

# Indigenous Child and Youth Wellness and Resiliency: What Does Indigenous Knowledge and Evidence Tell Us?

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# THE CALL FOR WELLNESS



- TRC CALLS TO ACTION
- UNDRIP
- Canadian Human Rights Tribunal
- MMIWG
- AFN Resolutions



“Recognizing in particular the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child...”

UNDRIP 2008





We have lots of experience where evidence  
has not served us well



# Going Beyond The Stats

- Information and statistics have highlighted many of the challenges faced by Indigenous youth. These include:
  - Significant losses (language, culture, identity, traditional skills, Indigenous knowledge, etc)
  - Social problems (poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment, substandard housing, child welfare)
  - Health problems (chronic & infectious illnesses, high suicide rates, substance abuse, violence, intergenerational trauma, accurate diagnosis, etc)







**“The eye sees only  
what the mind  
is prepared  
to comprehend.”  
- Henri Bergson**







RECONCILIATION  
IS ABOUT  
**SHIFTING**  
TO A  
**STRENGTHS BASED**  
**PARADIGM**







We miss the strengths of the people  
Without a vision of wellness

# Strengths Based Approach



The reality is, the strength is in what we cannot see... or have not invested in seeing.

Strengths exist despite intergenerational trauma.

A strengths based approach attends to intergenerational trauma



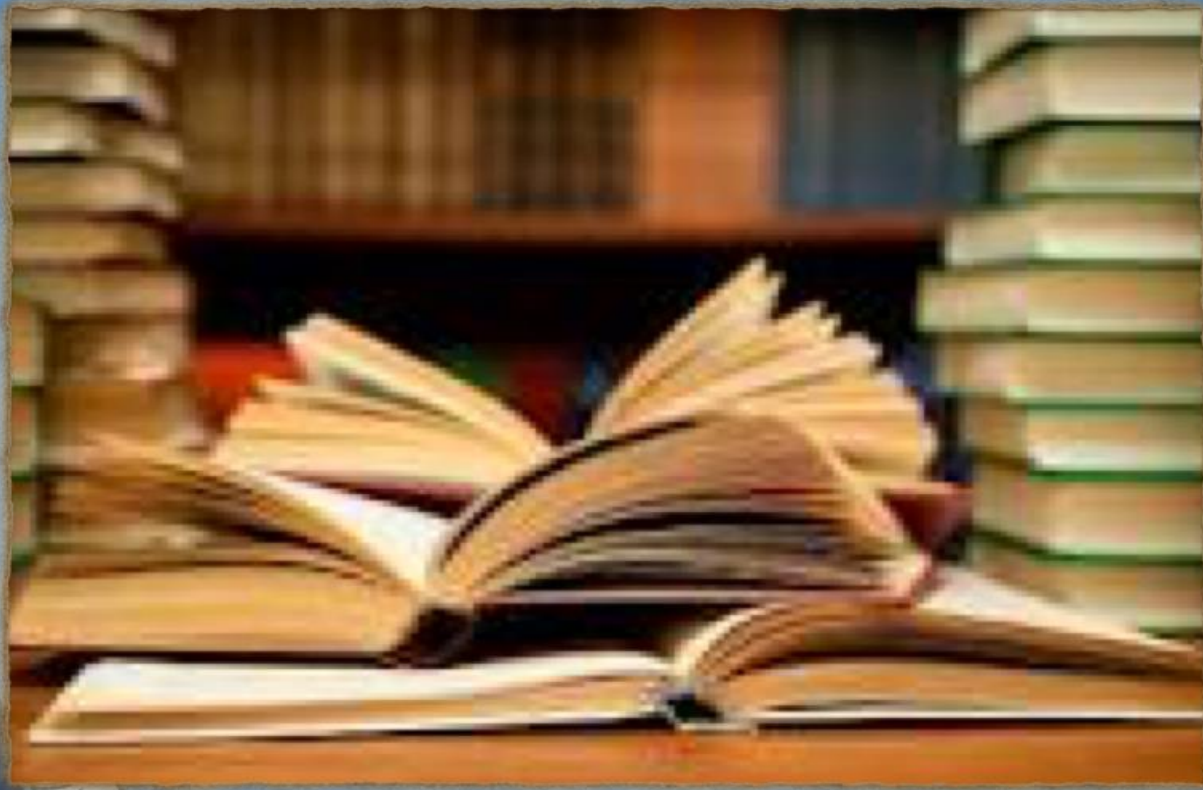
# RECONCILIATION is about *SHIFTING*

## What we know

- Western approaches do not generally consider cultural identity as a determinant of health, don't consider the spirit and do not interpret identity or health beyond the individual to include family, community, Creation
- They haven't worked well or supported healthy change, growth or development



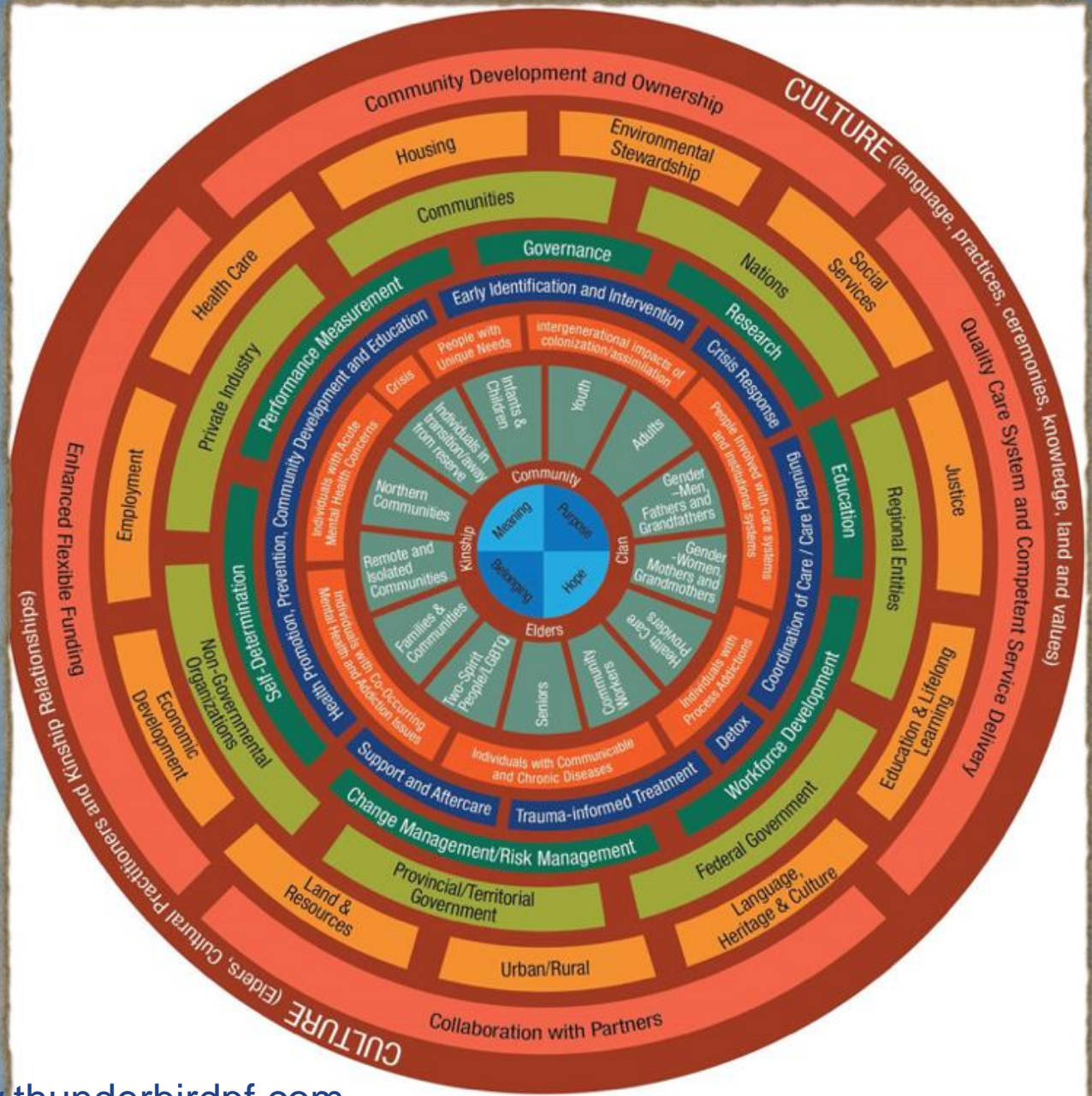
# Decolonization of Indigenous Knowledge



Inclusion of Indigenous Evidence and  
Research Methods



# First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework



# Culture as the Foundation

- Culture is an important social determinant of health, and as a holistic concept of health is an integral part of a strong cultural identity.
  - Many First Nations communities believe that the way to achieve individual, family, and community wellness (a balance of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life) is through culturally specific, holistic interventions.  
(FNMWC)

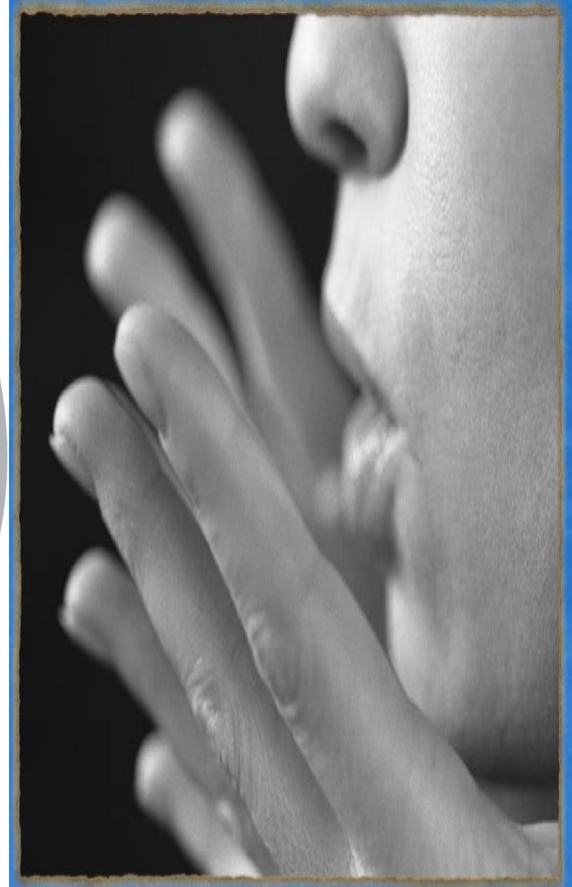
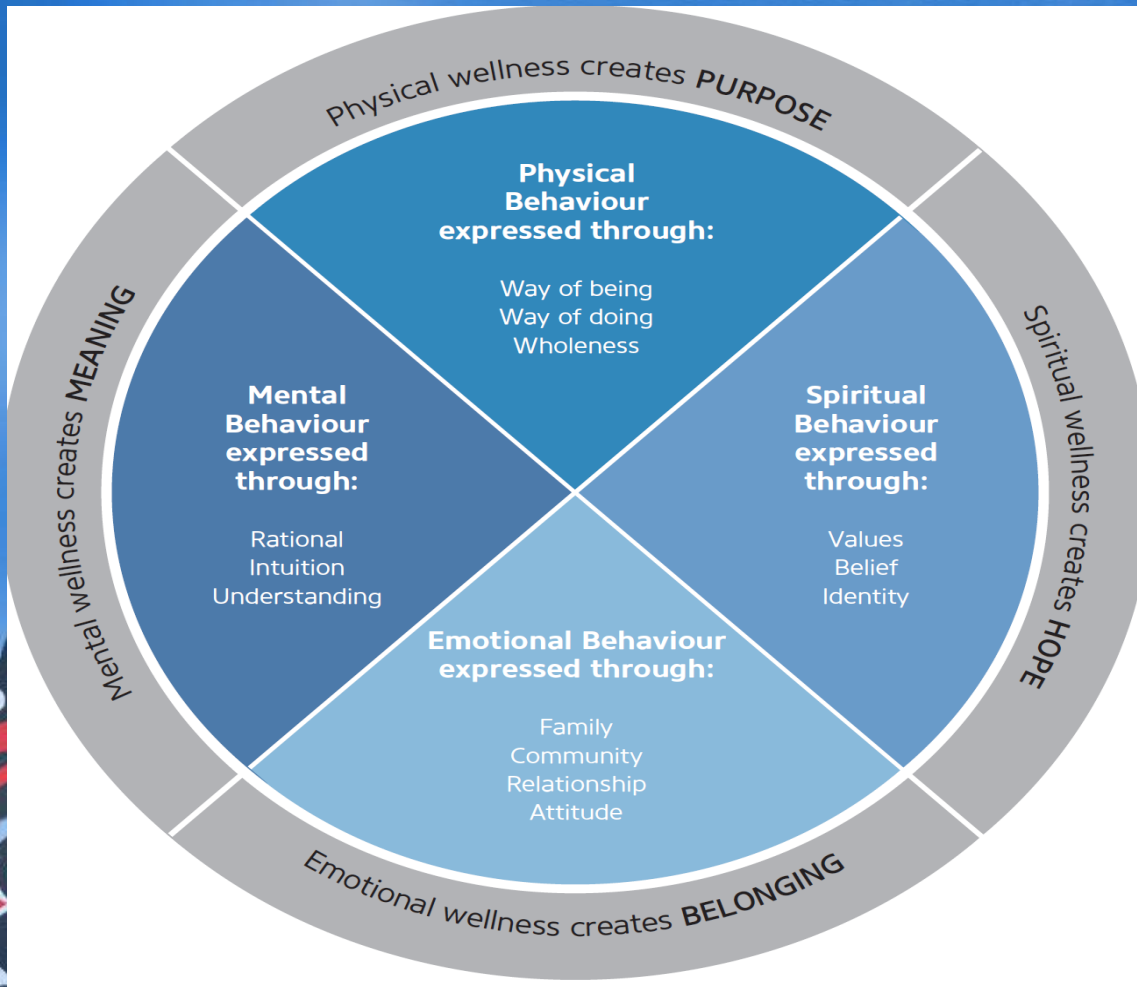




*“We want to have a deeper connection to the land, our traditions, communities and elders and live in communities where we can give back and help one another”*



# First Nation Voice on Wellness

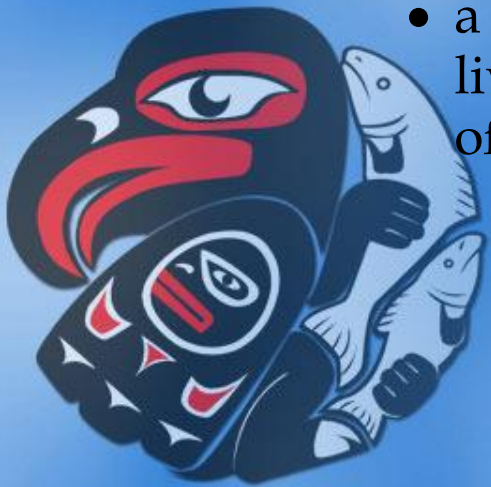




# Outcomes

Mental wellness is a balance of the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical. This balance is enriched as individuals have:

- **HOPE** for their future and those of their families that is grounded in a sense of identity, unique Indigenous values, and having a belief in spirit
- a sense of **BELONGING** and connectedness within their families, to community, and to culture
- a sense of **MEANING** and an understanding of how their lives and those of their families and communities are part of creation and a rich history
- **PURPOSE** in their daily lives whether it is through education, employment, care-giving activities, or cultural ways of being and doing



# Hope, Belonging, Meaning, & Purpose Across the 7 Stages of Life plus pre- birth and death

(Peter Ochiene, Aki Winini)





Stages of Life & Journey of the Spirit	Important Events	Focus of Development
Pre-birth	Tether spirit to physical world	Identity
The Good Life	Confirming belonging	Developing self in relation to others
The Fast Life	Understanding of purpose	Finding expression of identity
The Wandering and Wondering Life	Sorting meaning	Seeking meaning of life
The Stages of Truth	Knowing oneself & purpose in life	Spiritual identity, roles & responsibilities
Planning & Planting	Family	Preparing for the future
Doing	Living out what ones purpose is in the world	Family & community
The Elder, Giving Back Life	Teaching, connection to ancestors, preparing for future	Cultural continuity
Death	Spirit journey & celebrating life	Honoring “the spirit that lives forever”
After Death	Ongoing support from ancestors	Support from ancestors

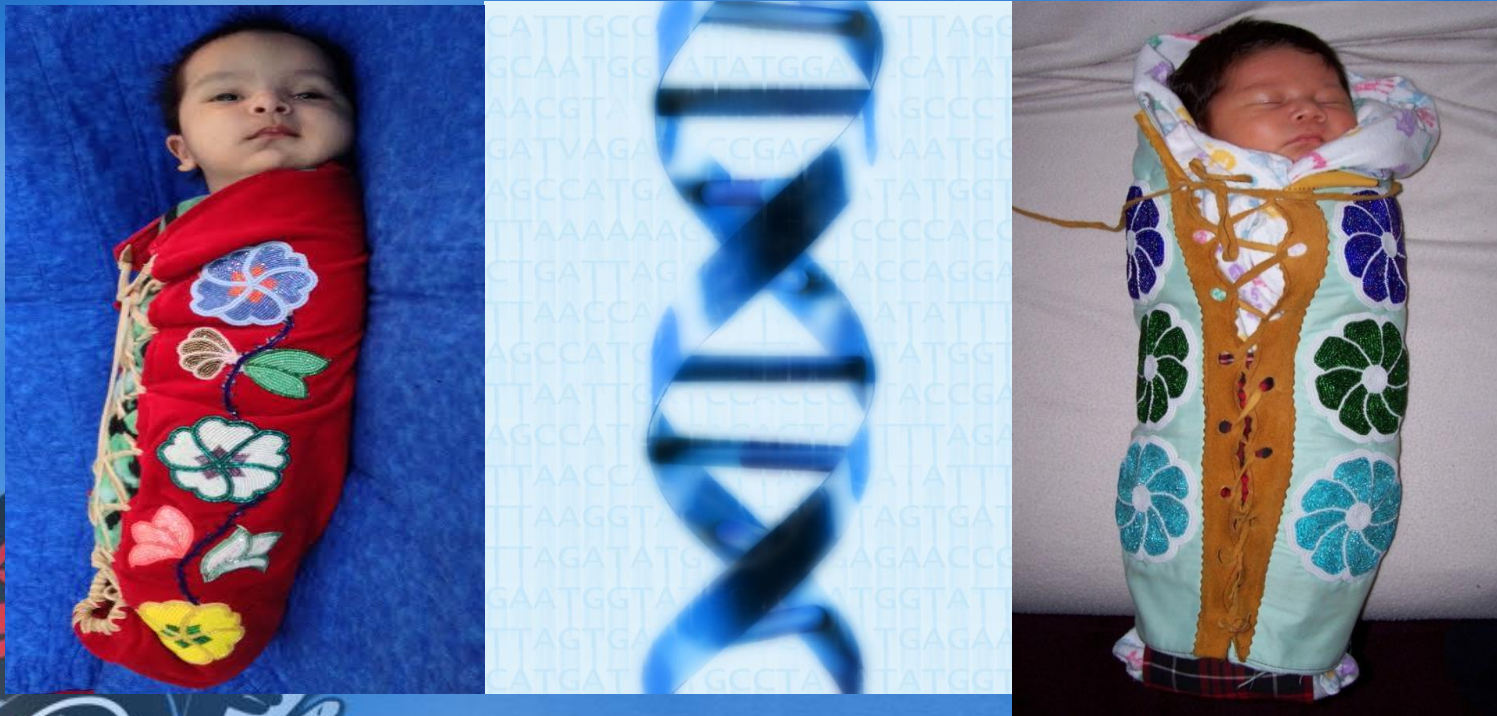
# Cultural Understanding

- Manido Meness is an Ojibway term used contemporarily for “beads” but its origin comes from the understanding that our physical and spiritual life is “strung” together by the Creator with “spirit seeds”
- The spirit seeds that are strung together, physically and spiritually make up our unique identity, which is: our nation, spirit name, language, and from these comes our personality, characteristics, strengths, gifts and potential...



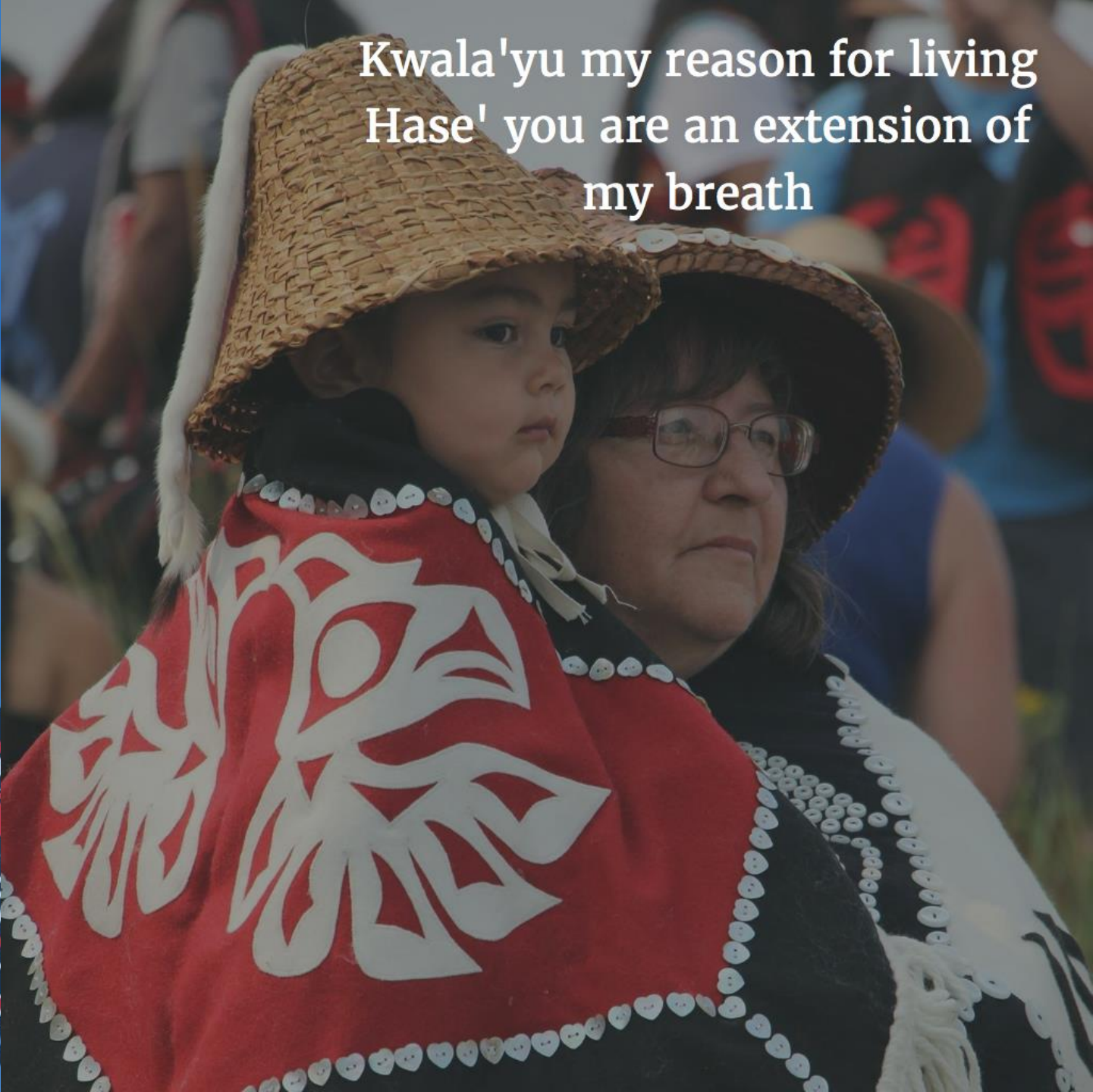


The way we dress our children should be a reflection of their inherent gifts ... The DNA, string of life.



As helpers we have the same obligation... to help people connect with their identity and then help dress them up with their inherent gifts / strengths

Kwala'yu my reason for living  
Hase' you are an extension of  
my breath





# Attitude: Culture Perspective of engagement in life comes from birthing time...

When we are born, its important to “tether” or “connect” our spirt to the earth... our first mother.

This simple act of touching the earth for the first time, is an act of connecting our life to our life path.

This engages our connection to life.

As helpers are role is to support engagement with the healing journey by facilitating some practice of “connection”

From that point forward, a culture based approach to supporting strengths is “dressing them up with their strengths, gifts and identity.



**Touches the earth for the first time**





# Culture FOR LIFE

Here's How I Connect  
With My Culture...



HELPING MY BROTHER  
TAKE HIS FIRST STEPS  
ON MOTHER EARTH  
-KIONA

My Culture. My Life.

Connect With Culture **FOR LIFE:**  
[cultureforlife.ca](http://cultureforlife.ca)





Indigenous culture is  
what has sustained us



Denied



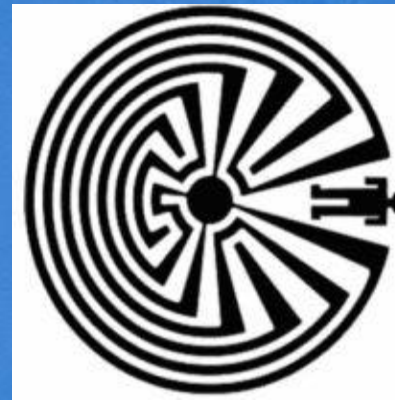
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# CULTURAL WELLNESS IS A CONNECTION TO ORIGIN

- Wellness from an Indigenous perspective is a *whole and healthy person* expressed through a sense of balance of body, mind, emotion and spirit. Central to wellness is belief in one's connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment

*Elder Jim Dumont*





*‘Culture is the expression, the life-ways, and the spiritual, psychological, social, AND material practice of this Indigenous worldview.*



*Elder Jim Dumont*

Wellness is supported by:

- ✓ Culture
- ✓ Language
- ✓ Elders and families
- ✓ Natural environment

Achieving wellness utilizes:

- ✓ Indigenous knowledge
- ✓ Indigenous practices
- ✓ Language
- ✓ Ways of knowing





- Cultural reclamation is at the heart of healing.  
Reclaiming culture includes:
  - Revitalization of language
  - Understanding impact of Indigenous history to community and nation
  - Reclaiming cultural practices and community ceremonies,
  - Learning cultural teachings
- Our task in achieving wellness requires we:
  - Know who we are
  - Seek our identity
  - Understand our role on Mother Earth



# Culture & resiliency

- Connection to culture and a strong sense of cultural identity has been found to demonstrate the following:
  - Associated with prosocial behavior in youth
  - Increases values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity in youth
  - Discourages risky health behaviors and encourages generally stable and positive health practices
    - Combats the effects of stress and negative health outcomes
  - Buffers depressive symptoms and alcohol in adults
  - Protects against alcohol misuse, the impact of discrimination, and suicide
  - *As listed in Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, Burns & Camillo (2010)*



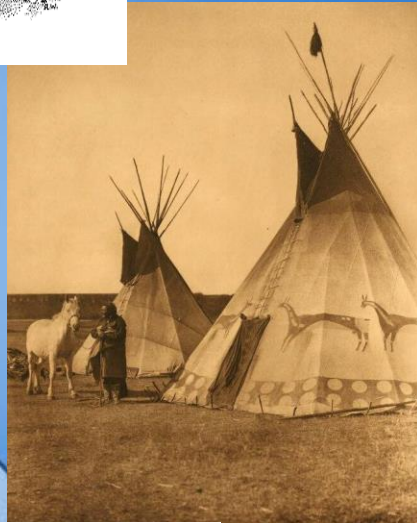
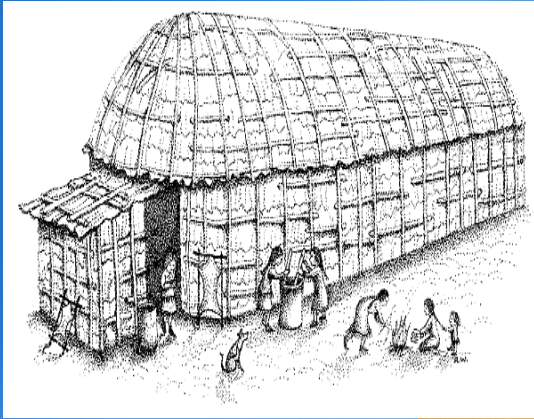




Being a mother is greatest  
gift and highest honour.  
My son is growing, living  
and breathing proof of  
strength and resilience.



# INDIGENOUS FRAMEWORK



Ceremonial lodges facilitate cultural wellness through spiritual connection (ceremony) and through the transmission of teaching/story and therefore KNOWLEDGE of how to live 'life to the fullest' flows from within the lodge structures

Lodge is the place that facilitates wellness



# Indigenous Knowledge

- Strength and resiliency based
- Community action
- Spirituality based
- Importance of knowing history
- Nurturing a strong sense of identity (personal, family, community)
- Importance of culture and language
- Healthy identity connected to healthy people





# Cultural Connections

Research with the Quebec Cree have found that people who report good relationships in the community and spend more time in the bush are associated with less distress (Tanner, 1993)





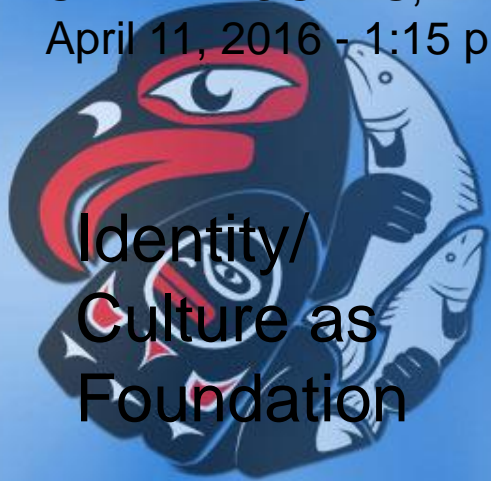
# Nunavik project uses Inuit identity to tackle addictions, mental health issues

"It gives them hope and confidence that they can succeed"

SARAH ROGERS, NEWS: Nunavik  
April 11, 2016 - 1:15 pm



Pigiatsiaq hunters and youth pose for a photo in an igloo the group built together outside of Puvirnituk Feb. 3. The life-skills program is largely focused around on the land activities for at-risk youth. (PHOTO BY JAMES ASINAJAQ NAPPARTUK)



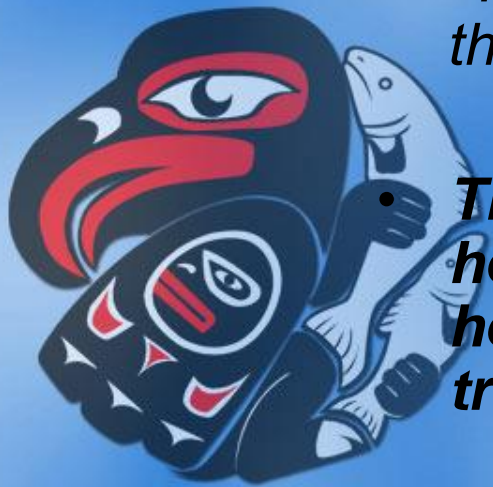
*“We need more specialized First Nations informed health services. I don’t just want to be asked a ton of questions that make me feel bad. That’s not natural to me. We need to learn how to do things like smudge, use sage, help others and be educated on how these traditions work again”*





# ***Matawa land-based healing approaches to support connection to land and a healthy mind***

- Fasting ceremony
- Community festival on the land
- Youth retreat
- Canoe trips: adult & elders, youth & elders
- Learning lodges
- School based trapping course
- *“The land is our healer by bringing people back to their roots”*



- ***The land is central to finding our strengths and to healing, we will support the development of healthy minds through using our culture and tradition (Matawa Demonstration Project)***



My way of life. It keeps me grounded & connected. I enjoy being out in the land just like my late father & my late mooshoom before me.

Neo Williams,  
Kashechewan First Nation





Cultural based  
programs to address  
youth addictions had a  
100% completion rate  
of 4 months residential  
treatment and 86%  
discontinued use of  
inhalants post-  
treatment

(NNHC, 2007)



# Language Promotes Wellness

- “We must stick with the language because that’s the thing that’s going to get us through. That’s our only identity now. This is the place where we can re-learn all those things what our ancestors did. That’s why I’m teaching my children to be prepared for the future... to keep our language...is very important”





*“About 1995 almost 95% of our children spoke Oji-Cree now all you hear is English - even the small ones. In Webequie, we had 7 (counseling) open files back then, and maybe they were scared but when I left to retire last year there were about 600 open files...”*



# The importance of language to wellness

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) continues to work on improving the quality of education for our people, while remaining vigilant in maintaining and revitalizing our Mi'kmaq language.

- High school graduation rates among First Nation students in Nova Scotia were nearly 88%, considerably higher than the national average of 35%;
- Numeracy and literacy rates in elementary and secondary schools increased;
- More than 500 First Nation students were enrolled in post secondary institutions;
- Eighty-eight First Nation students graduated from a post secondary institution in 2013 and went out into the world, confidently expanding their personal horizons and ready to make a change in their communities; and
- Our special needs students are getting the focused attention they need to grow and thrive.





# BELIEF



First Nations that appeared to have **more cultural continuity**, measured by **traditional Indigenous language knowledge**, who have greater than 50% of members with Indigenous language knowledge have youth suicide rates six times less than those First Nations with less than 50% of members having Indigenous language knowledge

*"..when First Nations 'live from their language' they are 'maintaining all that (they) believe in and all that you've been born from.' ...Because our beliefs come from that in terms of how we govern ourselves. It comes in terms of how we eat, and in terms of how we educate ourselves and conduct ourselves in that full circle.*

"Oster, R. T., Grier, A., Lightning, R., Mayan, M. J., & Toth, E. L. (2014). Cultural continuity, traditional Indigenous language, and diabetes in Alberta First Nations: a mixed methods study. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 13, 92. <http://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-014-0092-4>

# FAMILY



- Traditional parenting promotes interconnectedness & balance
- Secures knowledge of family, extended family, clan, community, nation, natural world
- Promotes bonding
- Promotes identity for self and to community





Learning the  
responsibilities of being  
head youth dancer  
from my Grandfather.

# Meaning



My culture is my life: attending  
a Buffalo kill before the  
sundance.

The meat was used to feed 600  
people in the camp for 5 days.

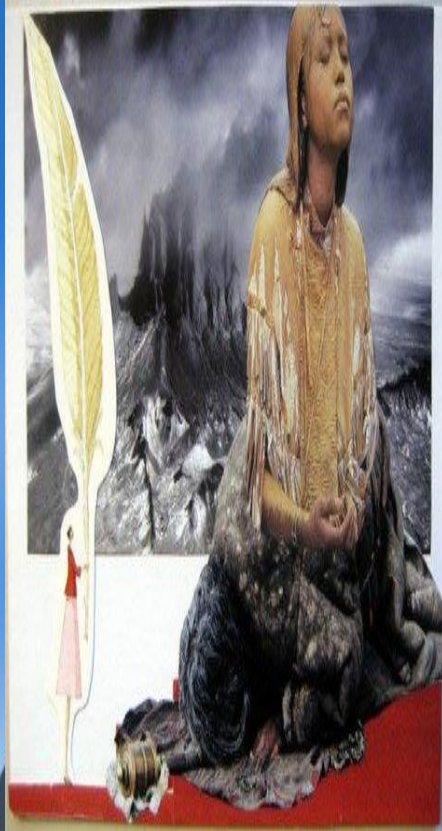




# UNDERSTANDING

Youth who are given the opportunity to learn how to manage transitions through cultural ceremonies and teachings gain understanding:

- Personal capacity
- Roles (gender, family, community)
- Abilities to cope with life challenges

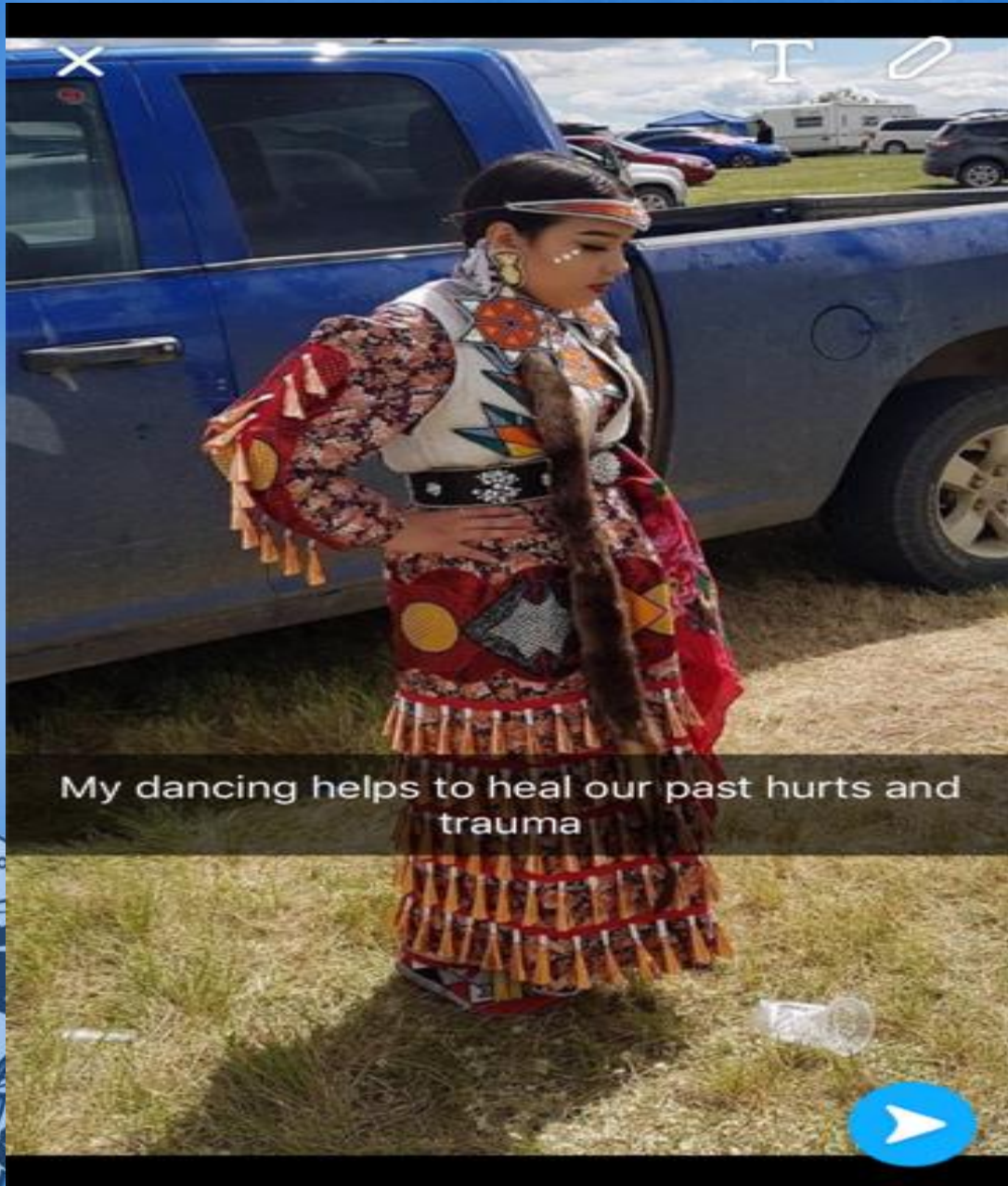




# HOPE







My dancing helps to heal our past hurts and trauma



“Aboriginal people believe that children do not belong to us but are gifts sent from the Creator. It is our job to nurture and guide children throughout their childhood so they will grow to fulfill their purpose while on this earth. Because children are so sacred it is everyone’s responsibility to nurture them and keep them safe, to provide them with unconditional love and attention so they will know they are wanted and hold a special place in the circle. Every child regardless of age, or disability has gifts and teaches us lessons. They are all unique and should be respected.”



(A Sense of Belonging: Supporting Healthy Child Development in Aboriginal Families, 2006)



# Miigwech/Thank You/Merci

QUESTIONS?

