsitapiiaakiiks | Blackfoot women were recognized for their skill at tanning hides.

Initially, trading posts skirted the boundaries of the Siksikaitsitapi territory.

1810  
Niitsitapii blockade all transmountain trade routes south of present-day Rocky Mountain House. David Thompson is unable to complete his survey of a transmountain route to the Pacific and loses time exploring northern routes.

### Settler Story

Colonial expansion based on the Doctrine of Discovery ideology and the concept of terra nullis.

Early 1800's  
Commerce-based fur trade

1810  
David Thompson discovers a route across Canada for the transcontinental railway.

*continued >*

### Niitsitapii Truth-Telling

By the mid-19th Century at least two Smallpox epidemics had decimated the Niitsitapii and other Indigenous peoples.

The fur-trade is a misnomer that has perpetuated romanticized stories of the West. In reality, by the time trading posts were established in Blackfoot territory, the fur trade had devolved into a whisky trade intended to economically exploit the Niitsitapii and to create dependency and addiction. Whisky traded with the Niitsitapii included ingredients such as distilled alcohol, tobacco, pepper, soap, molasses, strychnine, cocaine and opium in varying doses.

In the mid-1870's as the NWMP regulated the whisky trade, Siksikaitsitapi Chiefs gathered to negotiate Treaty 7 – what they considered a peace treaty. Under laws foreign to the Niitsitapii, reserves were created and polices were developed to ensure Indigenous people would be unable to participate in the economy.

Siksikaitsitapi kitao'ahsinnooni | Blackfoot territory was divided into parcels for settlers.

With the extermination of the iniiks | buffalo and enforce-ment of laws that made it illegal to leave the reserve, Niitsitapii were unable to continue their way of life.

### Settler Story

European traders introduce Smallpox to Niitsitapii.

Mid-1800's whisky trade is illegal in US

Influx of whisky traders into southern Canada

Early 1870's two American whisky traders (Hamilton and Healy) establish a trading post near to what is present-day Lethbridge.

Mid-1870's Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) take over the post and eventually establish Fort Whoop-up.

1876 Indian Act was created

1877 The Blackfoot Treaty was negotiated

### Niitsitapii Truth-Telling

With the finding of coal, more settlers came to Lethbridge and from 1901, and throughout Prohibition, Sikóóhkotok evolved into a brewery town. Access to alcohol continued for Indigenous peoples throughout a period of cultural genocide now referred to as the Residential School era.

The implementation of the residential school system further broke families as children were forcibly torn from their parents and communities. The children were punished for speaking their language and siblings were forever separated.

In addition, while initially encouraged to participate in cattle and farming operations, no Indigenous person was able to apply for the loans and grants awarded to non-Indigenous peoples, so they could not compete and were further excluded from participating in the economy.

### Settler Story

Early 1900's brought the railway, increasing settler population, coal mining and brewing industry. Indian Act and missionaries deployed to reserves. Additional Residential schools built across Southern Alberta. "Progress was being made."

1884 the first Residential School was opened on a Blackfoot reserve.

Opportunity to lease farmland on reserves. Dams built for the benefit of settlers.

**The beginning of Lethbridge is in many ways a story of the oppression of a strong, healthy and beautiful way of life for Niitsitapii. We have a responsibility to reconcile that.**

# Ohkanaomowoo Sikóóhkotok | Gathering Together in Lethbridge

is about retelling our shared story and building respectful relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler-citizens, visitors and businesses.

The City is committed to changing the ways we work by actively engaging in the processes of truth-telling and reconciliation. We have an opportunity to create a new story based on truth, respect and kindness for the benefit of all.

Together we will learn about the past from Niitsitapii-led perspectives, sit uncomfortably with the truths about traumas and lived experience of Indigenous peoples, and create safe spaces for dialogue that lead to shared understandings and healing.

*“No one alive today is necessarily responsible for the creation of these colonial structures [of oppression], but many of us [settlers] benefit from them – and we all have a responsibility to dismantle them.”*

– Non-Indigenous Reconciliation focus group member

There are several Blackfoot words that could be used together to describe the process of reconciliation:

## “ Nitákkaawa | Allyship

is a responsibility to stand up against racism, dismantle colonial structures of oppression and locally, to make Sikóóhkotok a safe place for Indigenous peoples.

“ Ohkanaomowoo  
Gathering together

“ Aatsímoyihkaan  
Speaking in a sacred way

“ Innakotsiiyinni  
Respect for others

“ Kimmapiiyitsinni  
Kindness to each other

## Nitákkaawa | Allyship

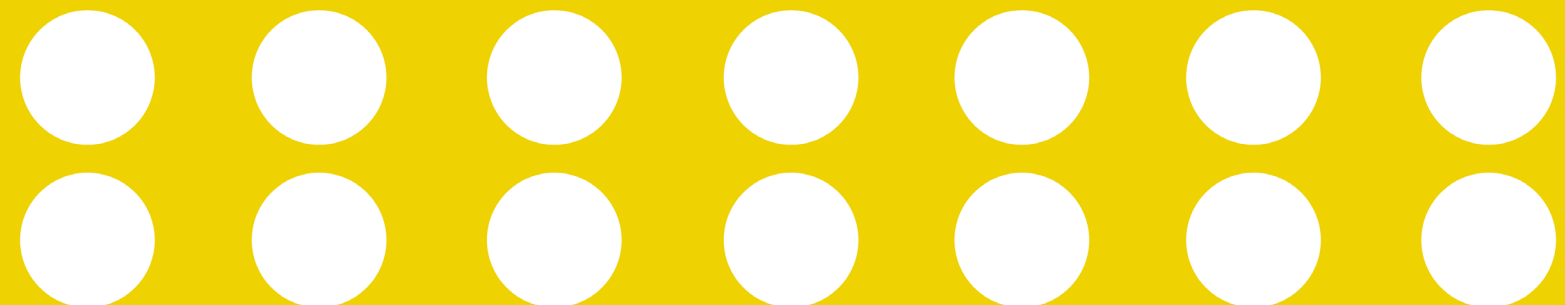
The Niitsitapii were known as warriors, but were also strong allies and would often take in non-Niitsitapii who were experiencing hardship.

Allyship is a lifelong process of decolonizing. We've developed a list of a few local actions that you can apply to confront racism and join us in the process of reconciliation. It is important for each of us to move beyond mere performance allyship however, and try to seek out actions and relationships that are not merely symbolic, but which create meaningful, tangible change in our community.

Several resources will be referenced with each action for you to further make important connections:

- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Articles \(UNDRIP\)](#)
- [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice \(NI\)](#)
- [The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action \(TRC\)](#)

There are many steps on the journey to becoming an ally and working towards reconciliation. Each identified action lists several ways that you can start, continue and commit to this new way of life: **First Steps**, **Walk the Path** and **Lifelong Journey**.



## 1 Call out and stand up to racism. (NI 15.5 / UNDRIP A. 1 and 2)

**First Steps:** Learn about unconscious bias and how it affects the way you see your community and specifically Indigenous peoples.

**Walk the Path:** Address and speak out against racist comments, biases or stereotypes within your family, social and professional networks. Seek out and provide accurate information.

**Lifelong Journey:** Commit to practicing empathy and kindness in each step of the journey of reconciliation recognizing that we may not see the end result in our lifetime. Join and meaningfully support groups, activities and events aimed at confronting racism and creating inclusive spaces.

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*“We are all colonized people. When we talk about decolonizing, it is something that all of us should strive for. The first step of decolonization is your own mindset.*

– Reconciliation focus group member

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## 2 Incorporate Blackfoot language into your vocabulary. (TRC 13-17, NI 15.2 and 15.4, UNDRIP A.13)

**First Steps:** Greet people with the original welcome of this territory, Oki.

**Walk the Path:** Expand your vocabulary by checking out the [“Reconciliation in Lethbridge” postcard](#) created by Sikóóhkotok | City of Lethbridge and learning the terms found in this toolkit.

**Lifelong Journey:** Download a Blackfoot language app or take a Blackfoot language course at the Galt Museum. Incorporate Blackfoot language in your daily life, including when connecting with Niitsitapii and when referring to places across Siksikaitsitapi kitao’ahsinnooni | Blackfoot territory.

## 3 Talk about the history of Residential Schools in your daily life.

(UNDRIP A. 8 and 15, TRC 62-65, NI 15.2, 15.3 and 15.4)

**First Steps:** Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [Summary Report](#) and [Calls to Action](#)

**Walk the Path:** Increase your knowledge by accessing resources available through the Lethbridge Public Library, Red Crow Community College, Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge. Learn about the residential schools that operated in southern Alberta.

**Lifelong Journey:** Create dialogue with relatives and friends and help them learn to critically analyze the way Canada’s history is told. Encourage your child’s school to teach about Residential Schools, including through the voices of Indigenous peoples. Participate in National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

There were at least seven [Residential Schools](#) operating within Blackfoot First Nations and in surrounding communities, including:

- Crowfoot (aka St. Joseph’s, St. Trinité) in Cluny
- Old Sun in Gleichen
- Sacred Heart and St. Cyprian’s (aka Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Home, Peigan) in Brocket
- St. Joseph’s (aka High River, Dubow) in High River;
- St. Mary’s (aka Blood, Immaculate Conception)
- St. Paul’s (aka Blood, Anglican/Church of England) in Cardston.

In total there were 25 Residential Schools in Alberta documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

## 4 Learn about Indigenous peoples' cultures, histories and contemporary experiences, first-hand.

([UNDRIP A.15](#), [TRC 62-65](#), [NI 15.2](#), [15.3](#) and [15.4](#))

**First Steps:** Visit Indigenous cultural heritage sites in the region such as [Áísínai'pi | Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park](#), [Waterton Lakes National Park](#) and [Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre](#).

**Walk the Path:** Take formalized training, such as the [University of Alberta's free Indigenous Canada course](#) or the [KAIROS Blanket Exercise](#).

**Lifelong Journey:** Seek out Niitsitapii-led education and awareness raising opportunities through organizations like [Red Crow Community College](#), [Southern Alberta Art Gallery](#), [Lethbridge Public Library](#) and [Galt Museum and Archives](#).

## 5 Learn how you can support Reconciliation in your community.

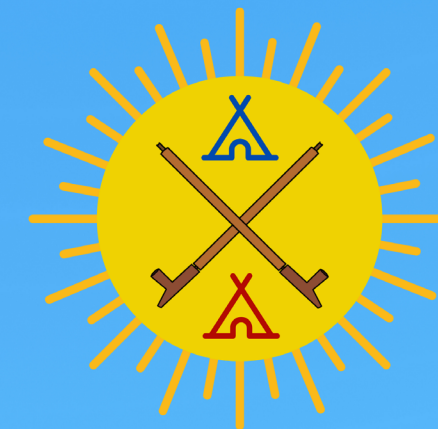
([TRC 1-94](#), [UNDRIP A1-46](#), [NI 15.6](#), [15.7](#) and [15.8](#))

**First Steps:** Learn more about the [Reconciliation Lethbridge Advisory Committee](#) (RLAC).

**Walk the Path:** Attend meetings and events hosted by RLAC.

**Lifelong Journey:** Consider volunteering or becoming a member of RLAC, or volunteering with another Indigenous community serving organization such as the [SAGE Clan Patrol](#).

Blackfoot terminology and references used in this resource were sourced from nikso'kowaiksi (relatives), RLAC members, print and online resources, including the [Online Blackfoot Dictionary](#). We recognize that the Blackfoot language follows an oral tradition, and so therefore there may be alternate spellings and definitions for these words in English.



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