



'Walk With Me: Survivors Gaining Strength Together Outdoors' is a new program of ANKORS. It is a creative, nature-based approach to foster healing, empowerment, and connection for women and gender diverse individuals in the West Kootenays impacted by violence or abuse. Being physically active, having time to reflect, overcoming challenges, and being part of a shared experience with other participants are the design principles of each outdoor experience. The natural world and the group are the primary educators.

While 'Walk With Me' is inspired by Outward Bound's 'Women of Courage' program, we wanted to craft something unique to, and based in, our local region. We began in November 2021 by meeting with the Circle of Indigenous Nations Society and making a formal request for a local Elder to support the project. We then put together an Advisory Committee and held two meetings in early 2022 to get input into, then feedback on, our proposed application process and recruitment materials. The Advisory Committee includes 11 members from across the region and from a range of agencies and services including Crown Counsel, Victim Services, Support Recovery, TransConnect, COINS, Women's Counseling, Stopping the Violence, and Women's Outreach. The committee supported us to create materials that would help potential participants feel welcome to apply, the paperwork would not be too much of a barrier, and that we would also capture all the information needed to properly plan and safely lead the trips. 'Walk With Me' continues to work closely with Trans Connect to ensure the program is inclusive and that trans and non-binary individuals feel safe and supported, and we are very grateful for that connection.



'Walk With Me' offered its first outing—a snowshoeing trip to Strawberry Pass in the Rossland Range—in April 2022 and has since done another spring snowshoeing trip to Busk Nordic, and a recent day hike to Kokanee Creek Canyon. Thirty-two women and gender diverse individuals have signed up for the program to date. Eight have participated in outings so far, with the majority of people coming back for more than one trip. Those same eight participants, plus an additional five, have already signed up for upcoming hiking, canoeing, and biking trips.

The program includes a formal evaluation component to capture impacts but testimonials from the outings so far suggest that the program is on course with its aims:

*"I'm stronger than I thought."*

*"I am so grateful to the whole group and for how everyone held space for each other."*

*"That was one of the most beautiful and healing experiences of my life!"*

We are grateful to the Osprey Foundation, Columbia Basin Trust, Kootenai Art Therapy Institute, Hamber Foundation, and the BC Community Response Networks for funding 'Walk With Me'.