

INTRODUCTION

This manual was created as a learning and reference tool for groups and organizations providing services to Aboriginal people. Its focus is towards an understanding of the history of Aboriginal people, including some insight into the victimization of Aboriginal people through the process of colonization and the resultant family dysfunction. Finally, the manual will explore how best to provide culturally appropriate services to respond to the needs of Aboriginal victims of crime and violence.

It is designed to serve two purposes. First it provides a culture-based approach to providing streamlined victim services for Aboriginal people. Secondly, it is an educational tool to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture and history in Canada.

Why This Manual Was Created

Aboriginal people are over-represented in all risk-groups associated with preventable social and economic problems such as homelessness, poverty, addictions, violence, chronic illness and diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and diabetes. Aboriginal people are highly over-represented in provincial and federal prisons, are three times more likely to be victims of crime or violence and are four times more likely than non-Aboriginals to be arrested. In some Aboriginal communities, 8 out of 10 Aboriginal women experience domestic violence. Mainstream providers offering prevention and intervention programs continue to fail to draw Aboriginal people to their services.

One reason for this is the paternalistic and prejudicial attitudes that exist toward Aboriginal people in mainstream society and the general lack of awareness of the experience of Aboriginal people. The persistence of these attitudes underscores the urgent need for Aboriginal-specific training and educational resources.

Another barrier to access is a service system that has become badly fragmented and over-specialized. The failure to coordinate services leaves many Aboriginal clients feeling re-traumatized by repeated disclosures required for numerous intake and assessment procedures without finding the respect, compassion and practical support so urgently needed.

Although the range of services run by and for Aboriginal people is expanding, they often lack the resource capacity to fully meet the level of need; therefore an accessible and culturally-sensitive service system is essential.

To achieve this vision, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers must work collaboratively to create an atmosphere of mutual respect, cooperation and trust. The painful lesson learned from our shared history should be to keep hearts and minds open to every opportunity for a new beginning.

Although this manual does not provide a set recipe for such relationships, it is meant to promote the type of active, intercultural learning that generates new thinking and new approaches.

How to Use this Manual

This manual provides information about Aboriginal history as well as the impacts of residential schooling on Aboriginal people. It is not meant as an intensive study of complex and important historical events. Readers wanting more information are referred to the list of recommended **Resources** at the end of this document.

All of the information in this resource manual is meant to be used, copied and/or adapted to suit the needs of those using it. Sections can be used in whole or in part as handouts for public or professional education workshops or as a way of generating discussion about history, culture or exploring the provision of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal people.

Section 1 of the handbook provides a brief overview of indigenous cultures prior to European contact. Canadian education does not present the history and lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples, or the important contributions of Aboriginal people to society as we know it today, so this section of the manual is essential reading. It is hoped this section also prevents Aboriginal people from being defined solely in terms of victimization by colonizers, which comprises only a small part of the overall history of the original inhabitants of this land.

Section 2 begins with an overview of the post-contact period and the emergence of the Métis as a people. This is followed by a description of the policies that led first, to Indian residential schooling and then to the so-called “60’s Scoop” where thousands of Inuit, Métis and First Nations children were forced into foster care and adoption.

This section also describes many of the abuses endured by these children and their families – when the children were taken away. Also included are the intergenerational impacts of historical trauma and accumulated loss from the perspective of frontline workers and Elders.

Section 3 describes the realities of modern life for Aboriginal people today. This section provides some statistical information on the Aboriginal population in Canada in terms of educational, socioeconomic and victimization rates. There is also an exploration of the manner in which Children’s Aid Societies have taken up where the residential schools left off in terms of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, communities and cultures. The section concludes with an in-depth discussion on Aboriginal family violence, the impact on women, children and families.

Section 4 explores the process of colonization to which Aboriginal people have been subjected since the time of contact. Connections and linkages are made between that process of colonization and the lived experience of Aboriginal people today.

Section 5 examines the current justice system and the response to victims and offenders. The differing worldview of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in terms of perceptions of justice are explained in detail. It is hoped that this section helps to foster an understanding of the difficulty that Aboriginal people experience when they interact with a system that runs counter to their own beliefs and worldview. In terms of violence and victimization, this conflict of worldviews may explain why so many Aboriginal women are reluctant to get involved with the mainstream system to address family violence and abuse.

Section 6 outlines some of the current services which are attempting to meet the needs of Aboriginal victims. The processes utilized are detailed and the common elements of these services are identified. In some cases, the programs described have been developed to address issues other than family violence, but it is our belief that these same holistic methods of healing individuals, families and communities may be applied to victims of family violence and crime.

Section 7 discusses some recommendations for best practices in the provision of culturally appropriate victims' services for Aboriginal people. This information has been drawn from studies of current Aboriginal agencies and from the review of other programs highlighted in this document.

Section 8 consists of suggestions on how to work with Aboriginal clients to promote safety and prevent re-victimization. It includes information on preparing clients to access other resources as well as a detailed checklist for workers to prevent inadvertent re-victimization of clients.

Section 9 is a discussion of healing as sacred. It details various methods of traditional and alternative healing as a beginning of crucial education about the types of care victim's might wish to access.

The **Fact Sheets** in **Appendix A** are designed to be easily photocopied as handouts for public education presentations in high schools, at community forums, or for staff training within health and social service organizations.

Appendix B is an Annotated Bibliography of related resources and recommended readings.

Limitations of the Manual

The Elders caution non-Aboriginal readers against thinking that written information alone is a sufficient way to learn about other cultures. The beliefs, values, traditions and customs of Inuit, Métis and First Nations people are too diverse and complex to be adequately conveyed in this format.

As well, written information is easily misinterpreted and remains fixed over time. The true value of written information can be assessed by two criteria.

1. Does it affirm what you already know at some level, based on your own experience?
2. Does it arouse your curiosity enough that you are motivated to further your own learning in a particular area?

For Aboriginal people, experiential learning is the fundamental principle behind the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Traditional methods of teaching and learning involve doing and the Elders tell us, "The **way** we are taught is as important as **what** we are taught".

The readers of this handbook are encouraged to actively and respectfully seek out other opportunities for cross-cultural, experiential learning.

For further information about cultural events that welcome public participation, we encourage you to explore the following.

- Community Powwows or other cultural celebrations in your area.
- Aboriginal Day celebrations and special events held annually each June 21st.

- Contact the community centres in your area such as Native Friendship Centres or Aboriginal Health Centres, or Inuit or Métis Community Resource and Information Centres.
- Contact any of the national Inuit, Métis or First Nations organizations listed in this manual.
- Visit any of the websites listed in this handbook for further information on inter-cultural events and learning opportunities.



A SNAPSHOT OF LIFE PRIOR TO CONTACT

The Situation on Turtle Island

Writings of the first Europeans about the inhabitants of Turtle Island give us their initial impressions of indigenous life prior to colonization.

On Parenting and Children

"Their children are not obstinate, since they give them everything they ask for, without ever letting them cry for that which they want. The greatest persons give way to the little ones. The father and the mother draw the morsel from the mouth if the child asks for it. They love their children greatly. They are never afraid of having too many, for they are their wealth."

From "Concerning the Ways of the Indians: Their Customs, Dress, Methods of Hunting and Fishing, and Their Amusements"
by Nicolas Denys 1672.

"Out of a hundred that have passed through our hands scarcely have we civilized one. We find docility and intelligence in them, but when we are least expecting it they climb over our enclosure and go to run the woods with their relatives, where they find more pleasure than all the amenities of our French houses. Savage nature is made that way; they cannot be constrained and if they are they become melancholy, and their melancholy makes them sick. Besides, the Savages love their children extraordinarily and when they know they are sad they will do everything to get them back."

Ursuline Mother del'Incarnation, 1668
Quoted in "Stolen from Our Embrace"

On Interpersonal Relations

*"Excesses of emotion and behaviour are rare, and their language is chaste."
"Indeed they have an admirable composure, and do not know what it is to burst out into insults. I do not remember ever seeing any one of them angry".*

From the Charlevoix, *Journal, II* CAI
Quoted in "The Unredeemed Captive"

On Character

"They are of body lusty, strong and very nimble: they are a very understanding generation, quick of apprehension, sudden in their dispatches, subtle in their dealings, exquisite in their inventions, and industrious in their labour".

From Alexander Whitaker, Minister
1613

On Governance

"Finally, there is a civil government amongst them which they strictly observe, and show thereby that the law of Nature dwelleth in them: for they have a rude kind of Common-wealth, and rough government, wherein they both honour and obey their kings, Parents, and Governors, both greater and less, they observe the limits of their own possessions and encroach not upon their neighbours dwellings."

From Alexander Whitaker, Minister
1613

The Situation in Europe

During the time when Europeans first arrived on the shores of Turtle Island in late 1400 to the end of 1800, the following was the situation they left behind in “civilized” Europe.

The Inquisition

From 1257 to 1816, 500 years of terror were decreed by Papal authority under the “Inquisition” in which over one million people; mostly women and homosexuals were brutally murdered. Written by a priest, the Inquisitor’s handbook titled “Malleus Maleficarum” recommended heretics (non-believers in Christianity) and witches be “often and frequently exposed to torture”, before burning them alive.

Children in Europe

Both pre and post industrial Europe were defined by the terrible exploitation of children as young as 6 years old who were forced into labour as prostitutes, factory workers, miners, chimney sweeps, and beggars. The cruelties inflicted against children from the “lower classes” of society resulted in terrible injury and death for many thousands. *Les Misérables*, a play written by Victor Hugo in 1862 describes vividly the lives of European children at the time their missionaries were “civilizing the savages” of the “new world”.



PRE-CONTACT HISTORY

Introduction

The term “Aboriginal People” refers to the descendants of the original inhabitants of what First Nations people call “Turtle Island” but is now known as North America.

The Canadian Constitution recognizes three separate groups of Aboriginal People each having unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. They are the **Indians, Inuit and Métis**.¹ (The term “First Nations” came to use in the 1970’s to replace the term Indian which many people found offensive. Another offensive term, “Eskimo” has been replaced by Inuit.)

From a cultural and spiritual perspective, Indigenous people expressed their beliefs in their origins through creation stories passed down from generation to generation by the Elders. Inuit creation stories tell of the first man, **Aakulagjug**, and the first woman, **Umarniqtu**. Prior to Christianity, Inuit shamans would ask for their help and guidance through difficult times.²

Creation stories from the south were as diverse as the many First Nations. In a Mohawk version, *Sky Woman* fell to earth onto the back of a great turtle, which grew to become the continent of Turtle Island.³

From an anthropological and historical perspective, there are two main theories of the origins of human life on this continent.

One is that the first humans crossed the Bering Strait from Asia sometime between 60,000 to 12,000 BC and that by 8000 BC, their descendants had settled throughout the continent. This view is strongly rejected by many Aboriginal people.

Others counter the theory of a single-entry point. They argue that similarities of symbols and construction methods at sacred sites from Peru and Mexico to Africa, Egypt, Ireland and Bretagne are too common to be merely coincidental. These similarities more likely reflect the wide travels and intercultural exchanges of early seafaring peoples.

Historians now generally agree that humans were present in the Americas by 15,000 BC and that from 5000 to 1000 BC, agriculture, pottery, and complex social and economic systems existed that marked the end of the Stone Age period and the beginning of what is known in history books as, the “High Indian” civilizations.

Population estimates for the Americas prior to sustained European contact in 1500 are as high as 112.5 million people speaking an estimated 2,200 languages. In what is now Canada, the population is estimated to have been anywhere from 500,000 to over 2 million people.⁴ Within this population were many hundreds of diverse nations, tribes, languages and dialects.⁵

Among these richly diverse cultures, there were striking commonalities in worldview. Respect for self-discipline, appreciation for humour, the law of hospitality and a deep faith in the unity of all living things were beliefs shared by many.

1 See the Fact Sheets in the Appendix of this Handbook for additional information on Métis, Inuit and First Nation cultures.

2 *In the Words of Elders*, page 266.

3 *In the Words of Elders*, page 109

4 By early 1900 however, the Indigenous population of the Americas had shrunk by 93% mainly due to European diseases and genocide.

5 From *Canada’s First Nations*, page 9.

A shared understanding of the lives, strengths, customs and beliefs of Indigenous people prior to European contact is crucial in order to fully grasp the scope of the impacts of assimilation strategies such as residential schooling.

The Government of Canada marked a new era in the history of relations with Aboriginal people when it recognized the importance of this shared understanding. The following is an excerpt from the Government's *Statement of Reconciliation* released in 1998, which included an apology for the abuse in residential schools.



The ancestors of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples lived on this continent long before explorers from other continents first came to North America. For thousands of years before this country was founded, they enjoyed their own forms of government. Diverse, vibrant Aboriginal nations had ways of life rooted in fundamental values concerning their relationships to the Creator, the environment, and each other, in the role of Elders as the living memory of their ancestors, and in their responsibilities as custodians of the lands, waters and resources of their homelands.

*From the Government of Canada's
Statement of Reconciliation 1998*





Inuit and Inuvialuit are peoples very distinct from both First Nations and Métis, and they occupy vast areas of the Canadian Arctic.

Inuvialuit live in the Western Arctic and speak Inuvialuktun. Inuit live primarily in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and northern Labrador and Quebec and their language is Inuktitut. Inuvialuit and Inuit share a strong connection with other circumpolar Inuit of Russia, Alaska and Greenland in terms of their cultural history as well as their stories, traditions, crafts and tools.

It was not until the nineteenth century that any form of regular contact took place between Inuit and the Europeans. There is however, ample evidence Inuit and Inuvialuit were active trading partners with First Nations from the south for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans.

Living in small, well-organized camps of extended families, Inuit and Inuvialuit were nomadic people who survived primarily by hunting marine mammals and gathering.

People of the Arctic were fully aware of the urgency of their struggle for physical survival. They understood the absolute need for cooperation and sharing in order to endure in the harsh Arctic. This remains the foundation of an Inuit social ethic that Elders call “Inuit law”.⁶

Preserving emotional stability and balance within the camps was essential to maintaining cooperation, as conflict and disruption used up precious energies needed for survival.

Inuit and Inuvialuit were adept at finding creative ways to overcome interpersonal difficulties and maintain harmony within the camps. The social and psychological systems developed by Inuit over thousands of years ensured good mental health for individuals and families in spite of extremely harsh and demanding conditions.

Such systems placed high value on ***ajurnarmat***, silent acceptance and ***issuma***, the wisdom that comes with time and experience.⁷

Interpersonal communications skills are highly developed in Inuit and Inuvialuit, especially intentional listening, (clarifying that a listener both heard *and understood* what a speaker had said), and giving/receiving respectful advice. Strategic uses of humour and silence enabled people to live together in harmony throughout the long months of winter darkness.

Spirituality

As in many other Indigenous cultures, the Circle was one of the underpinnings of ancient belief systems. It represented the cyclical aspects of birth, life and death as well as seasonal cycles marking changes in lifestyle, food, social activities and ceremonies.

Inuit Elder Angaangaq describes this concept as ***“the Circle that Has No Beginning and No Ending to Which We All Belong”***.

Prior to contact, spiritual practice was based on shamanism. Shamans could be either male or female and held powerful and respected positions in community life.

⁶ *In the Words of Elders*, page 274

⁷ Issumatuq: Learning from the Traditional Healing Wisdom of the Canadian Inuit

Shamans were believed to possess healing powers as well as the ability to influence or change nature. Visions, songs and medicines helped shamans to induce pregnancy, restore mental health, overcome illness or injury and guide animals to the hunters.

As with many other Indigenous cultures, the Inuit and Inuvialuit worldview was one in which all living things were in unity; therefore humans, the land, animals and plants were considered equal in terms of respect and consideration.

Traditional Medicine

Types of medicines and methods for using them vary widely with regional differences in plant and animal life. Some examples:

- **Cuts** were treated by applying a powdery plant to the wound before it was bandaged with a thin layer of caribou skin; or sometimes a whole leaf of chewing tobacco was applied or arctic hare droppings that had been crushed into a powder (this was considered best for preventing bleeding).
- **Infections** were opened to let the pus out, then treated with goose or seal fat to keep it from drying out.
- **Cataracts** were removed by inserting human lice or warble fly larvae into the eye. (Larvae are now used to clean infected wounds in many modern hospitals.) Another treatment was to apply a powder made of cooked bones to the eye; this stuck to the cataract and was then removed with the cataract intact.
- **Treatment of Ear Infections, Fevers and Fractured Bones** was the same as today, applying hot or cold compresses and setting bones in splints or slings.

Family Life

Family life in the Arctic was characterized by the fluidity of the relationships among children and adults in the camps. Children held a very special place in Inuit life and in the hearts of all people of the camps, not just the birth parents. Disciplining, teaching and guiding children's development was a responsibility shared by all.

This fluidity is also evident in long-held Inuit adoption practices. "*Customary adoption*", which is still practiced today, is a traditional custom in which children are accepted into the homes of adoptive parents to be raised.

The reasons for such adoptions vary widely. It may be because the adoptive couple is unable to have children, or because the birth parents are unwilling or unable to care for the child.

Whatever the reason, the child knows her or his biological parents and family and is encouraged to develop a sense of connectedness to them while clearly also belonging with the adoptive family.⁸

Inuit and Inuvialuit do not use terms such as "give-up" or "give-away" to describe their relationship with children. There is no stigma attached to adoption and all references are from the perspective of choosing, wanting and welcoming children.

Their love of children is reflected in **Aqausig**, which means loving babies and creating a special song for each infant out of that love.

⁸ *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association.

The Role of Elders

Elders were held in great respect and authority. They intervened when there was trouble, provided guidance to members of the camps and determined what action would be taken when community laws were broken.

People with extensive knowledge of the land were also considered Elders. They taught young people respect for animals, the land and the importance of sharing.⁹



We were told to help Elders, to love them, to go to Elders with problems because they wanted us to be good people. We were told to obey and listen to adults and we were told to love orphans. We were told not to fight, not to lie, and not to steal. This is what we were told.

*Rachael Uyarasuk
In the Words of the Elders*



Roles of Men and Women

Survival in the Arctic required the skills of everyone in the camps. Women developed skills in preparing seal and caribou skins for clothing to suit even the harshest Arctic weather conditions.

9 In the Words of Elders, page 204

They prepared the food and along with the men, fished, dried the fish, and constructed the camp dwellings. Women were also the keepers of the ***Qulliq***, an oil lamp that was the only source of light and heat throughout the long winters.



Along with Elders, women were the decision-makers of the household, influential in resolving disputes and maintaining relationships.

Men's most essential skills were planning and carrying out the dangerous hunting expeditions for large game such as seal, whale, caribou and polar bear.

Both women and men were actively involved in child rearing as parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, and foster parents, teaching the children of the camps respect for Inuit laws crucial to their survival.

Inuit expansive notion of “family” is reflected in the language. The word **qatangutigii** refers to immediate or close family relations based on blood ties.

The word **ilagiit** refers to the “outer family” of extended relatives that can sometimes overlap with qatangutigii.

Children were also bonded to adults through **tuqlluraniq** a namesake. Inuit believed naming a child after someone who has recently died, would allow that person’s spirit to live on in the child.

For thousands of years, Inuit cultural and family life centered on community feasts and the sharing of food, drum dancing, throat-singing and games of dexterity and skill.

Contact with Europeans

The quest for the Northwest Passage first motivated Europeans to explore the Arctic regions. One of the earliest accounts of this contact are the journals of Martin Frobisher in 1576, which describes Inuit as “a peaceable people”.

The arrival of whalers in the Arctic in the mid-1700s marked the beginning of economic relationships between Inuit and Europeans. By 1800, whaling boats pervaded the north and by the early 1900s intense whaling had severely reduced the stocks.

Following the whalers came traders, missionaries (Anglican from rural England and Roman Catholic from France and Belgium) and the North-West Mounted Police. Until the 1950’s however, Inuit still retained control over decision-making and remained largely autonomous.

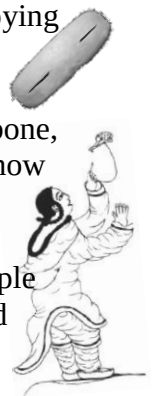
Discovery of rich mineral deposits and the cold war’s demand for strategic NATO air bases in the 1950s sparked a new interest in the North that would change Inuit cultural and political life dramatically.

This interest marked the onset of “forced relocation” during which the Canadian government forcibly removed Inuit from ancestral homes and hunting territories to centralized, government built settlements. This dis-connection from ancestral lands caused a grief that is still felt by many Inuit today.

Contributions of the Inuit

Inuit ingenuity and creativity continues to enrich contemporary life. Some examples:

- The kayak, designed by Inuit has become one of the most popular ways of enjoying water travel and sport worldwide.
- Snow goggles were fashioned from bone, antler and ivory to reduce blinding snow glare during hunts.
- Inuit art inspired by the animals, people and spirits of the Arctic is known and loved by collectors worldwide.



Explanation of Terms

Inuit: is plural and means “the people”; the singular is **Inuk**.

Inuktitut and Inuvialuktun: are the languages of the Inuit and Inuvialuit respectively (there are also many dialects).

Inuksuk: singular, meaning “like a person” it refers to stones piled to resemble humans as markers or forms of communication. Plural is **Inuksuit**.

Eskimo: a Chipewyan expression meaning “eaters of raw meat” that many contemporary Inuit find insulting and unacceptable.

Qallunaat the name Inuit use to describe people who are not Inuit.

Ulu: the half-moon shaped women’s knife used for cutting meat and preparing hides.



Country Food: the food of the north such as Arctic Char, caribou, muktuk, seal, whale, and bannock. Inuit love this food raw and fresh or frozen or made into roasts and stews.

Amauti: a woman’s parka with a large hood for carrying a child on her back.

Qulliq: a long, narrow, flat lamp, generally carved of soapstone with a wick made from cotton or moss that could only be picked at certain times of the year. The fuel it burned was oil from the fat of any animal such as caribou, seal, whale or polar bear. For many centuries, the qulliq was the only source of heat, light and cooking for Inuit.

Syllabics: there are two written forms of Inuktitut and Inuvialuktun, one based on syllabics and the other based on Roman orthography. These written forms of the language were introduced by missionaries and are still in use today.

Today, Inuit survivors of residential schools speak of their terror as children during first plane flights to these schools, of their loss of a sense of family and feeling of being loved, the loss of language, the humiliation they suffered at being forced to perform demeaning acts and the pain of physical and sexual abuse.

Cultural Reclamation

Forced changes in housing, diet and education imposed by the Canadian government proved disastrously unhealthy for Inuit. A population that had endured for tens of thousands of years without addictions, substance abuse or serious health problems such as tuberculosis, began spiralling into tragedy.

In 1971, Inuit Tapirisat Corporation (ITC) was formed to work on behalf of Inuit social, economic and political development. Through ITC, cultural reclamation emphasized protection of language and restoration of hunting as the bases of Inuit society. (With the creation of Nunavut, the name was changed to Inuit Tapirit Kanata (ITK).

In 1984 Pauktuutit, a National Inuit Women’s Association was founded to address social, economic and political issues of importance to women and to restore the role of women in all spheres of cultural and political life.

Some of the issues of concern being addressed by Canadian Inuit:

- 60% of Inuit are under age 25
- 50% are unemployed.
- The rate of suicide is the worst in the world: Canadian Inuit suicide rate is 211 per 100,000 vs. the rest of Canada 14 per 100,000.
- Sexual assault in the North is 4-5 times higher than the rest of Canada; the highest risk group is children age 7-18 years.

Inuit Today

There are four Inuit regions of the Canadian Arctic, each with its own “Regional Association” and separate land claim agreement. These regions are: Labrador with an Inuit population of 4,500, Nunavik, population of 8,000, Nunavut, population 23,000 and Inuvialuit with a population of 5,000.¹⁰

The creation of the new territory of Nunavut on April 1, 1999, marked a historic milestone in the history of Inuit in Canada. Its new legislative assembly, cabinet and court, are responsible for governing an area comprising 20% of Canada.

The hallmarks of Inuit tradition and culture remain to this day: respect for individuals, a concern for Inuit collective well-being and a willingness to share. Inuktitut and Inuvialuit are still spoken in all Inuit communities and is the language used in radio and television programs that originate in the North.

Whether in northern communities or the urban Inuit communities of the South, traditional Inuit country food, games, dance and song remain at the centre of community celebrations.

¹⁰ Inuit Tapirisat Kanatami (ITK) Website

The First Nations



Prior to European contact, many complex and significant Nations coexisted in the Americas. In what is now Canada, there are six major cultural regions: the Woodland First Nations in the east, the Iroquois First Nations of south-eastern Ontario and Quebec, the Plains First Nations of the prairies, the Plateau First Nations and Pacific Coast First Nations and the First Nations of the Mackenzie and Yukon River basins.

The economic base was primarily fishing, hunting and agriculture. Goods found in burial sites such as conch shells from the Gulf of Mexico, copper work from the Southwest and ground slate from the Maritimes, show there was also an extensive trading network all through-out the continent. Such expansive trading practices later enabled the First Nations to become competitive, efficient trading partners with the Europeans.

Family Life

Many Indigenous cultures were matrilineal with descent traced on the female side of the family. Clans in these First Nations were comprised of extended families descended from a common female ancestor. They generally consisted of a woman, the **Clan mother**, and her daughters or a group of sisters, together with their husbands and children. In other Aboriginal cultures, there were different practices regarding clans and family composition.

The bonds uniting couples were completely different from European customs of matrimony and divorce. In some Aboriginal cultures, couples partnered and un-partnered easily, with no other consideration than consent of the two people involved.

The standards later introduced by the Christians for men and women concerning sexuality and “chastity” were considered coercive and unacceptable by many Aboriginal peoples.

Two essential values or laws expressed and modeled in family and community life were non-interference and sharing. Because sharing was considered a law, the hoarding of possessions or wealth was considered anti-social behaviour. Whether through potlatches or give-aways, a family’s wealth was indicated by the value of the gifts bestowed on others.

The European notion of discipline for children was virtually non-existent in many Indigenous cultures. Children learned proper behaviour by modeling adults or experiencing the consequences of their misbehaviour. The steadfast refusal of parents to “spare the rod and spoil the child” later became an excuse for the church to remove children from their families and communities in order to “civilize them”.

Gender and Sexuality

Studies of 200 Indigenous languages show 168 have a concept of more than two genders, with some having words to describe as many as 8 different genders. Men who were “like women” and women who were “like men” were especially respected for the uniqueness of the gifts they contributed to community life. Such individuals, called “berdaches” by Europeans (known today as Two-Spirit¹¹ people), served important roles as Matchmakers, Teachers, Counsellors, Medicine People, Pipe Carriers, Visionaries and Seers. In the Crow tradition, a Two-Spirit man cut the centre pole for the Sun Dance.

11 “Two-Spirit is a modern term created by Aboriginal gays, lesbians and transgendered people. It refers to

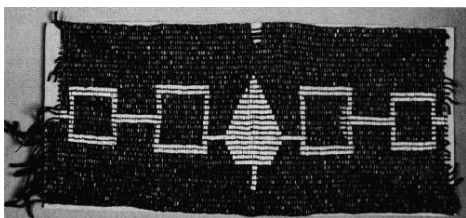
Indigenous Governance: The Iroquois System

Aboriginal people possess the accumulated wisdom of many centuries of nation building. There were many different forms of governance among the First Nations of Turtle Island, few of which were recognized by the European newcomers as indicative of their idea of civilization. However, there were some forms of governance which have been studied extensively and even adopted in many ways for use by “modern” governments.

One of the earliest known governance systems created to manage the complex affairs of many nations is the union of the ***Haudenosaunee***, meaning People of the Longhouse.

Over a thousand years ago in early 1000 AD the great leaders, Ayonwatha and Deganwidah founded the ***Haudenosaunee*** (also called League of the Iroquois or Iroquois Confederacy) under a constitution called the ***Kaianerekowa*** or **Great Law of Peace**.

The Wampum Belt, created to symbolize the Constitution is the oldest of its kind in North America and possibly the world.



both female and male characteristics being present within one person.

The design of the Wampum Belt illustrates the principles of Friendship, Law, Peace, Security and Shelter under which the five nations that comprised the League united with one another.

The principal Nations of the Iroquois League were: the Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida and Cayuga and their union endured for many centuries. The Tuscarora were later incorporated into the League when it became evident to them the extent to which Europeans jeopardized their future. Together, they controlled territory stretching from what became New England, to the Mississippi River.

Every member Nation of the League had a council composed of delegates called *sachems* chosen by the women of that Nation.

Each Nation governed its own territory and had its own council to decide issues of public policy. These councils exercised jurisdiction over the internal concerns of that one nation only. In this respect, they exercised powers somewhat like the individual governments of the colonies.

In addition to individual councils for each separate nation, the sachems together formed the Grand Council of the League.

In this Council, all fifty sachems of the five (and later six) Nations sat together to discuss issues of common concern and manage internal and external affairs. Within the Grand Council each sachem had equal authority and privileges. Individual power was wholly vested in each person's speaking skills, gifts of persuasion and ability to represent the people.

When the Europeans arrived in America, the Iroquois League constituted the most elaborate and significant rights-based political confederation in the world.

The Iroquois model of political alliance and governance became a template that would later be used, in some instances word for word, by the founders of the American Constitution, some of whom had visited the chiefs to learn about the constitution.¹²

The Role of Women in Governance

Women had an important and central role in many Indigenous cultures. Within the Iroquois League, this role included the power to choose as well as to impeach a chief.

If the conduct of any sachem or chief appeared improper to the people or if he was unable to inspire their confidence, the women of his clan had the authority to impeach and expel him by official action. They would then choose a new chief to replace him.

Women were also owners of the Longhouses and agricultural lands, responsible for decision-making and other aspects of family and community life.

Men were generally the providers and defenders who carried out the decisions of the women, however as noted previously the concept of gender was fluid as were gender roles.

¹² Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin visited the Iroquois chiefs and borrowed much from their constitution. For example, the oral preface to the Iroquois Constitution begins, “We the people” as does the written preamble to the American constitution.

Shared Leadership and Authority

In almost every North American tribe, clan or nation, ultimate authority rested with the group rather than individuals. Power was not centralized; compliance was not coerced and decision-making required consensus.

The underlying principle of consensus was that the best decisions arise out of a participatory process in which a diversity of ideas and perspectives are taken into consideration.

Communication and consent were the central tenets of good government. Leaders were fully accountable to the people through transparent, collaborative decision-making processes.

The system of women choosing male chiefs ensured gender equity, respect and accountability to women. This created balance in family, community and political life.

Another important political innovation “borrowed” from the First Nations was the caucus. Caucus was a formal mechanism designed to prevent political issues from becoming too divisive or combative within a larger group.

Potentially troublesome issues were delegated to a smaller, closed group called a caucus for full discussion by members.

Representatives of the caucus then returned to the larger council with the results of their deliberations. The caucus has since become a mainstay of both American and Canadian political systems.

I like to think of Indigenous leadership in terms of the relationship between the drummers, singers and dancers at a Powwow. The drummers and singers give voice to the heartbeat of the earth, and the dancers move to the sound, giving life to their personal visions and to those of their people. The drum prompts and paces. Drummers, singers and dancers act together to manifest tradition through the songs: all three groups are essential and related the role of each group being to respect and represent the spirit of creation in its own way, according to its own special abilities.

Taiaiake Alfred
Peace, Power and Righteousness

Legacy of the Iroquois League

The Iroquois model of governance and its concept of impeachment were worlds apart from the European tradition, where monarchs, regardless of their competency, ruled by “divine right” until death.

In creating a “new” independent government, the Americans categorically rejected the European model in favour of the egalitarian principles of the Iroquoian model. However, they apparently saw no reason to copy the Iroquois in granting women any political role.¹³

¹³ In addition to governance structure, the American Constitution also “borrowed” the guiding principles of the Great Law of Peace, such as the Right of Freedom of Speech, the Right of Freedom of Religion/Culture of Happiness, Shelter, Protection etc.

Many aspects of the governance model conceived by the Iroquois were borrowed for the constitutions of both the United States and Canada as well as for the United Nations when it was created in 1918.

First called, the “League of Nations” it was modeled after the Iroquois League, granting all members an equal voice, no matter how small or large the country they represented. Ironically, the founders of this international body located it in New York, part of the ancestral homelands stolen from the Iroquois.

Agriculture¹⁴



From the beginning of European contact, Indigenous people skilled in agriculture willingly shared their ancient practices of biodiversity with the newcomers. Their practical yet innovative approach to growing and processing plants is now understood as one of the keys to reversing ecological damage in today’s commercial farming.

Some of the best-known plants originally domesticated by Indigenous people are corn, potatoes and tobacco.

Foremost of the ecologically-friendly methods they developed was polyculture farming - planting crops that are different but complementary, together on a small field, or milpa.

Rather than planting in neat rows to allow cultivation, plants were placed in small mounds. This resulted in less soil lost to rain runoff, which in turn stabilized the soil.

¹⁴ Indian Givers: How The Indians of the Americas Transformed the World, 1988

European farmers in America adopted this practice, known as hilling, and followed it from early colonial times until the 1930s. When the United States abandoned hilling in favour of dense planting, erosion increased dramatically; to this day, thousands of tons of quality topsoil float down the Mississippi River system annually.

Combining complementary crops and planting in the “hilling” system protected against erosion, insects and harsh weather. Recent scientific research has proven the effectiveness of combining corn, squash, and beans in reducing herbivory - the destruction of the plants by insects and other pests.

Because cultivated plants attract predatory insects that in turn, prey upon smaller pests, corn loss is reduced without use of chemical insecticides.

Weed-like plants were also grown around the edges of gardens, to attract pests away from the crop plants. Recent studies in Mexico have shown traditional polyculture increases corn yields by as much as 50 percent over monoculture.

Traditional Medicines

From the time of first contact, the Europeans recognized the skills of Indigenous people in preparing, preserving and compounding medicines. Although European medicine at that time had not yet progressed beyond alchemy, people of the Americas had refined countless highly effective medicines capable of producing both psychological and physiological effects.



Traditional Healers used the roots of trees and plants to produce drugs such as **quinine** and **ipécac**, a potent medicine that cured otherwise lethal intestinal infections. (Poison clinics throughout the world still use this to induce vomiting, but it is most important in treating amoebic dysentery.)

A tonic made from evergreen bark and needles to cure scurvy would later save the lives of many European sailors.

The bark of the poplar or willow tree was used to make a liquid for headaches and other minor body pains. Centuries later, a coal-tar derivative was found to contain a similar active ingredient **salicin**, which is now known as acetylsalicylic acid or **aspirin**.

A cathartic from the bark of the *Rhamnus purshiana* shrub was a commonly used **laxative**. Because of its bitter taste it was usually mixed with sugar or chocolate.

Traditional healers also developed medicines for ailments of women. Blue cohosh, a parasitic plant growing on the roots of oak trees was used as an antispasmodic to help reduce menstrual cramps.

One of the most widely used skin ointments in the world today is known as **petroleum jelly**. Traditional healers made this salve from olefin hydrocarbons and methane. Applied to human and animal skin, it protected wounds, stimulated healing and kept the skin moist. (It was also used to lubricate the moving parts of tools.)

The proven value and usefulness of Indigenous cures and medicines were demonstrated in a series of publications in early 1800 with such titles as “The Indian Doctor’s Dispensary”.

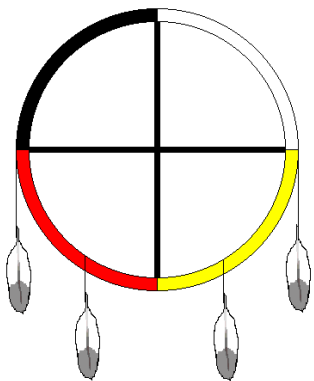
By 1820, when the first **United States Pharmacopeia** was published, it listed **over 200 drugs supplied by “Indians”** that continue to benefit modern medicine.

Spirituality

Balance and holism are the fundamental principles underlying the Native worldview and concept of spirituality. Because it expresses a unifying force in life, the circle, hoop, or wheel is one of the most sacred Native spiritual symbols.

The circle represents balance and completeness in the universe within a framework of ongoing cyclical change and transformation.

The **Medicine Wheel** is the symbol of how this principle applies in theology, philosophy, psychology and all aspects of life.



Although many nations have developed different versions of the Medicine Wheel, all are based on the four directions and the four seasons or cycles of life.

At the centre of Medicine Wheel teachings is the concept of **Mino-Bimaadiziwin**, or **“Living in a Good Way”**. This concept teaches the importance of balancing in oneself, aspects of all four quadrants of the wheel.¹⁵



Holism means awareness of and sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all things: of people and nature; of people, their kin and communities; and within each person, the interconnectedness of body, mind, heart and spirit



Medicine Wheel Teachings Applied to the Developmental Stages of Life¹⁶

The Medicine Wheel or Sacred Hoop teaches that life is cyclical. Because everything occurs naturally in cycles, the potential for transformation is inherent in all of creation.

Within this worldview, the circle connects the spirits of all beings and things in a great, sacred “whole”. When connectedness to any part of the whole is lost or interrupted, the sense of sacredness is also lost. As the sacred is the most fundamental of all connections, when it is lost, people will destroy others, the environment or themselves.

¹⁵ From “In the Words of Elders”.

¹⁶ Thanks to the teachings of Dr. Terry Tafoya, in the Keynote Address: Values, Attitudes & Beliefs.

Applied to human development, the Medicine Wheel teaches of four, sequential life cycles, each with its own developmental task. A special ceremony is attached to each stage, to mark and celebrate the changing seasons of life from birth to old age and death.

The First Direction is the East: the direction of **childhood**. The developmental task in this quadrant is to learn **belonging**.

By watching and play-acting what adults do, children learn the place of people and all things in creation, as well as their own place at the heart of family and community life.

The Second Direction is the South: the direction of **mastery**. The developmental task in this quadrant is **learning new skills and behaviours**.

Children learn the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of a balanced life by spending time “on the land”, hunting, and fishing, trapping, canoeing and kayaking; through story telling and the ancient legends, and through ceremonies.

The Third Direction is the West: the direction of **Interdependence**. The developmental task in this phase is to put the skills that have been acquired and one’s own special gifts, into **service for the benefit of family, community and nation**.

The Fourth Direction is the North: the direction of **Generosity**. This is the direction of the Elders whose developmental task, now that they know they belong, and have learned and practiced many useful skills, is to **give-away their wisdom**. This ensures the teachings continue into the next generations.

Disruption of the developmental tasks in any of the four cycles can cause an imbalance resulting in a loss of connection to the sacred.

The role of Traditional People, Counsellors and Elders is to help individuals find their own path to restoring balance by reawakening their connection to the sacred. Healing work is therefore considered sacred work, requiring special gifts characteristics and skills.



In this sense, traditional healing is a science, an art, a philosophy and a way of life



Contributions of the First Nations

The modern world continues to benefit enormously from the contributions of the First Nations people. In addition to governance models and the medicines described earlier, the following are just a few of many First Nations gifts to modern life.

- The **canoe** originally made of bark and pitch.



- **Toboggans**, invented by the Mi’kmaq of what is now Eastern Canada for hauling game, moving camp and traveling.

- **Snowshoes** of many different types were first invented by Aboriginal people.



- **Hundreds of pharmaceuticals** derived from original Native remedies are still used widely in treating dysentery, cholera, upset stomach, diarrhea and scurvy; also aspirin; petroleum jelly; cough syrup made from balsam and honey.

- **More than 100 species of plant grown today were originally grown by Indigenous people. Corn, squash and potatoes** are some of the best know of these plants that are now grown world-side. The Huron cultivated 17 varieties of corn or maize and 8 of squash. (**Popcorn** and **corn syrup** have become favorite foods.)
- **Wild rice** is actually a cereal grain mistakenly called rice by the Europeans because of its rice-like shape. This was an especially prized delicacy, often presented as a gift or token of friendship.
- **Games** such as lacrosse and lawn darts originated with the First Nations.
- **Chewing gum**, originally made from spruce trees.
- **Gingerale**, originally a remedy for upset stomach is still widely used as a tonic as well as a soft drink.
- **Sunflowers** were cultivated for the nutritional value of the seeds.



A Proud History

The many First Nations of Turtle Island were strong, independent, sovereign Nations prior to contact with Europeans. There was a wide variety of social structures and expressions of spirituality although what many had in common was a strong link to the land. Our level of technical competence and innovation in the face of the unique challenges we faced was comparable to that of the European invaders. If not for First Nations assistance, those first explorers would have perished. Despite 500 years of colonization, we have survived due to our resilience and strength in the face of adversity.

EARLY CONTACT HISTORY: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MÉTIS



Although racial “mixing” began from the time of first contact with Europeans, a distinct Métis¹⁷ population did not emerge until the fur trade was well established.

From the eastern coastal regions, across to Hudson’s Bay and the Great Lakes, English, Scottish and French crews of fishing, trading or exploring expeditions paired with Native women. In what was then New France, both the church and the crown encouraged such interaction as a way of bolstering the French/Native population and strengthening French claims to the land.

With the expansion of the fur trade, these men moved westward, intermarrying with Cree and Ojibwe women. Gradually, the *coureurs de bois* became of mixed heritage. By mid-1800 a large population had congregated in the Great Lakes region.

With competition becoming fiercer between the Northwest Trading Company and the Hudson’s Bay Trading Company, many French *coureurs de bois* moved even further westward seeking their fortune in the fur trade.

Métis leader, Louis Riel estimated that by mid-1800, one quarter of the Aboriginal population of the west was Métis. Their distinctiveness from both First Nations and European culture was marked.

Drawing upon diverse ancestry that included Cree, Ojibwe, Scottish and French origins, the unique features that came to define the Red River Métis were:

- French and/or Michif (a dialect blending French and Cree) as the first language.

- Integration of Christian and Native spiritual beliefs and religious customs.
- Fusion of Bretagne and Native music.
- The red sash and the fiddle as foundational symbols of Métis culture.

When the Hudson’s Bay Trading Company defeated the Northwestern Trading Company in early 1800 it established a settlement at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers to promote its interests in the fur trade. With Hudson’s Bay Company approval, Métis joined this settlement, where they combined subsistence farming with biannual buffalo hunting.

The Art and Science of the Hunt

Buffalo hunting was a dangerous and complex undertaking that required a broad range of skills and military-type precision planning.

The hunts, held each year in late summer and again in winter, were highly organized events involving men, women and children. The distinctive, two-wheeled Red River carts were designed by the Métis to haul families’ belongings as well as meat and hides to/from the location of the hunts.

Before each hunt, a General Assembly was held to select officers and ensure everyone knew and agreed to abide by established rules of order. These rules, meant to ensure everyone’s safety, included:

- A ban on alcohol;
- A ban on leaving the camp without authorization of the leaders; and
- Agreement that no hunter made a move without a signal from the appointed guide.

¹⁷ Métis is a French word meaning “mixed”

As a first step, the assembly chose ten **capitanes** who in turn, selected ten **soldats** each as well as ten guides from among hunters past their prime. The most skilled of the capitanes became the leader of the hunt whose role was styled after a combination of “War Chief” and “le President”.

Over the course of the hunt, each guide and captain commanded for a day, ensuring in each ten-day cycle, all guides and captains had an opportunity to experience the leader’s role.

An elaborate choreography of riders on horseback and the sequential positioning of coloured flags signalled progression of the hunt from one stage to the next.

During the sighting phase, two soldiers always rode together; whether they rode towards or away from each other, indicated to the others the presence or absence of buffalo. At sighting, the hunt flag flying above the cart of that day’s guide was lowered, signalling authority had been passed from guide to hunt leader.

Changing gaits and directions of the lead horses, as well as riding and flag patterns for the chase and cool down were all part of the visually stunning, complex choreography of the buffalo hunt. This choreography became the prototype for what is now known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police “Musical Ride”.

By the summer of 1840, the buffalo hunt consisted of over 1,200 Red River carts, 620 hunters, 650 women and 360 children.¹⁸

18 Ancestral Pain: Métis Memories of Residential School Project

Role of Women

Women played a crucial economic role in Métis culture. They produced clothing and footwear for trade, tanned hides, trapped and traded furs, dressed furs for shipment, grew vegetables, fished, built smoking lodges and smoked fish as well as buffalo for pemmican and produced and sold large quantities of dried fish gelatine, isinglass.

Spirituality

Historically, many Métis expressed their spirituality through strong ties to the Roman Catholic faith, although some also retained aspects of First Nations spiritual traditions. Social customs and controls were strongly influenced by Catholicism and Métis communities routinely sought guidance from their priest for marriage, divorce, family disputes, births, deaths and legal issues.

This familiarity with Roman Catholic customs would later bring comfort to many Métis children in residential schools who found consolation in the religious teachings and songs of their family and community life.¹⁹

Rebellion

The creation of the Dominion of Canada in late 1800 marked the transfer of lands previously “owned” by the Hudson’s Bay Trading Company. These lands now became part of the new country under the authority of a British Lieutenant-Governor.

19 Lost Generations: The Silent Métis of the Residential School System

Louis Riel defied the authority of this new government and established his own provisional government to secure the economic and political interests of Métis in the west.

Negotiations between Riel's government and the Canadian government led to the passing of the "Manitoba Act" in 1870 which among other things, reserved 1.4 million acres of land for the children of "half-breed heads of families". (Later, the government would evict Métis from these lands to create national parks and sell parcels of the land to speculators.)

When the rights they had negotiated in good faith through the Manitoba Act failed to materialize, the Métis launched the Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885. The Métis were defeated on the battlefield at Batoche on May 12, 1885, and their leader, Louis Riel was subsequently hung for treason. Although these events delayed the quest for justice for almost half a century, the Métis refused to abandon their identity as a distinct people or their vision of self-government.

The disappearance of the buffalo herds due to over killing created an economic crisis in Western Canada. During this period, Métis were starving while continuing to struggle for their rights to land and political representation.



Métis Today²⁰

Métis are a completely distinct culture from First Nations and Inuit. This was formally recognized in the 1982 Canadian Constitution, which included Métis in the definition of "Aboriginal Peoples" although Métis remain excluded from all benefits under the Indian Act.

According to the 2001 Census, 295,000 people living in non-reserve areas reported being Métis. This is about 40 per cent of the total Aboriginal non-reserve population in Canada. Sixty-nine percent of the non-reserve Métis population lived in urban areas. Alberta has the largest Métis population at 22 per cent while Manitoba has the second largest Métis population in Canada.

Contemporary researchers describe the difficulties of identifying Métis through historical records. Overwhelmingly these records refer to Métis as "half-breed" or "non-Treaty".

According to the Métis National Council, the definition of a Métis person is:²¹

***Métis means a person who self-identifies as
Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal
peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry,
and is accepted by the Métis Nation.***

There are other persons who self-identify as Métis and are not part of the Métis National Council.

²⁰ Information in this section is from "Ancestral Pain"

²¹ Presently each of the Provincial Métis governments are in the process of creating an agreed upon definition.

Cultural Symbols

Cultural symbols of the Métis today include the Métis sash, the Métis flag, and the Red River Cart.

The sash is a finger woven, woollen belt approximately 3 metres long, taking its name from the Quebec town where it was produced. The Assomption sash was an integral part of voyageur dress in the past.

The sash was both functional and recognizable as Métis apparel. It served as a key holder, first aid kit, washcloth, towel, emergency bridle and saddle blanket. The fringed ends could become a sewing kit when required. It is now worn ceremonially either over the shoulder or around the waist.



The Métis flag is the oldest Canadian patriotic flag, predating Canada's Maple Leaf flag by 150 years. First used by Métis prior to the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816, the flag depicts a white infinity symbol horizontally placed against a blue background symbolizing an eternal, seamless interaction of two distinct cultures: that of the Europeans and that of the First Nations.



Before the arrival of the train in the west, goods were transported by the Métis using the Red River cart. The Red River Cart became a symbol of the Métis people.

Originally the carts were small horse-drawn affairs, with three-foot solid wheels cut from large trees, carrying up to 450 pounds. Later, larger wheels with four spokes were used and gradually the red river carts with their huge, many-spoked wheels evolved, carrying nearly twice as much.



Contemporary Issues

Data from the 2001 Census notes the following:

- The largest Métis population in Canada is in Alberta where 22% of the total Métis population resides;
- 5.27% of Métis have a university education compared with 4.08% of First Nations, 1.8% of Inuit and 15.7% of the general population;

- the rate of unemployment is 12.4% for Métis compared with 22.2% for First Nations; 19,9% for Inuit and 7.4% for the general population
- the average income for employed Métis persons was \$22,213
- 9.8% of Métis families are lone parent families compared to 5.08% of the general population

Cultural Reclamation

Métis have played an important role in the development of Canadian society and increasingly, their special status and rights are being recognized at provincial and federal levels.

On July 1, 1989, the Métis Settlements and the Alberta Government signed the *Métis Settlements Accord*, establishing the only form of legislated Métis government in Canada and providing a framework for negotiating land and self-government. Some highlights of this accord:

- 1.28 million acres of land were transferred to the ownership of the Métis
- Constitutional protection of lands was provided
- Co-management agreement established between the Province of Alberta and the Métis for long-term management of resources

After a decade of struggle, the efforts of the Métis Nation of Ontario, on behalf of Métis hunter Steve Powley, were successful. In 2003, a landmark decision of the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed the inherent hunting rights of Métis as Aboriginal persons under the Constitution.



INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation defines “residential school” as the “Residential School system in Canada attended by Aboriginal students, including industrial schools, boarding schools, homes for students, hostels, billets, residential schools, residential schools with a majority of day students, or a combination of any of the above”.²²

During the time these schools were in operation from 1892 to 1996 approximately 105-107,000 Aboriginal children were enrolled. Of these, 80 per cent were “status Indians”, 6 per cent were non-status Indians, 9 per cent were Métis and 5 per cent were Inuit.²³

Although Métis children lived under the same conditions as First Nations and Inuit in residential schools and suffered the same intergenerational impacts, one aspect of their experience was unique. In addition to the abuses and deprivations endured by other children, both First Nations and non-Aboriginal students and staff regarded the Métis as “outsiders”.

Chronological Overview²⁴

1845 A government report to the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada recommends boarding schools be set up to educate Indian children.

1847 The Assistant Superintendent of Indian Affairs writes to Dr. Egerton Ryerson, Methodist Head of Education in Upper Canada, asking for suggestions for setting up Indian Industrial Schools. Ryerson suggests there be a partnership between government and church and that the schooling be of religious nature.

1863 A Roman Catholic residential school is established at St. Mary’s Mission in Mission, B.C. by Oblate Father Florimond Gendre.

1867 The British North America Act is enacted. Indian education becomes a federal responsibility. Indian Day Schools are set up.

1876 The Indian Act is brought into effect, controlling the lives of First Nations people from the cradle to the grave and giving the federal government further responsibility for Indian education.

1879 Nicholas Flood Davin is sent to the U.S. to investigate and report on Indian Industrial Training Schools. Davin’s report recommends the establishment of Indian residential schools similar to the U.S. model. He further recommends funding off-reserve boarding schools to teach children the skills needed in the modern Canadian economy. Davin also advises the government to implement residential schools rather than day schools.

Residential schools, it was reasoned, would be more successful because they could completely remove children from “the influence of the wigwam”.

22 Aboriginal Healing Foundation Program Handbook, 3rd Edition, 2001

23 Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Data Project, DIAND 1998

24 Source: *Residential School Update* published by the Assembly of First Nations Health Secretariat, 1988

Not only was it commonly believed at the time that the “savage” Indian needed to be “civilized” but in the opinion of many church and government officials, the best way to do this was to bring children completely under the control and influence of the church-run boarding schools. At these schools, children could be fully indoctrinated in the ways of mainstream Canadian society.

1892 The Government of Canada passes an Order-in-Council regulating the operation of Indian Residential Schools. The federal government and churches enter into a formal partnership to run a school system for Indian children.

1892-1969 The partnership between the government of Canada and the churches lasted from 1892 until 1969. The Roman Catholic Church, Church of England, United Church, and Presbyterian Church ran the schools that operated in all provinces except New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island.

From 1969 to 1996 when the last school closed, the Government of Canada assumed responsibility for the schools.

Federal government policies concerning the education of Aboriginal children are characterized by three distinct historical phases²⁵.

First Phase: Mid 1800's to 1910

Until 1910, the federal residential school policy was openly and aggressively assimilationist. The fundamental principles were of “civilizing and Christianizing” and strategies focused on preparing First Nations children to join the “lower fringe of mainstream society”.

²⁵ Source: Residential School Update. Assembly of First Nations Health Secretariat, March 1988

There were two basic strategies for furthering the goal of assimilation.

1. Isolating Aboriginal children from mainstream society as schoolteachers and missionaries taught them the skills to effectively function within it.
2. Placing Aboriginal children among European-Canadians to learn their behaviours, customs and social graces.

Second Phase: 1910 to 1951

Segregation: Aboriginal children were streamed into residential and day schools designed to “civilize and Christianize” them in accordance with Euro-Canadian values. The goal was for the children to return to their home communities and in turn, teach these same values to their families and communities. During this phase, the government delegated responsibility for daily operation of residential schools to four major churches in Canada: Roman Catholic, Anglican, United and Presbyterian.

Third Phase: 1951 on

Integration: Aboriginal children began to be absorbed into mainstream schools. Residential schools increasingly came under secular administration.

Programs and activities similar to those provided in mainstream schools for Euro-Canadian children were emphasized.

1992 The Nuuchah-nulth Tribal Council in B.C. begins a research study of the effects of residential schooling on their community. They identify a range of physical, sexual, and psychological abuses.

1994 In November the Royal Canadian Mounted Police review the research files of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council. As a result, the “Native Residential Task Force” is created with an investigative mandate to examine all Indian Residential Schools in British Columbia operating between 1890 and 1984.

- The Assembly of First Nations releases its report on Residential Schools titled “Breaking the Silence”.

1995 Arthur Henry Plint, former supervisor of the Alberni Indian Residential School (1948-1953 and 1963-1968) pleads guilty to 16 counts of indecent assault and is sentenced to 11 years in prison.

1996 The last federally run Residential School, Gordon Residential School in Saskatchewan, closes.

1996 The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples is released in November. It includes three recommendations specific to residential schools. Foremost among these is a call for a public inquiry on the effects of residential schools on generations of Aboriginal people. It also recommends creating a national repository of residential school records.

1997 In late June, John Watson, British Columbia’s highest-ranking Indian Affairs official, is the first government of Canada representative to admit that residential schools were part of an assimilationist policy of the Canadian government.

1998 “Gathering Strength”, the Canadian government’s response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission Report is released announcing the creation of a 350 million dollar healing fund to address the impacts of residential school abuse.

In March of 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is established. The vision of its Board of Directors is:



Our vision is one where those affected by the legacy of physical abuse and sexual abuse experienced in residential school have addressed the effects of unresolved trauma in meaningful terms, have broken the cycle of abuse, and have enhanced their capacity as individuals, families, communities and nations to sustain their well being and that of future generations.

Aboriginal Healing Foundation
Annual Report 2003



General Impact

First Nations and Residential Schools

Residential schools were established in all provinces and territories except for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick as a means of assimilating “Indian” children into Canadian society.

In 1900, 48% of First Nations children between the ages of 6 and 15 were enrolled in these schools.²⁶

Children would be removed, sometimes forcibly, from their communities and families. They would be taken to a residential school far removed from their home communities and they would have little or no contact with their families until they graduated from the residential school at age 16.

²⁶ Canada’s First Nations, page 316

In some communities, all of the children would be removed at one time, leaving a terrible void in the community. For some families, as many as five generations attended the residential schools, compounding the trauma and the resultant dysfunction.



When children returned to their families and communities, they could no longer speak their Native language or relate to their parents or culture. This has had an ongoing multigenerational impact on First Nations individuals, families, and communities.

The Métis and Residential Schools

Métis fell outside of plans made by the Canadian Government for people of the First Nations including educational provisions such as residential schools. Stripped of their land as well as hunting and trapping rights, the Métis become increasingly impoverished. The close link between the Métis and the Roman Catholic Church and the pressure to fill up the schools in order to receive more government funding prompted some Bishops and priests to pressure the Government to include Métis children in residential school policy.

Initially, though the Government opposed this recommendation, a policy was eventually developed to admit Métis to these schools only when there were not enough “Indian” students and where the Métis families were living “in varying degrees, the Indian mode of life”. Finally, in 1952 the Provinces began paying for Métis students to attend residential schools.

Because Métis children were either recorded as “half-breeds” or not recorded as enrolled at all, actual enrolment numbers are difficult to confirm. It is estimated that 18.8% of the students in prairie residential schools were Alberta Métis, 15.7% were Manitoba Métis and 8.1% were Saskatchewan Métis. When combined with “non-Status Indian” records that number increases to 25% in Alberta revealing that one quarter of the total population of residential school students in Alberta were Métis. Overall, 9.12% of self-identified Métis in Canada report attending residential schools.²⁷

Three Alberta residential schools were located in areas with high Métis populations. They were: Grouard-St. Bernard’s Indian Residential School, Fort Vermillion-St. Henri Indian Residential School and Jossard-St. Bruno Indian Residential School. In Manitoba, the schools located in areas with the highest Métis populations were Qu’Appelle Residential School and the Elkhorn School.



27 From “Ancestral Pain: Métis Memories of Residential School Project, 2003.

Inuit and Residential Schools²⁸

Inuit were the last Aboriginal people in Canada to be affected by the residential school system. Even though Inuit had indicated their preference for federal day schools where the children could remain under the cultural influence of their families, the Canadian Government opened three residential schools: Yellowknife Residential School Hostel in 1958, Inuvik Residential School in 1959 and Churchill Residential School in 1964.

When these schools first opened, less than 15% of the Inuit school-age population was in attendance. By 1964, due to “vigorous” government policy this had increased to 75%.²⁹ It is estimated that of the total 105-107,000 individuals who attended residential schools, 5% were Inuit.³⁰

Inuit children attending these schools experienced a dramatic change in both diet and dress. The purpose was to acculturate them to middle-class Canadian standards that failed to take into account conditions of life in the Arctic.

To wean the children away from raw meat, the traditional Inuit diet was banned from residential schools, although for a time, some schools served raw foods to the children as a “special treat”. Children were taught the foods fed to them by their parents were dangerous to health and uncivilized. Needless to say, this caused a strain on relationships when the children returned home.³¹

28 See also Section II “Residential Schools.”

29 Thesis: The History of the Federal Residential Schools for the Inuit, 1996

30 Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Data Project, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs 1998

31 Thesis: The History of the Federal Residential Schools for the Inuit, 1996



Abuse in Residential Schools

Increasingly, many Aboriginal therapists and frontline workers describe the abuse that occurred at residential schools as ritual or “ritualized” abuse.

Contemporary trauma literature, defines ritualized abuse as repeated, systematic, sadistic and humiliating trauma to the physical, sexual, spiritual, and/or emotional health of a person which may utilize techniques including but not limited to, conditioning, mind control, and torture

*Some clients who use dissociative defences extensively report experiences of extremely disturbing events. Their trauma stories are of intentional cruelty, malevolent intent, multiple perpetrators, abusive activities by groups of people, and abuse that occurs in the context of elaborate rituals with or without religious content. Hearing these stories can stir strong feelings (and sometimes doubts) in the minds of the listeners.*³²

32 From Risking Connections, Page 23

Albert Biderman developed a “Chart of Coercion” outlining eight tactics of power and control that, together, characterize “ritualized” abuse.³³

1. *Isolating victims* by depriving them of their usual social supports and the ability to resist, making them completely dependent upon the captor.
2. *Monopolizing the perception* of victims by eliminating any stimuli not controlled by the captor and punishing non-compliance.
3. *Inducing debility and exhaustion* in victims by weakening their mental and physical ability to resist.
4. *Continual threats* against victims to induce anxiety, helplessness and compliance.
5. *Granting occasional indulgences* as positive motivation for compliance and to prevent complete adjustment to deprivation.
6. *Demonstrations of the omnipotence and power of the abuser* by demonstrating the futility of any resistance.
7. *Degradation and humiliation*, making the costs of resistance more damaging than compliance, and,
8. *Enforcing trivial demands* to ensure that total compliance becomes habitual.

Using these eight characteristics as a framework, participants at an Eastern Ontario retreat for Aboriginal frontline workers, counsellors and Elders used the following examples to illustrate the ritualized nature of abuse in residential schools.

³³ Biderman’s theory of coercion was quoted in Amnesty International, “Report of Torture” and in Diana Russel’s book, “Rape in Marriage 1984

The examples described below are drawn from participants’ own personal experiences at residential schools or day schools or from the stories told to them by family members who attended these schools.

Examples of Isolation



- Children were taken away from family, community, extended family, from spirit of place and familiar language; from the land and their natural environment, and placed in a foreign environment.
- Children were separated by gender at the schools.
- Siblings were either sent to different schools or separated within the same institution.
- Family contact through letters or visits from family or siblings was forbidden.
- Isolation rooms or solitary confinement were forms of punishment for children.
- Children’s emotional needs were seen as evidence of “sickness”.
- Some parents died while their children were away at the schools and the children were not told or allowed to return for the funeral ceremony.
- Children were transported across far distances.
- Children were left alone to deal with bullies or victimization.
- If the nuns didn’t like a child, it further isolated that child.
- Uniform clothing, haircuts and language fostered feelings of anonymity.
- Children who were assertive or showed independence, were a “pariah” to nuns and students.

Examples of Monopolization of Perception



- The priests, sisters and their spiritual symbols became your foes; you had to believe in *their* god.
- Children were given continual messages of POWER AND CONTROL and EVIL VS. INNOCENCE: the abusers had the power of either damnation or “saving the savages”.
- Authority was their god and the school was their world.
- There was continuous degrading or “shaming” of traditional/cultural ways as well as of individual children and their “heathen” families.
- Children forgot the concepts embedded in their own languages and religious practices.
- There was mental, physical, spiritual and emotional suppression.
- Sexually abused children were made to pray after the abuse for the abusers “lost souls”.
- Children were taught everything about Native culture was wrong/bad (symbols, songs, dances medicines, Elders, toys); only non-Indian culture was good.
- Children were punished for individuality or self-expression; were forced to believe the abusers’ version of right/wrong.
- Children were made to look “not-Indian” by being scrubbed with iron brushes, dark hair cut off and dressed in “white” clothes.
- Girls were made to feel ashamed of their maturing bodies through binding of breasts.
- Children saw things that even a child knew were wrong, but were helpless to do anything about them.

- Choices did not exist.

Examples of How Debility and Exhaustion Were Induced in Children



- Children lived in continual fear of complete denial of rare privileges.
- Children spent whole childhoods in continual fear of further punishment and abuse.
- Children were deprived of food, sleep, warmth and other basic necessities as a form of punishment.
- Children endured cold buildings and “disgusting” food.
- Hard labour and religious regimes were hard on children, such as early morning mass, standing or kneeling in corners or on hard floors for hours.
- Children were used as “slave labour” and given adult-level chores, constantly working and cleaning to the point of exhaustion.
- Children were stressed out; forced to endure long hours of work/study regardless of their state of health.
- Children endured years of emotional deprivation; received no love or comfort.
- Talk, touch and interaction were forbidden; kids were put together who could not speak a common language.
- Children endured years of sensory deprivation.
- The environment was completely *regimented*; time schedules were very structured; there was little free time, and no time to slow down or process what was happening or form opinions.

- Children were used in experimentation with various diets to determine effects.
- When children became ill, their “health care” was to be put in isolation.
- Room checks were conducted during the night and early in the morning.
- Children were forced to bury the bodies of other child residents who had died.
- All forms of ABUSE were perpetrated on children: sexual/physical/emotional and spiritual abuse.

Examples of Threats against Children



- If you tell anyone about the abuse:
 - you won't ever see your family again
 - you'll lose visitations/mail
 - you won't be fed
 - you will be hurt even worse
 - you'll die
 - you'll go to hell
 - no one will believe you.
- Children were threatened with torture for disobedience such as having mouths scrubbed out with Ajax.
- Children were threatened that if they did not do chores satisfactorily they'd get even more, or worse chores.
- Children were threatened with further degradation such as shaved heads, or removal of clothing in front of peers.
- Children were threatened with losing day trips.
- The threat of punishment was constant.

Examples of Occasional Indulgences



- If everyone is good, there will be ice cream, fresh dairy products, sweets, or a trip to the movies.
- Infrequent day trips for older students.
- There was a special meal at Christmas or Easter.
- Some children were allowed to return home in summer.
- During school inspection times there was good food; a homey atmosphere was created; children were dressed up nice.
- Children who were teachers “pets” received special privileges in front of peers.
- Small gifts were given “by God”.
- Children got bread instead of dog biscuits.
- One day a year, there was a picnic.

Demonstration of Omnipotence



- There was blind obedience within a chain of hierarchy, a pecking order.
- Even the manner in which the priests and nuns walked around was intimidating.
- Children were taught Aboriginal people have no voice in anything and no choice because whites are the best and Natives are the savages.
- The teachers have all the power and control so they eat and dress better.

- Children did the labour i.e. knitting and they sold the children's work; but no money went to the children.
- Everyone had to stand up when the priest walked in the room.
- Priests and nuns were role models, so the goals and dreams of some children were to become clerics.
- No one could escape without consequences and punishment.
- They could see everything children did.

Examples of Degradation



- There was name-calling and put down of kids, parents, culture and language.
- Children were forced to wear dirty/soiled clothes as punishment.
- Sick children were forced to eat their own vomit.
- Children were hit while eating.
- Children were forced to crawl at the feet of nuns and priests.
- Children were forced to wear diapers for bed-wetting.
- Conditions were below poverty so there was a continual bombardment of humiliations.
- Children were taught women are below men in all things.
- The lighter-skinned kids got more positive treatment.
- Children were physically beaten in front of whole school; held down by the hands and feet with pants pulled down.
- There was different food for children from what the nuns ate.

Examples of Enforcing Trivial Demands



- Every little thing had to be cleaned, i.e. forced to clean the already clean toilets, over and over again.
- Children were forced to follow rules for genuflecting, walking in straight lines and protocols for addressing priests.
- Children were forced to clean floors with a toothbrush as punishment.
- There was continuous MILITANT SURVEILLANCE.

Children were subjected to the same tactics used on prisoners of war. These multiple, ritualized forms of abuse perpetrated against Aboriginal children over many generations were perpetrated by telling Aboriginal people that the "savagery" of their culture and their need to be "civilized" were at the root of the abuse.

Reflections on Multiple Trauma

Fully understanding the impacts of the abuse suffered by Aboriginal children in residential schools by the adults responsible for their care and education requires widening the lens and viewing this abuse within a larger context. Worldwide, the approach of colonizing countries to Aboriginal cultures was remarkably similar. Britain's (and later the Commonwealth of Canada) was no exception.

Inuit, First Nations and Métis cultures were considered at best, irrelevant and at worst, uncivilized and savage. The practical wisdom of their teachings and long-held customs such as cooperation, sharing, balance and respect were not recognized or understood by Euro-Canadians. As a result, policies were created and implemented that had devastating long-term impacts on Aboriginal people.

Policies such as those in Canada that supported the “aggressive assimilation” of Aboriginal children through residential schooling are now characterized as examples of “ethnocide” or as “genocide”.



The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 describes genocide as “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group”. The convention bans a number of acts of genocide including “taking group members’ children away from them and giving them to members of another group”.



Ethnocide is “the deliberate attempt to eradicate the culture or way of life of a people. Ethnocide depends on the use of political power to force a relatively powerless people to give up their CULTURE and is therefore characteristic of colonial or other situations where coercion can be applied”.³⁴

“Historical trauma” is another contemporary concept that helps put the long-term impacts of residential schooling into a larger context.

34 From The Dictionary of Anthropology Edited by Thomas Barfield, quoted on page 18 of “Where Are The Children? Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools” (emphasis theirs)

Historical trauma refers to traumatic experiences that are cumulative over the life span of individuals as well as across generations. Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart defines historical trauma as follows:

Historical trauma is the collective emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide.

Ottensbacher in:
Intergenerational Trauma and Historical Grief in
American Indians



The urgent health and social problems of Aboriginal people in Canada are now believed to be directly related to multiple generations of children who were not only abused in residential schools and disconnected from their families and communities, but were also taught to feel shame in their heritage, language, customs and spiritual traditions, in their very being.



Child Sexual Abuse: Facts to Consider³⁵

Many sexual abuse survivors (estimates are as high as 50%) do not remember the abuse until years after it has occurred. Often something in adulthood will trigger the memory; many are never able to fully and clearly recall the abuse.

35 Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet, National Clearing House on Family Violence, 1993

Numerous studies have underscored the relationship between child sexual abuse and adolescent/adult prostitution with estimates ranging from 76 to 90% of prostitutes having a history of child sexual abuse. A *Save the Children Canada* report on Aboriginal children estimates 90% of all child prostitutes in Canada are of Aboriginal descent.

A 1990 survey of Native treatment centres across Canada revealed that 80-90% of their clients were victims of sexual abuse. According to this survey, staff of these programs see alcohol and drug addictions “merely as symptoms” with sexual abuse as the underlying cause.³⁶

Most abusers shift the blame away from themselves, where it belongs, and place it on the child, by telling children the abuse is their own fault. Survivors often continue to hold the distorted belief that they are responsible for the abuse perpetrated against them, causing feelings of extreme guilt and self-blame.



*Recruiting the victim into a sense of responsibility for the abuse is often an important strategy that enables abuse to continue.*³⁷



For many years the so-called “Justice” system of North America enabled such abuse to continue by fostering the (mis)perception that children’s complaints, especially of child sexual abuse, were invalid.

36 Stolen From Our Embrace, Fournier and Crey 1997
37 From Dulwich Centre Journal No. 4, 1998

Summary

This section is provided to foster understanding, from an Aboriginal perspective, of the type of “power and control” tactics used against children at residential schools. The mixture of physical and sexual abuse and racist cultural denigration with religious fundamentalism or fanaticism proved highly toxic for Aboriginal children who attended these schools as well as for their descendants.

Although surprisingly widespread at residential schools across Canada, use of the eight techniques of coercion illustrated in this chapter may not have been conscious on the part of individual perpetrators.

However, as the overview of assimilationist policy shows, these tactics certainly aligned with the goal of “civilizing the savages” through strategies now understood as genocide or ethnocide.

It is widely believed that the churches and even the federal government have apologized for the Residential Schools. Most of these organizations have offered statements that are in the form of an apology without actually being one.³⁸

Statements by the Council of Catholic Bishops note that several Catholic church groups and religious congregations have made statements regarding Residential Schools which arise from an examination of conscience. These statements have tended to take the same form as that offered in 1991 by the federal government where an apology was made for the “mistakes” and “pain and suffering” that occurred there, not for government involvement in establishing and operating the schools.³⁹

38 The Circle Game, Chrisjohn and Young, 1997
39 Ibid.

In 1986, the United Church of Canada offered a complete and unalloyed apology which recognized the wrongs done at the schools under their supervision. They acknowledged not only the abuses that occurred, but also apologized for their participation in such an institution. In 1993, the Anglican Church of Canada offered a similar apology to Aboriginal peoples.⁴⁰ No other church institutions have taken any responsibility for their part in the Residential Schools program.

One painful outcome of this history is that many Aboriginal individuals, families and communities have learned these lessons well and use these tactics against each other through “lateral violence”.

Lateral violence is described as; “the shaming, humiliating, damaging, belittling and sometimes violent behaviour directed toward a member of a group by other members of the same group.”⁴¹ The lateral violence widespread in many Aboriginal families, communities and nations today must be acknowledged and addressed as part of any effective plan for long-term healing. Examples of lateral violence include gossip, put-downs, competition, family feuds, family violence, elder abuse, violence against women, and gangs.

Although residential schools have now disappeared from the Canadian landscape, their consequences have not and other tactics of power and control against Aboriginal people continue.

Aboriginal people in Canada continue to be trapped by social, political and economic policy that promotes dependency by preventing self-determination. Healing in a larger cultural context therefore, requires a commitment to fostering social, political and economic conditions of re-empowerment: a “politics of healing”.



⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Boiling Point: The High Cost of Unhealthy Anger to Individuals and Society, Jane Middleton-Moz, 1999

Aboriginal People and Family Violence

To truly understand the realities of life for Aboriginal peoples in Canada today, consider the following:

In 1998, for a sixth consecutive year, Canada was named as the number one (best) place to live in the world by the United Nations. Based on the Human Development Index, which assesses the economy, educational attainment and life expectancy of a group/population, quality of life can be measured. When the same parameters were used to study the living conditions of the registered Indian population, the listing of Canada fell from first to 60th place.⁴²

First Nations, Inuit and Métis people experience violence at levels much greater than non-Aboriginals. Suicide rates among Aboriginals are the highest in the country, as are per capita rates of incarceration in practically every part of Canada. Spousal abuse, sexual violence, child and elder abuse are common in Aboriginal communities.⁴³

Violence and oppression is also directed at Aboriginal peoples from many other elements of society. Apprehensions of Aboriginal children by social service agencies continue to be commonplace. Urban Natives experience high rates of prostitution, drug and alcohol use and HIV. In 1999, a report noted that in the last 20 years, 43% of the people shot and killed by the RCMP were of Aboriginal ancestry.⁴⁴

A Look at the Numbers⁴⁵

- 800,000 people identified as North American Indian, Métis or Inuit in the 1996 census.⁴⁶
- In 1995, 46 % of Aboriginal people had incomes below \$10,000 compared with 27% of the non-Aboriginal population.
- 52% of all Aboriginal children live in poverty.
- In 1996, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was more than double the rate of unemployment for non-Aboriginals, 24% versus 10%.
- Young Aboriginal people are less likely to attend school.
 - Of youth aged 15-19, 63% of Aboriginal youth were in school full or part-time compared with 83% of non-Aboriginal youth in the same age range.
 - Of youth aged 20-24, 31% of Aboriginal people versus 49% of non-Aboriginal people were attending school.
- Aboriginal people aged 15-64 are more likely than non-Aboriginals to be lone parents, 11% versus 5%.
- Although Aboriginal people represent only 3% of the total population, they accounted for 17% of the provincial/territorial admissions to custody in 1998-99. This rate is similar at the federal level.

42 Exposure to Violence in the Home: Effects on Aboriginal Children, p. 15

43 Family Violence in Aboriginal Communities: A Review, p. 3

44 Ibid.

45 All statistical information was compiled from various Statistics Canada publications.

46 This represents approximately 3% of the total population of Canada

- While Aboriginal youth accounted for 44% admissions to remand, 46% of sentenced custody admissions and 32% of probation admissions in jurisdictions providing these data in 2002/03, they account for approximately 8% of the youth in population for these jurisdictions.
- Aboriginal people are more likely to come into contact with the police – as victims of crime 17% versus 13% for non-Aboriginals, as witnesses to crime 11% versus 6%, and by being arrested, 4% versus 1%
- The 1999 General Social Survey reported that:
 - 35% of Aboriginal people reported having been victims of crime compared with 26% of non-Aboriginal people.
 - 19% of Aboriginal people reported having been victimized two or more times compared with 10% of non-Aboriginal people
 - Aboriginal people experienced violent crime at a rate of 307 incidents per 1000 population compared to the non-Aboriginal rate of 110 incidents per 1000 population. This represents a rate three times that of non-Aboriginal people.

Where are the Children?

Another issue, which has a significant impact on Aboriginal people, families and communities, is the removal of children from Aboriginal homes by mainstream social service agencies. It is important to remember that the concept of removal or apprehension of children is a foreign concept to the traditions of First Nations communities.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Report of the Saskatchewan Justice Reform Commission Chp 2, p. 27

Beverly Jacobs (2002) sums up the “Sixties Scoop”:



*In 1951, Ottawa delegated jurisdiction of Aboriginal health, welfare and educational services to the provinces. The Indian Act was amended to ensure that all provincial laws were applied to status Indians unless it conflicted with a treaty or federal laws. Once the provinces were in charge and were guaranteed payment for each Indian child they apprehended, the numbers of Aboriginal children skyrocketed. Only one percent of all children in care were Native in 1959, but by the end of the 1960's, 30 to 40 percent of all legal wards were Aboriginal children, even though they formed less than 4 percent of the national population. This era was soon to be defined as the “Sixties Scoop”, despite the fact that the apprehension and adoption of Aboriginal children still continues to this day. By the late 1970's, one in four status Indian children were picked up by social workers.*⁴⁸



⁴⁸ Submission to the Special Rapporteur investigating the Violations of Indigenous Human Rights, p. 42

The “Sixties Scoop” has apparently continued into the 21st century. Fuelled by the same systemic racism that was responsible for the Residential School system, Aboriginal children continue to be removed in shocking numbers from their homes, families and communities by mainstream social services agencies. Some studies estimate that there are over 25,000 First Nations and Métis children in the care of Canadian child welfare systems.

Since 1995, there has been a 71.5 percent increase nationally in the number of Aboriginal children entering care and the numbers are not decreasing. It is clear that little has been learned from the devastating effects of residential schools since there are currently three times as many children in care than attended residential schools at their height in the 1940’s.⁴⁹

The history and continuing effects of the targeting of Aboriginal children by the child welfare system has had many detrimental effects on Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people who are homeless, who face problems with the Canadian justice system or who are in youth detention centres or prisons are products of the child welfare system. A survey of Aboriginal prisoners in Prince Albert Saskatchewan in 1990 found that over 95 percent of them had been involved with the child welfare system in some way.⁵⁰

49 Report of the Saskatchewan Justice Reform Commission Chp 2, p. 26-27

50 Submission to the Special Rapporteur investigating the Violations of Indigenous Human Rights, p. 43

Some suggest that these trends could change as the government encourages First Nations communities to develop and implement services to address issues including child welfare. However, studies have shown that Aboriginal run agencies receive 22% less funding than provincially run counterparts which serve primarily non-Aboriginal communities.

A Study undertaken by the Department of Indian Affairs and the Assembly of First Nations in 2000 indicated that there is little support for early intervention programs that would ensure children’s welfare and safety without removal from their families. Further, the study noted that witnesses who spoke before Parliamentary committees highlighted this reality with the observation that if a child is placed in care, they immediately get access to counselling services but when biological families are seeking such services or funding to maintain their family or keep them together, there is no support available.⁵¹

This removal of children from their homes, families and communities has and continues to have significant impacts on Aboriginal children. Many experts are coming to believe that removing children from their parents and communities is inherently damaging. When child welfare authorities apprehend a Native child, that child is placed in a position of triple jeopardy. They are not only removed from their parents but also from a tightly knit community of extended family members. Further, the child is also removed from a unique, distinctive and familiar culture. This triple jeopardy typically has long lasting impacts on the child.⁵²

51 Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada, p. 11

52 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, The Family, Vol. 3, Chp. 2, p. 21

Family Violence

It is difficult to categorically state the levels of family violence in Aboriginal communities. There are two reasons for this; first, there is no one universally accepted definition of family violence and; second, a great number of family violence and abuse incidents go unreported for a range of reasons.

Other issues that make the compilation of exact statistics on Aboriginal family violence difficult include the fact that there is no one national system for compiling such statistics. Further, while family violence in Aboriginal communities shares many common characteristics with these issues in mainstream society, there are also a number of distinctive differences. Due to all of the above factors, it is important to remember that any statistical information on family violence in Aboriginal communities should be viewed as estimates only.⁵³

Family violence in Aboriginal communities is estimated to be occurring at epidemic levels. The reporting rate for violence by a spouse among Aboriginal peoples is 20% compared to 7% for other Canadians.⁵⁴ A study completed in 1989 estimated that between 75% and 90% of women in some northern Indian communities are battered by their spouses. Other studies have indicated 80% mental and physical abuse in common-law relationships and 70% mental and physical abuse in couples less than 35 years of age.⁵⁵

53 Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 23

54 Final Report of the Justice Reform Commission of Saskatchewan - Chapter 3 - Violence and Victimization, p. 7

55 National Family Violence Survey: Phase 1, p. 18-19

According to the recent General Social Survey, 25% of Aboriginal women reported assault by a present or past spouse compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal women. Close to one-half (48%) of these Aboriginal women were victims of life-threatening violence compared to 31% for the non-Aboriginal women. The rate of emotional abuse of Aboriginal women was 37% compared with 18% for non-Aboriginal women.⁵⁶ Many sources suggest that these numbers are likely only scraping the surface of the reality of Aboriginal women's experience of violence since many women refuse to report or speak openly about the violence they experience in their families.

Statistics compiled from interviews with inmates in the correctional system have indicated that a larger proportion of Aboriginal inmates than non-Aboriginal inmates reported that they experienced or witnessed physical or emotional violence during their childhood (78% versus 57%). Also, a larger proportion of Aboriginal inmates indicated the use of drugs or alcohol within their home environment (70% versus 54%).⁵⁷

The experience and witnessing of violence in the home is one of the many factors that are linked with the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system as well as issues such as substance abuse, social maladjustment and other detrimental effects.



56 Ibid. p. 9-10

57 The Effect of Family Disruption on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Inmates, p. 24

According to our oral traditions, family violence was rare in Aboriginal communities prior to contact with European culture. Communities would not tolerate the abuse of children, spouses or elders; it was simply unacceptable. However, many communities have experienced the detrimental effects of the residential school system, the attack on the status of Aboriginal women, the oppression of traditions and spiritual ways, the loss of family influence and the absence of parental and elder teachings. As a people, we have adopted non-functional, non-Aboriginal attitudes, beliefs and values. We have been oppressed and have internalized this oppression (self-hatred) and the result has been violence in many forms.⁵⁸

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996, identified three distinctive elements of family violence as experienced by Aboriginal people. Recognition of these elements gives us a clear direction for addressing the issue of family violence in Aboriginal communities. These distinctive elements are:

- 1) Aboriginal family violence has invaded whole communities and cannot therefore be considered merely a problem of a particular couple or household;
- 2) failure in family functioning may be traced to state interventions which were deliberately designed to displace or disrupt Aboriginal families;
- 3) violence in Aboriginal communities is fostered and sustained by a racist social environment which promotes demeaning stereotypes of Aboriginal people and which seeks to diminish their value as human beings who have a right to be treated with dignity.

58 A Resource Guide on Family Violence Issues for Aboriginal Communities, p. 1

Women's Experience

Many Aboriginal women move from the violence of their childhoods – which is often an experience of the violence against their mothers layered over the violence they themselves have survived – to violent relationships with men, including both rape and battering.

*Violence is not just a mere incident in the lives of Aboriginal women. Violence does not just span a given number of years. It is our lives. And it is in our histories. For most Aboriginal women, violence has not been escapable.*⁵⁹

Native women who seek justice against the violence in their lives are overshadowed by the image of the squaw. They are treated as “inherently rapeable” because of racist assumptions made about Native female promiscuity. Native women who are experiencing violence are reluctant to call police because they may be seen as “at fault” or deserving of the abuse.⁶⁰

A study conducted by the Indigenous Women's Collective for the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission of Manitoba supported this observation by finding that police response to Aboriginal domestic violence discouraged Aboriginal women from going to the police for help. There is a perception that police lack an understanding of the situation of the abused Aboriginal woman and also of the needs of her children in the situation.

59 Organizing Against Oppression in Thunder in my Soul, p. 170

60 A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood, p. 110

More than one woman recounted that when she complained to police, she was the one removed from the home. Others shared stories of police attending the scene, finding it calm and leaving without doing anything to support the woman. This usually resulted in even more severe violence once the police left. With evidence of such a lack of support from police, is it any wonder that Aboriginal women often suffer in silence?⁶¹

Aboriginal women are vulnerable in a society that devalues them as women, as Aboriginals and as human beings. This vulnerability is exploited by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men who commit acts of extreme brutality against Aboriginal women. Some acts are motivated by racism, but it has been suggested that many are carried out in the expectation that societal indifference to the welfare and safety of Aboriginal women will allow perpetrators to escape any punishment of their crimes.⁶²

Family Violence and Children

Since the days of residential school, widespread family violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities has passed through at least three and sometimes four generations where chronic abuse and violence has been fostered within our families and communities. This means that multiple generations of children have been raised in persistent fear, unease and intermittent trauma. They have been ‘incubated in terror’ and continue to pass that terror on to all the generations that follow.⁶³

61 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 13 - Aboriginal Women, p. 9

62 Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada, p. 2

63 Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 49

Studies have indicated that the collateral impact of family violence and abuse on children has both developmental and long-term social aspects that are detrimental to the health and well being of children and, in the long term, families and communities. Lane et al. have identified a number of potential impacts on children who witness violence:

- 1) they are almost certainly to be traumatized and to suffer the effects of post-traumatic stress for many years after the abuse has stopped and possibly for life,
- 2) they are also at risk for serious alteration of normal brain development that could leave them emotionally, cognitively and socially impaired as traumatized brain states become built-in brain traits
- 3) the brain alteration that takes place may well leave them at high risk for future violent behaviour
- 4) these results are all possible but whether or not they occur depend on many factors including the values and belief systems taught and practices by family and community, the child’s personality and characteristics, and the nature, severity and duration of the abuse or neglect the child experienced.⁶⁴

Studies suggest that children exposed to violence in the home are 10 to 17 times more likely to have serious emotional and behavioural problems when compared to children who have the benefit of being raised in non-violent homes.



64 Ibid. p. 47

Children who have witnessed abuse often show the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which may include anxiety, fear, irritability, difficulty or inability to concentrate, intrusive memories of the abuse, outbursts of anger and hyperactivity.⁶⁵ These symptoms certainly have an impact on children's ability to learn, the development of social skills and their relationship to authority.

Sharon Perrault identified the multigenerational impact of family violence when she stated that:

*A paradigm has existed and continues to exist concerning our children and although we adamantly express that our children are our future, we as a society have often failed to protect them from the perils of violence. Children who are exposed to violence in the home are pre-disposed to repeating what they have witnessed. "The hidden child in every adult continues to obey so that the rules are carried multi-generationally, and the sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation."*⁶⁶

65 Exposure to Violence in the Home: Effects on Aboriginal Children, p. 11

66 The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Family Violence Program - Stony Mountain Project, p. 16

It is crucial that we recognise the importance of addressing the crisis Aboriginal children and youth are finding themselves in. Youth are the largest and fastest growing part of Aboriginal society. Within Aboriginal society, youth seem to most acutely carry the symptoms of community and cultural disruption. It has been recognised in much of the authoritative literature that unless young people are specifically targeted, they are destined to repeat and amplify the self-destructive behaviours of their predecessors.⁶⁷



The Justice Department published, "A Snapshot of Aboriginal Youth in Custody: Phase II" in February 2004. Some of the statistics found in that document highlight quite clearly the crisis that many Aboriginal youth are struggling with. Many of these statistics may be related to the experience of poverty, violence, and substance abuse in their homes and communities.

These numbers also indicate how Aboriginal youth are repeating the behaviours of previous generations, which are related to the systemic oppression, colonization and other detrimental factors that affect the lives of Aboriginal peoples.

67 Mapping the Healing Journey, p. 30

- Thirty-nine percent of Aboriginal youth in custody were reported to be involved with child protection agencies at the time of their admission – 16% were a ward of the state and 23% had an active file.
- Almost half (47%) of Aboriginal youth resided in a family that received social assistance as a primary source of income.
- Only 2% of Aboriginal youth in custody who were aged 18 and over had completed high school
- Approximately one in six Aboriginal youth in custody were suspected or confirmed to have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
- More than eight out of every ten Aboriginal youth in custody were suspected or confirmed to have a substance abuse problem – 57% had a confirmed problem and 24% were suspected to have had a problem.
- Eight percent of Aboriginal youth were reported to have harmed themselves while in custody.
- Approximately 11% of Aboriginal youth were reported to have had suicidal thoughts and 3% had attempted suicide while in custody.
- One in five Aboriginal youth were reported to have attempted suicide and 14% were reported to have had suicidal thoughts prior to admission to custody.

The study also conducted Sharing Circles with incarcerated Aboriginal youth. The information these youth provided points to the high level of dysfunction in Aboriginal families and communities. Many spoke generally of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Some of the youth provided more specific comments on their feelings of shame, betrayal and anger related to their childhood victimization.

Youth agreed overwhelmingly that substance abuse within their families was an acute problem. Some participants spoke of criminality within their families, many having parents, siblings and extended family members also incarcerated. Exposure to suicide amongst family members was also commonplace for participants in the Sharing Circles.⁶⁸

In *Mapping the Healing Journey*, the authors stated categorically that there is a growing crisis among Aboriginal youth. Many communities who have been involved in a generation of healing and recovery have found that the next generation of youth is even more deeply entrenched in crisis and addiction than their parents were. It is imperative that community healing involves extensive work with children and youth. The approach to healing requires this type of broad focus since taking a narrow focus on adult healing and recovery often leads to a struggle between the healthier adult population and youth who are reluctant to even want to address their healing.



68 A Snapshot of Aboriginal Youth in Custody: Phase II, p. 14

Making Connections:

Understanding the Roots of Family Violence

The stark realities of life experienced by many Aboriginal people today are strongly linked to a past that was rife with exploitation, colonization and racism.⁶⁹ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and many others who have studied the past and current position of Aboriginal people in society have concluded that many of the social ills experienced by Aboriginal peoples are a result of policies of assimilation, racist assumptions about Aboriginal culture and the resulting loss of identity suffered by individuals, families and communities. Due to the cumulative effect of this multi-generational trauma, Aboriginal people often find themselves victims of crime and violence, over-represented in the justice system and unable to relate to a justice system that is foreign to their world-view.

Understanding Colonization

Contact with European explorers and settlers marked the beginning of very rapid and extensive changes for Aboriginal Nations on Turtle Island. These changes usually had devastating effects on the way of life of Aboriginal peoples who were denied the right to meet the newcomers on equal terms and to negotiate the process of change on the basis of mutual respect, equity and justice.⁷⁰ Much of this resulted from the European view of Aboriginal people as children, as savages or as an obstacle to European objectives.

69 Many would suggest that the exploitation, colonization and systemic racism directed against Aboriginal people is not simply part of the past but also is very much part of the current experience of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

70 Jefferson, p. 85

Aboriginal peoples on Turtle Island were once autonomous and self-determining economically, politically, culturally and socially. Colonization brought about the destruction of Aboriginal economic systems through the introduction of a foreign hierarchal system of economics based on greed. By imposing this system, the colonizers developed and maintained the upper levels of the system and used the profits gained for their own benefit.

Through control of the economic system the colonizers were able to manipulate and direct Aboriginal peoples' political processes. The colonizers recognized only the leaders they preferred and offered treaties which promised the well-being of the people in exchange for access to the land. As this economic and political control over Aboriginal people increased, the colonizers introduced their own worldviews to repress Aboriginal cultures and which also acted to destroy Aboriginal social institutions. Aboriginal worldviews were and are trivialized while Aboriginal values were and are demeaned and manipulated. Severing Aboriginal people from their culture which tied them to the land also allowed the colonizers to confirm the European claim over the land and its resources.⁷¹

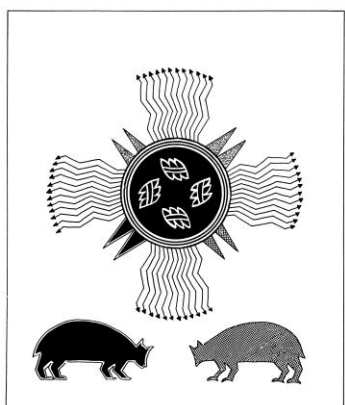
The colonization process began 500 years ago and continues today. From the beginning of European contact there was a clash in cultures that was situated in the stark differences in worldview and outlook between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples.

71 Hart, p. 25

The most startling thing for Europeans when they first arrived in Canada was the position of Aboriginal women in their respective societies. It did not take Europeans long to realise that in order to dominate the land and the people occupying it they needed to disempower the women. Indigenous systems that allowed women to hold power were incompatible with the kind of power dynamics required to maintain colonial power and so those systems had to go.⁷²

We have seen how the position of Aboriginal women has changed since contact. Aboriginal women are victimised at appalling rates by both their own people and mainstream society. Those who were once the heart of our nations have become mere objects of sexual desire and abuse.

Aboriginal women are highly sexualized, viewed as either the sultry Indian princess or the undesirable squaw, a thing to be used and disposed of in any case. It is important to remember however, that colonization has had a serious impact on all Aboriginal people, women, children and men.



Kim Anderson has made a strong link between the violence of the process of colonization and the violence which Aboriginal people are experiencing today.

72 A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood p. 58



*Colonization in and of itself is a violent process. It brought many untold forms of violence against the women, children and men of the Americas. Today we are faced with epidemic, lateral violence in our communities. State and church policies started this vicious cycle by instilling violence in children who were placed in residential schools and abusive foster homes and by degrading women sexually, politically and socially. Colonial practices also stripped Native men of their autonomy and dignity, and robbed them of their ability to 'provide and protect'. Western patriarchal family structures enabled Aboriginal men to turn their violence inward. Frustrated and powerless men have exerted their anger in the only arena of power they were given by the coloniser: the power to dominate Native women and children. The introduction of alcohol and drugs exacerbated the violence.*⁷³



The lateral violence described by Anderson is explained through an understanding of the process of 'internalization'. Internalization is part of the disintegrative process of colonization in which Aboriginal people subconsciously judge themselves against the standards of White society, adopting the 'White ideal'.

73 Ibid p. 96

Part of this process entails internalizing or believing the standard judgements, expectations and portrayals of Aboriginal people by the dominant society. The result is often shame and rejection not only of the self but also of the similar other, that is, other Aboriginal people.⁷⁴ What this means is that we become our own worst enemies. Our shame and rejection of ourselves and other Aboriginal people takes the forms of self-destruction through drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and sexual abuse.

Colonization does not end with the internalization of White standards, judgements and expectations and the resultant shame and rejection of self that has lead to the epidemic levels of violence and abuse in our communities. Colonization continues to have an impact in the way that disconnection and alienation from culturally based spiritual resources have left many Aboriginal people without a vision for many years. The values and ethical concepts of Native people have been threatened and sometimes lost through the colonization process, leaving Aboriginal people without direction that speaks meaningfully to them.

The process of colonization has also resulted in and been served by the obscene levels of poverty in Aboriginal communities. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples that had once been self-reliant and efficient in winning a living from their environment now struggle with generational welfare dependency; astonishingly high rates of unemployment, 90% in some communities; and the culture of poverty as they try to find solutions to the problems they face.

74 Violence in Aboriginal Communities, p. 74

Most Aboriginal communities struggle with a foreign system of government instituted by treaties and laws that fragment communities, perpetuate disunity and disruption, and which undermine the political empowerment of the people.⁷⁵ It is clear that the process of colonization has attacked Aboriginal communities on many levels; devastating many families, communities and Nations.

In much the same manner, colonization attacks individuals on the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual levels. On an emotional level, the colonizers consider Aboriginal people to be unreasonably angry and ungrateful since they obviously do not appreciate all the benefits graciously bestowed by the colonizers. Aboriginal peoples' physical appearance is ridiculed by the colonizers as dark, ugly and dirty. Aboriginal people are conflicted by the contradictions imposed by the colonizer when told that to be accepted by God they must give up all that defines them as Aboriginal people.⁷⁶

In terms of mental capacity, Aboriginal people are portrayed as incompetent, unreasonable and incapable of learning the colonizers ways and the knowledge held by Aboriginal people is not recognized until it is presented as 'new knowledge' by the colonizers.⁷⁷ Given the nature of these multi-level attacks against individuals, families and communities by the process of colonization, it is clear that the only means to address the issues arising from it must also take a multi-level approach.

75 At the Time of Disclosure, p. 10

76 Seeking Mino-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal Approach to Healing, p. 26

77 Ibid. p. 27

The effects of colonialism are still felt on many levels by Aboriginal people. The ‘cutting off’ of culture that has occurred in the past has created deeply rooted pain, isolation and dependencies, which have resulted in family violence, substance abuse and sexual abuse. The distrust of authority continues and the silencing of our voices is still felt. Much of what happens today within the justice system calls to mind for Aboriginal people previous systemic colonial assaults.

The isolation of incarceration reminds Aboriginal people of the isolation of children, removal from families and cultural roots, which was perpetrated through the residential school system, and the removal of children by mainstream social services. The punitive, non-traditional treatment of incarcerated individuals has psychological linkages to the past and there is much evidence that Aboriginal peoples are hardening rather than healing as they struggle outside of their traditional community environment.⁷⁸

Systemic Racism

The process of colonization and the current experience of Aboriginal people in Canada are embedded in systemic racism. Racism is defined as:



*A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.*⁷⁹



78 Biidaaban: The Mnjikaning Community Healing Model, p. 10-11

79 Merriam Webster On-line Dictionary, retrieved 29 Dec 2004 from www.m-w.com

The driving force behind policies of assimilation and domination developed by the colonial government was the assumption of superiority of the European worldview and spirituality. Racist perceptions viewed Aboriginal people as childlike, savage and in need of ‘protection’.

The European perception of their own superiority justified the negative outcomes of oppressive policies. These “lesser beings” needed to make their own way up to ‘civilization’ without too much assistance. Difficulties experienced by Aboriginal people in meeting the standards expected of them were explained away as part of the learning process or by blaming the victim, who clearly was not trying hard enough.

In 2004, Amnesty International noted that most Aboriginal people know racism first-hand. Most have been called ‘dirty Indian’ in schools or foster homes or by police and prison guards. Aboriginal people have also experienced subtle shifts in treatment when they access services and they know that these shifts are no accident.

It is important to acknowledge that racism is a learned attitude. It is taught in the home, in schools and in the workplace. Subtle and unintentional racism is more difficult to recognize but exists nonetheless. Negative images of people may be accepted and internalized by everyone, causing racism to operate mostly on an unconscious level. It begins with the development of self and ends up being a permanent part of society.⁸⁰

80 Final Report of the Justice Reform Commission of Saskatchewan - Chapter 7 - Eliminating Racism: Creating Healthy Relationships in Saskatchewan, p. 1

The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission and others have recognized that Aboriginal people have experienced the most entrenched racial discrimination of any group in Canada. Since Confederation, discrimination against Aboriginal people has been a central policy of Canadian governments and has been permitted by the general Canadian population to continue virtually unchecked.

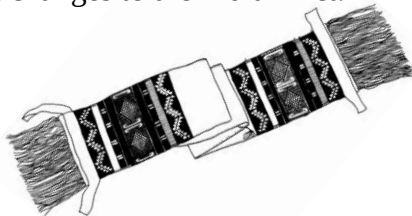
For over a century government policies have been singularly aimed at reducing the differences that exist between Aboriginal people and mainstream Canadian society in the hope that Aboriginal peoples would disappear as distinct societies.⁸¹ Former minister of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott made a very clear statement regarding the aim of Canadian government policy.



Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question and no Indian department.



This statement may have been made in 1929, but many would suggest that the sentiment behind that statement still drives government policy and practice aimed at Aboriginal peoples today. The primary example of how little the attitude of the government has changed in modern times is found in the most recent changes to the Indian Act.



81 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 4 - Aboriginal Over-Representation, p. 12

In 1985, in response to court action on both the national and international level, the Act was amended by bill C-31. This restored status to many of the women who had been enfranchised by previous provisions of the Act. The Act outlines a number of categories of status Indians.

Many of the children of the women who regained their status through C-31 are deemed 6(2) Indians and are unable to pass their status on to their children unless they marry a 6(1) category person. These measures continue the government's earliest policy of assimilation by denying First Nations peoples the right to pass on their heritage to their children.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of statistical information to provide clear evidence of the level of racism which Aboriginal people experience when they are involved with mainstream agencies. Amnesty International and others have recognized that this lack of statistical information is problematic since crime and victimization policy is informed by such statistics. Culturally sensitive and appropriate programming cannot be developed without the statistics to support that there is a need.

A further problem is that discrimination by against Aboriginal people by police, lawyers, prison guards and judges cannot be identified unless there are statistics that demonstrate there is overrepresentation within the system. By not collecting racial background information, Canadian policy reflects an inherent bias towards the racial majority. This, in and of itself, potentially contributes to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system.⁸²

82 Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada, p. 15-16

The justice system is a significant point at which many Aboriginal people experience systemic racism first hand. Throughout the history of Aboriginal/colonial relations, the justice system has been used to provide a legal justification for the oppression of Aboriginal peoples. This historical oppression is responsible for the current state of social and economic distress experienced by Aboriginal people.

Today, our supposedly neutral justice system discriminates against Aboriginal people by applying laws which have a negative impact on people of lower socio-economic status. You can be sure that this is the same racial discrimination; it has merely been 'laundered' to hide it within the system.⁸³



Problems with the Justice System

Aboriginal people are highly over represented in the justice system as victims, witnesses to crime and as offenders. The statistics regarding the numbers of Aboriginal people involved with the justice system should be considered more as estimates than as accurate numbers since statistics are not collected in any systematic manner across jurisdictions. This could mean that the actual numbers of Aboriginal people involved with the justice system are much higher in some jurisdictions than even the current numbers suggest.

83 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 4 - Aboriginal Over-Representation, p. 23

Part of the reason for the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system is the fact that Aboriginal and Western worldviews are vastly different. Aboriginal people come into conflict with a system that is foreign to them, they cannot relate to the underlying philosophy and resultant practices of the mainstream justice system because of this difference in worldview. The situation is exacerbated as the worldview conflict and confusion which Aboriginal people experience when dealing with the justice system is interpreted as a confirmation of the racist assumptions about Aboriginal people.

In many traditional Aboriginal societies prior to contact there was no notion of imprisonment. In extreme cases of wrongdoing, the offender might be banished from his or her community but this was usually for a limited time for the purpose of the individual cleansing him or herself and renewing their relationship with the Creator.⁸⁴ Aboriginal people kept the peace in their own communities in their own way, through the values and ethics that defined their cultures.

While every First Nation would have their own unique philosophy and cultural practices, a number of fairly common values have been identified. These values existed to ensure the survival of the group through the cooperation and friendliness of individuals. Conditions were established and maintained by conflict suppression within the group through the practices of non-interference, non-competitiveness, emotional restraint, sharing, Native concept of time, attitude toward gratitude and approval and the principle of teaching.⁸⁵

84 Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence, p. 49

85 Native Ethics and Rules of Behaviour in Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, p. 535

British law was imposed against the will of Aboriginal peoples. European values, religions, power structures and languages were forced upon the original peoples of Canada through legislation and the judicial process. Despite this imposition, Aboriginal peoples were told that the White justice system was an equitable system that would protect Aboriginal interests. Given this contradiction, it is not surprising that Aboriginal people might not respect such an imposed system.⁸⁶

To understand the differences in perceptions of justice, it is important to understand the fundamental cultural difference between Aboriginal and Western traditions. This difference is most clearly seen in the perception of one's relationship with the universe and the Creator.

The Western Judeo-Christian tradition sees man as the pinnacle of creation, to hold dominion over the earth and all its creatures. In contrast, the Ojibwe traditional belief holds that man is the least important entity in creation.⁸⁷

It is clear in this example that the Western and Aboriginal worldviews are in many respects polar opposites of one another. Each worldview is the basis for customs, manners and behaviours that contribute to the make-up of a particular culture and the way in which the philosophy, purposes and practices of legal and justice systems might develop.

The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission clearly outlines the differences between the Aboriginal and Western understanding of justice and also questions the appropriateness of the current justice system in dealing with Aboriginal people:

⁸⁶ Conquest by Law, p. 53

⁸⁷ The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 2 - Aboriginal Concepts of Justice, p. 4-5



At the most basic level of understanding, justice is understood differently by Aboriginal people. The dominant society tries to control actions it considers potentially or actually harmful to society as a whole, to individuals or to the wrongdoers themselves by interdictions, enforcement or apprehension, in order to prevent or punish harmful or deviant behaviour. The emphasis is on the punishment of the deviant as a means of making that person conform or as a means of protecting other members of society.

The purpose of justice in an Aboriginal society is to restore the peace and equilibrium within the community, and to reconcile the accused with his or her own conscience and with the individual or family who has been wronged. This is a primary difference.

It is a difference that significantly challenges the appropriateness of the present legal and justice system for Aboriginal people in the resolution of conflict, the reconciliation and the maintenance of community harmony and good order.⁸⁸



⁸⁸ The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 2 - Aboriginal Concepts of Justice, p. 6

This difference in perception of justice is only part of the problem when it comes to the difficulties Aboriginal people experience in dealing with the justice system. Systemic racism, language barriers, cultural differences and low socio-economic status cause the supposedly equitable justice system to be anything but equitable towards Aboriginal people. The first point of contact with the justice system is often the police.

Aboriginal people tend to be mistrustful of police due to a history in which the police have participated as the enforcers of oppressive legislation. Statistics have proven that Aboriginal people are more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be arrested by police than non-Aboriginals. Studies have suggested that the differences in statistics between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people result in part from the manner in which the behaviour of Aboriginal people becomes categorized and stigmatized.

To a certain extent, police tend to view the world in terms of 'respectable' people and 'criminal types'. Each type has particular characteristics that provide cues to officers to initiate action or to overlook behaviour. Police may tend to intervene more with people who are visibly different from the dominant population simply because it is believed that such people might tend to commit more serious offences.

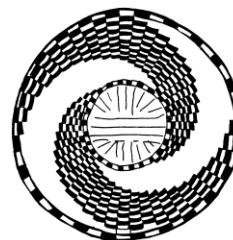
Aboriginal people are given less latitude in their behaviour because police may tend to believe that they are generally a danger to the public order.⁸⁹ These types of beliefs are part of the systemic racism that is responsible for many of the negative impacts of the justice system on Aboriginal people.

89 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 4 - Aboriginal Over-Representation, p.21

Many Aboriginal people believe that police harass them and use excessive force with them. These beliefs have been proven to be accurate if one considers the outcome of the recent Stonechild and other inquiries into police treatment of Aboriginal people. Police also tend to be most visible in the low-income areas of urban centres that are often home to a large percentage of urban Aboriginal people.⁹⁰

Amnesty International has found that many police view Aboriginal people as a community from which the rest of society must be protected rather than one deserving protection. This has resulted in a situation where Aboriginal people are 'over-policed' but under protected.⁹¹ Police tend to find crime where they look for it and they often look for it in Aboriginal communities, not in upper class neighbourhoods.

The poverty in which many Aboriginal people live may force them to commit offences simply to survive. This is not taken into account when they are subsequently involved with the justice system. Women who have had to steal to provide their children with food and other necessities are portrayed by judges as menaces to society and bad examples to their children. They end up with criminal records for petty crimes and are further ensnared in the cycle of poverty.⁹²

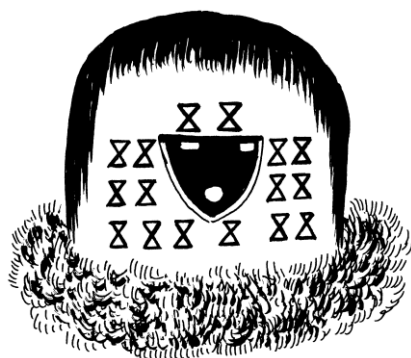


90 Final Report of the Justice Reform Commission of Saskatchewan - Chapter 5 – Policing, p. 22

91 Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada, p. 18

92 The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada, p. 144-145

Poverty has other impacts on how Aboriginal people experience the justice system. Most Native defendants cannot afford a lawyer and so must rely on legal aid lawyers who rarely have time to familiarize themselves with the case before appearing in court. According to studies conducted by the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, Aboriginal people are more likely than non-Aboriginal people to appear in court without a lawyer. Those who do have lawyers spend considerably less time with them. This lack of time with their lawyers can have significant consequences for how the accused is dealt with in the system.⁹³



Another issue, which has an impact on Aboriginal people's experience of the justice system, is the bias of judges who are making decisions in cases involving Aboriginal people. One documented case involved a custody hearing in which the judge made clearly biased statements about the Aboriginal mother having 'brainwashed' and 'indoctrinated' her children when she introduced them to her Mik'maq culture while determining that her non-Aboriginal husband was a 'solid citizen' despite a criminal record. When a complaint was finally heard, the committee found that the judge in question had behaved improperly but his behaviour was not serious enough to warrant removal.⁹⁴

93 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 4 - Aboriginal Over-Representation, p. 17

94 Submission to the Special Rapporteur investigating

A significant part of the problem is the inherent biases of those with decision-making or discretionary authority in the justice system. This includes everyone from police to lawyers to judges. Unconscious attitudes and perceptions are applied when making decisions; there is no way to avoid it. Many opportunities for subjective decision-making exist within the justice system and there are few checks on the subjective criteria being used to make those decisions.⁹⁵

The words of Geoffrey York very clearly summarize the place of Aboriginal people in the justice system and the manner in which many Aboriginal people experience 'justice':

*The offender is not born in the Indian – the Indian is born into a system which offends. In a free and democratic society, this system was to be 'just' for everyone. It was 'just' for the probation officers because it gave them a livelihood. It was 'just' for police officer because it gave them a sense of duty to lock up Indian people. It was 'just' for officers of the Crown, so they would close up their files after another Indian is incarcerated. It was 'just' for the personnel of the jails... The justice system thrives in this country, and the commodity that provides the fuel is Indian people.*⁹⁶

the Violations of Indigenous Human Rights, p. 13-15

95 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 4 - Aboriginal Over-Representation, p. 15

96 The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada, p. 174

It is clear that the criminal justice system has failed Aboriginal people because it is a system that is based in European cultural values that are vastly different from Aboriginal cultural values. It also does not comprehend nor care to comprehend, the Aboriginal experience or culture.

It is an adversarial system, which is full of complex and foreign concepts; a system that is alien to most Aboriginal people. The aim of Canadian criminal law is to protect society from harm by protecting the values and morals of individual rights in addition to physical protection of person and property.

In an Aboriginal society, protection of values is based on individuality within the community.⁹⁷ This means that justice requires a different form than the usual adversarial, punitive model. What is required is a holistic healing model that addresses the need for both individual and community healing,⁹⁸ and that focuses on restoring peace and equilibrium within the individual and the community.

97 Submission to the Special Rapporteur investigating the Violations of Indigenous Human Rights, p. 9

98 From Victims to Leaders: Activism Against Violence Towards Women in Strong Women Stories, p. 215

Response to Family Violence: The Justice System

Previous sections of this document and much of the dominant research has noted that the Canadian justice system deals with Aboriginal people, and others, by punishing one or more individuals rather than healing a network of relationships. Healing the network of relationships is crucial for Aboriginal people and communities. Non-Aboriginal professionals tend to perceive the problems of crime or violence as individual behaviour without making any link to the community and intergenerational dimensions of the problem.⁹⁹

Victims are often re-victimised by the system itself and collateral victims receive little if any attention. Healing is not the driving paradigm in the dominant culture's justice system. However, some Aboriginal communities have developed new collaborative relationships with all levels of the justice system so that agencies may work together to build solutions that are oriented to healing and community reconciliation.¹⁰⁰

Some of the problems with existing programs include their basis in inadequate understanding of the true problem faced by Aboriginal people. There is also little understanding of the type of programs that would be most effective. They do not take into account the intergenerational trauma created by the interventions which were designed to displace or disrupt Aboriginal families and communities.



99 Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 85
100 Ibid.

Existing programs also tend to not address the pervasive systemic and individual racism, which contributes to the continuing victimization of Aboriginal people. There is little incorporation of or funding for strategies to heal community structures and dynamics as well as individuals, families and communities, nor is there any recognition of the wide diversity of cultures among Aboriginal peoples.¹⁰¹ Programs tend to operate in a 'one size fits all' mode that is unlikely to meet the needs of most individuals, particularly Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission has stated:

*If those who operate the justice system are supposed to be doing so on behalf of society, they require a better understanding of Aboriginal society. The cultural differences, such as the non-confrontational, non-adversarial approach of Aboriginal people should be appreciated. The Aboriginal desire to return people and communities to a state of harmony should be understood. Those operating the present system should hear why Aboriginal people consider the existing system to be a foreign one that is not serving their needs.*¹⁰²

101 Ibid, p. 71

102 The Justice System and Aboriginal People - Chapter 4 - Aboriginal Over-Representation, p. 23

Clearly there is a call for those who are currently operating the justice system to take responsibility for educating themselves on Aboriginal people's history, culture and needs. This education needs to be an ongoing, integrated part of every program in order to effectively ensure that the perspective and needs of Aboriginal people are understood.

Victims Experience

Victims often get 'left by the wayside' because the current system is so wrapped up in its own process. The adversarial nature of the judicial process causes the criminal incident to become secondary to considerations of evidence and procedure. The system emphasizes process and offender rights, so victims tend to lose their place in the system.¹⁰³

Primary and collateral victims affected by the offence become bystanders since the state controls all aspects of the case. Offenders are encouraged to plead not guilty; thereby taking no responsibility for their actions. Even when the offender is found guilty, there is no requirement for making amends to the victim or expressing any sort of remorse.¹⁰⁴

For a variety of reasons cases typically take months or even years to make their way to the resolution stage, which not only weakens the disposition of the case but also frustrates victims who cannot bring closure to their case. Convicted offenders are removed from their communities and sentenced to a correctional system that is not responsive to the needs of victims, communities or offenders.¹⁰⁵

103 Making it Work: Planning and Evaluating Community Corrections & Healing Projects in Aboriginal Communities, p. 4

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid. p. 5

Every part of this process runs completely counter to the Aboriginal perspective of justice. The process creates a situation of re-victimization since Aboriginal people are unable to relate to the process in any way.

Many victims often experience secondary victimization when they encounter the justice system and other systems in the course of dealing with a traumatic event such as family violence. Secondary victimization occurs not as a direct result of the criminal act but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim. Some examples of secondary victimization include:

- The refusal to recognise their experience as criminal victimization
- Intrusive or inappropriate conduct by police or other criminal justice personnel
- The whole process of criminal investigation and trial
- The victim perceives difficulties in balancing their rights with those of the accused or the offender
- Criminal justice processes and procedures do not take the perspective of the victim into account
- The hurried schedule of Emergency Room personnel may affect an assault victim's sense of privacy
- School personnel may discount child disclosure of abuse
- Physicians and other medical personnel may not be aware of or acknowledge signs of spousal abuse
- Intrusive or inappropriate investigation and filming, photographing and reporting by the media.¹⁰⁶

106 The Impact of Victimization, p. 6

It is also possible that agencies established to assist victims might have policies or procedures that contribute to secondary victimization. Due to the systemic racism embedded in many Canadian institutions, Aboriginal people are even more at risk than others of secondary victimisation directly related to colonization. This, of course, contributes to the ongoing sense of victimisation and trauma that many Aboriginal people live with day to day. It is not unreasonable to assume that this would also make Aboriginal people reluctant to access mainstream services in order to avoid experiencing still more trauma.



A study conducted by the Solicitor General of Canada in 2001 found that victims often feel they are not treated with respect. They may feel this way due to the way a police officer has treated them, the tone or response of justice system staff when victims request information, being prevented from having access to the file or information about the offender who harmed them or feeling ignored by the Crown in cases of plea bargaining. Victims want respect from the system in general and specifically from the individual players in the system with whom they come into contact.¹⁰⁷

107 National Consultation with Victims of Crime: Highlights and Key Messages, p. 6

Changing the System

We have relied upon the criminal justice system to deal with the problems of crime and violence for many years. Citizens have been discouraged from participating in their own protection and have had little or no say in the services available to them. Victims call the police dispatcher, police arrive and deal with the problem in their own way and if an arrest is made, the formal justice system takes over.¹⁰⁸ Many of those found guilty are incarcerated and removed from their communities.

Professionals such as police, lawyers and judges control each step in the system while victims and others affected by crime have little direct involvement. Many victims feel that this process has failed them in many ways. Victims feel left out of the process completely as they are relegated to the role of witnesses and their role seems forgotten. They have no control over the process and are often not even informed about the progress or final resolution of the case.¹⁰⁹

Incarceration is the primary tool of the justice system. It is justified as a means for specific and general deterrence to prevent crime and violence. For many Aboriginal people this seems a very ineffective tool since victimization has become so much a part of who we are as a people.¹¹⁰

108 Making it Work: Planning and Evaluating Community Corrections & Healing Projects in Aboriginal Communities, p. v

109 Ibid.

110 The Victims Circle - The Four Circles of Hollow Water, p. 95

The threat of incarceration simply does not deter offending behaviour. What results from the threat of incarceration is that people do not come forward and take responsibility for the hurt they cause. The silence of victims, offenders and community members is reinforced and the system therefore promotes rather than breaks the cycle of violence.

What makes things worse is that those charged with violent acts usually remain in the community while awaiting a court hearing with no accountability to the community and often commit further offences.¹¹¹ This situation causes further stress, fear and vulnerability to victims who may have to encounter their abusers on a daily basis.

The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (2001) recommended that incarceration should be used only as a last resort and then only where the offender poses a threat to another individual or the community. Incarceration should also be used when the offender refuses to comply with the terms of a sentence imposed or where other sanctions would not reflect the gravity of the offence.

The Commission further recommended that incarceration for non-payment of fines should rarely occur unless an individual wilfully refuses to pay a fine and has the means to pay. Procedures other than incarceration should be considered for the collection of fines. Where incarceration is required for an Aboriginal person, they should be placed in a community-based facility near their home community or in a culturally appropriate facility if possible.

111 Ibid.

In 1989, a report on Native justice in Toronto found that Aboriginal people were disproportionately represented in the courts. This trend has not only continued but increased since then. The report indicated that the justice system for Aboriginal people operated much as a 'revolving door' where many were repeat offenders who were neither rehabilitated nor effectively sanctioned by the system.

High levels of substance abuse, prostitution, violence and related offences indicated that the underlying cause for involvement was deep-seated social problems. Many studies since then have supported this finding. Many of the charges were court related offences, such as, failure to comply with court orders and failure to appear. The report concluded that these types of charges indicated a high level of estrangement from the justice system by Aboriginal offenders.¹¹²

Native people are further alienated from the Canadian justice system due to the low numbers of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people among the key decision makers and authority figures in the system. There is a lack not only of Native police officers, but also a shortage of Aboriginal lawyers and judges.



112 Making it Work: Planning and Evaluating Community Corrections & Healing Projects in Aboriginal Communities, p. 22

This lack of representation and the predomination of White lawyers and judges in the Canadian courts make it highly unlikely that Aboriginal cultural values or socio-economic conditions are taken into account in any case.¹¹³ As discussed in a previous section of this document, unconscious or conscious biased attitudes have a definite impact on decision-making and case outcomes due to the amount of subjective license given to authorities in the justice system.

Reforming the criminal justice system will take more than simply adding a few Indigenous elements. It would certainly be more valuable to speak instead of transformation; changing the way the whole system operates at all levels.



The final report of the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples Justice Reform (2004) noted that reform of the justice system seems to connote taking what lies at hand and making it better whereas transformation seems to imply taking what exists and making it different and even better. While both processes start with what exists, reform only allows for change within a particular scope and context while transformation permits change of both scope and context.

113 The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada, p. 156-157

The Commission went on to outline what this transformation might look like:

*Transformation includes a change in thinking so that restorative justice is stressed at every opportunity. Along with this change is the shift in the role of communities, so that restorative justice can take place in an important way. For transformation of the justice system to succeed, society must no longer use the criminal justice system to handle social problems. Resources and support to individuals, families, and communities must be provided before behaviour becomes criminal. Meanwhile, within the criminal justice system, officials must be encouraged to use sentencing alternatives. Transformation would change the way the criminal justice system treats people. It would have more understanding of the major impact this system has on people's lives.*¹¹⁴

Making it work

Whether we refer to the higher levels of victimization of Aboriginal people, the epidemic levels of violence in Aboriginal communities or the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system; it is clear that the current systems established to respond to these issues are not effective.

114 Final Report of the Justice Reform Commission of Saskatchewan - Chapter 4 - Restorative Justice, p. 6

We have learned that Aboriginal people have a distinctive worldview that is based in a holistic perspective; that protection of values is based on individuality within the community. Therefore, any effort to address the issues of victimization, family violence and over-representation in the criminal justice system should adopt an approach that meshes with this worldview rather than running counter to it.

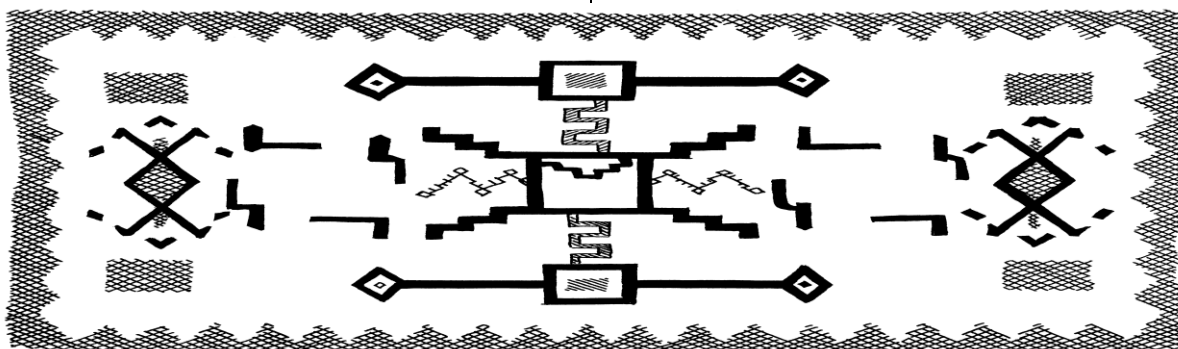
Studies have been undertaken by a number of organizations to determine some of the best approaches to provide services to Aboriginal people. The general finding of these studies is that operating from a holistic, healing model, integrating cultural and spiritual practices; best meets the needs of Aboriginal people who require assistance.

The Ontario Native Women's Association (1989) recommended that a holistic approach needs to be developed to deal with family violence in Aboriginal communities. This process should bring all participants, victims, abusers and bystanders to believe that change in their relationships is possible. The holistic approach should take into account the problems faced by Aboriginal people with the aim of supporting their identity and feeling of control.¹¹⁵ It is also important to realise that there will be some differences in the experiences and needs of urban Aboriginals versus those living on isolated reserves.

Research conducted by Corrections Canada in 1995 has supported this suggestion, noting that Aboriginal men, women and children may be mobilized to change not only themselves but also their surroundings and their communities through holistic methods of healing. Rediscovering their culture, learning from Elders and unlearning the negative effects of colonization while practicing alternatives to anger and violence enables Aboriginal people to no longer live in fear or have to leave their communities due to violence.¹¹⁶ The Aboriginal worldview, which sees individuals within the context of their families, communities and nations, is reflected in this observation.

The Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council and others have found that the needs of Aboriginal victims are much broader and often more complex than can be met through the criminal justice process. These needs can be immediate, short-term and long-term and may include emergency housing, financial assistance, health care, living skills, and counselling or healing as well as a meaningful justice outcome.¹¹⁷

There are currently some services that may meet some of these needs but they are often difficult to access due to being dispersed across a range of agencies. If a victim is in crisis, access to services can be even more difficult.



115 Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence, p. 89

116 The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Family Violence Program - Stony Mountain Project, p. 17

117 Holistic Community Justice, p. 10

There is a need for localized community justice and healing centres that can act as a single point of contact to streamline the provision of services and that have the flexibility to meet the varied needs of victims. Such services could assess victim's needs and advocate with various other service providers on the victim's behalf. Services to be provided on-site would include but not be limited to meeting immediate needs such as emergency housing and financial assistance, helping liaise with police and accessing legal advice.¹¹⁸

These agencies would also act as a pathway to assist victims who wish to pursue matters through the criminal process, as well as providing longer term therapeutic and healing programs. The services might also establish programs to build upon existing living and parenting skills. The local Aboriginal community's practices and healing skills would of course be reflected in the detail and design of all healing programs.¹¹⁹

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Solicitor General (2002) recommended that funding which supports and encourages long-term planning and action is needed to meet the healing needs of Aboriginal people. The funding must address both crisis intervention and community capacity building. This type of holistic, comprehensive, long-term coordinated approach would require sustained leadership over a period of years. Any organization that would provide such leadership would require sustained core funding, not only project funding to enable the team to build the capacity of the community to heal itself and to promote community development.¹²⁰



118 Holistic Community Justice, p. 10

119 Ibid.

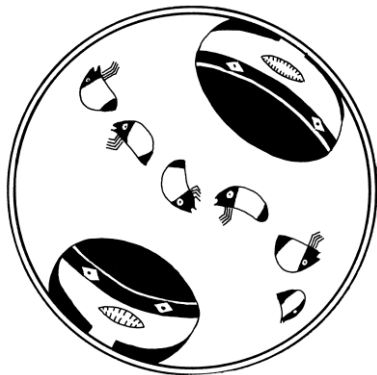
120 Mapping the Healing Journey, p. 53

Response to Family Violence: Aboriginal Programs

Many Aboriginal communities have been developing programs in response to the challenge of healing since the 1980's. The concept of healing in Aboriginal communities is focussed on wellness rather than sickness. The aim is to move all levels of the community from the individual to the Nation towards balance and wholeness while embracing politics, economics, patterns of social relations and the process of cultural recovery.¹²¹

While many community programs began with a focus on substance abuse, these programs soon began to evolve to address other related community issues such as; sexual abuse; suicide; anger and rage; depression and family violence. A wide variety of approaches to healing have been employed, including residential treatment (based on a variety of treatment models), one-on-one counselling, personal growth workshops, retreats and traditional practices such as sweat lodges, healing ceremonies, fasting, prayers and the application of traditional teachings.¹²²

For Aboriginal people, community healing must include both victims and offenders. This differs from mainstream systems where the focus is mainly on the offender and the victim tends to "get lost" in the process.



121 Mapping the Healing Journey, p. 44

122 Ibid. p. 11

A community-based healing model starts from the recognition that both offender and victim are part of the same community. Each victim and each offender is also part of a family. What affects the offender and the victim will also affect families, as well as the community as a whole. The term "community" when used by Aboriginal peoples is an inclusive term. When it is reported that the community is providing an alternative to prison for an offender, the community by definition can often include the victim, the victim's family, the offender, the offender's family and all others who feel they have a role to play in the process.

Aboriginal communities recognize that victims and offenders are both dealing with pain and the pain felt by both parties has to be addressed. Treating the individual therefore is only part of the process, even though healing must start within the person.

Healing must be experienced in a holistic way whether individually or collectively. This may mean that healing takes place in the individual, the family, or the community as a whole, or at all three levels at once. The ultimate objective of healing is to effect change within the family, extended or immediate, and the community at large.¹²³

Research has suggested that the most promising healing initiatives are those that are involved in actively transforming patterns of dysfunction within their actual context. Current research suggests that sending Aboriginal individuals away from their communities for treatment, removing them from their specific context, is less effective than community-based treatment. The usual punishment model employed by the justice system, ie removal, is ineffective.

123 Understanding the Role of Healing in Aboriginal Communities, p. 50-51

There are a number of approaches which are proving to be much more effective in addressing the needs of Aboriginal victims, offenders and their communities. These approaches include systemic counselling approaches, participatory learning and research applied to individuals and groups within their actual worlds and which views their patterns of thought and action as emerging from those worlds.¹²⁴ The key here seems to be a systemic or holistic approach which is embedded in the context of families and communities.

It is important to note that over the past three decades there has been more of a focus on and response to victims' concerns but little is known about the services available to victims and those who use them.¹²⁵ In the course of the research for this manual, locating detailed information on specific services was challenging. However, a number of programs developed by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people have done an excellent job of documenting their process and successes.

Following is a description of four programs that have been developed to assist individuals, families and communities to address sexual abuse, victimization and family violence. While some programs were initially developed to provide alternative services for offenders, the holistic approach employed requires addressing the needs of victims with equal energy.

124 Mapping the Healing Journey, p. 30
125 Juristat: Victim Services in Canada 2002/03, p. 2

Beardy's and Okemasis Community Family Violence Program

The Family Violence Program began as an idea shared by the members of the community with the frontline staff, Chief and Council. The vision was to make changes so that people living on the reserve would have the same access to services as other Canadians. The first step was a community family violence review to assess the level of knowledge of community members regarding the extent of all types of abuse in the community. Members responded that abuse was a significant problem for many in the community but that few knew where to go for help. The community wanted a holistic approach to healing that would also provide an alternative to incarceration for offenders.

Following a review of a range of program models, the community chose to work towards the development of a community-based treatment program. An interim committee was struck to develop a working draft of protocols.

The Ewichihitok committee protocols state, among other things, that: no member of the Chief or Council may sit on the committee, committee members needed to be drug and alcohol free for five years, that members could not gamble in and around the community or have a gambling problem.¹²⁶

126 Beardy's and Okemasis Family Violence Program, p. 2

The Ewichihitok committee authored a report that acknowledged the impact of violence in the community on children, adolescents, adults and elders. The report also noted that these impacts were intergenerational and were manifested in emotional, psychological, and behavioural problems that furthered the cycle of violence from one generation to the next. These problems were linked to the history of colonization, loss of First Nations culture, the experience of the residential school system and the impact of the removals of children from the community by the child welfare system.¹²⁷ The committee concluded their observations by stating that a combination of outside resources and First Nations service providers utilizing a multi-disciplinary, community-based approach would ensure the most effective delivery of service.

Counselling services are provided using a therapist from outside the reserve so that community residents would feel less threatened by the potential release of confidential information within the community. This creates a sense of safety that allows clients to be more open about their issues.

The program uses a team/case management approach, which keeps staff from working in isolation, reduces burnout and ensures a more effective intervention. Other benefits to this approach include the empowerment of families who participate, a reduction of the ability of clients to manipulate one service provider against another, and when there is a turnover in staff a structure is in place for new staff to fit into and this structure serves to maintain the program.¹²⁸

127 Ibid. p. 3

128 Beardy's and Okemasis, p. 4-6

The program also makes use of traditional healers, recognizing the importance of the cultural aspect of healing. During the assessment phase of the intervention the person or family are asked if they are traditional in their lifestyle and if so, involvement with a traditional healer is encouraged in tandem with the non-traditional services that are being requested.

Traditional healers that are recognized and involved with a family are invited to be part of the treatment team with the agreement of the individual and/or family.¹²⁹ Including traditional healers as part of the treatment team rather than as a separate aspect of the program meshes well with a holistic approach.

Over the five-year mandate of this program, a range of services were provided to the community. These included; individual, couple and marital counselling; women's and men's groups; family healing circles, and a group for youth who had committed a sexual offence. Women primarily requested counselling in the early years of the program but as time progressed, more men requested this service to deal with their issues.¹³⁰



It was found that the primary issue of couple/marital counselling was spousal abuse. In such situations, the offender was mandated by the program to attend counselling. The first step in this was an in-depth assessment that included a violence history as well as an addictions assessment.

129 Ibid. p. 6

130 Ibid. p. 7

The victim would be contacted to complete a violence history and lethality assessment. A lethality assessment provides some indication of the level of danger for the victim in this situation. If the situation was assessed as high risk for further abuse, couple counselling was not implemented until the risk was reduced and both parties were in agreement regarding the steps to be taken to ensure safety.¹³¹

Built into the final report of the program were a series of recommendations suggested as best practices. These recommendations include:

1. Outside consultation and training to assist in developing a vision for change.
2. A committee structure to support community change.
3. A community assessment to demonstrate the need for change.
4. The committee should be composed of members that will not attempt to sabotage the process to protect themselves.
5. An initial written plan.
6. Involving external professionals to provide training and frontline counselling services may help to develop a holistic community-based family violence program, depending on the existing resources in the community.
7. Service providers should be screened to ensure client safety, confidentiality and provision of comprehensive services.
8. Therapists must be skilled, experienced and capable of working with high risk and complex situations.
9. Professional support services should be provided to the frontline staff.
10. Confidentiality must be stressed. All staff should be made aware of the importance and meaning of confidentiality.
11. Initial training is necessary for frontline staff and collateral agencies.

131 Ibid.

12. Ongoing training is important for professional development as well as community members to deal with high-risk issues.
13. A team/case management approach is crucial both for the families and the frontline workers.
14. Linking with provincially based services.

It must be recognized that these recommendations were based on the experiences of a small community and not an urban setting. Many of these recommendations are certainly applicable to an urban setting but some adaptation would be required due to the varied population in urban Aboriginal settings.

The Four Circles of Hollow Water

The next program to be presented for consideration is the Community Holistic Circle Healing of Hollow Water from Hollow Water Manitoba. This program is probably the most well known program in the country as it was one of the first established. Many programs that have followed in later years have been based upon the Hollow Water Model.

In the 1980's, most Canadian communities denied both the prevalence and the cost of sexual abuse. At this time, the community of Hollow Water began its search for healing which has evolved into Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH). CHCH is an innovative healing approach that is very different from treatment models within the mainstream justice system. The process holds offenders accountable to their communities, and fosters healing for all — those victimized, their victimizers, and the community.¹³²

132 Four Circles of Hollow Water, p. 116

Enforced residential school attendance and abuse within that system over four generations have left many families in Aboriginal communities without knowledge of genuine family life or what constitutes healthy sexuality. This has resulted in families not having a healthy base from which to react to stressors or disclosed abuse. For many families and communities, the cycle of abuse began with the residential schools and so there was no recourse for anyone.¹³³



This situation has allowed victimization to continue and to be compounded. The damage of the initial victimization may be compounded through the responses of family, the attitudes and approaches of medical and judicial personnel, media portrayals of sexuality and society's attitudes. Family, community, and society make a difference in whether the individual experiences further victimization or moves toward relief and healing.¹³⁴

Both CHCH and Western therapists envision healing as a process and often liken it to a journey. While there are similarities, the CHCH concept differs significantly in a number of ways from western practice, particularly in the view of healing as a return to balance.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 93

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 92



*We know that in healing we must consider all dimensions. As well, this return to balance involves all that person's relationships – past and present. Further, an individual's healing journey is not complete until family, community and the whole nation in all of their dimensions are back in balance. Healing is a letting go – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – of our hurt – the hurt that has been inflicted upon each of us, the hurt we have inflicted on others. Each of us is a victim; each of us has become a victimizer of others. Healing is breaking the cycles of abuse and violence. Healing is replacing in our day to day living, our anger, our guilt, our shame, our vulnerability, with the seven teachings: honesty, love, courage, truth, wisdom, humility and respect.*¹³⁵



While the process developed at CHCH focuses primarily on sexual abuse within the community, the writer believes it could also be very effectively applied to family violence and other situations of victimization. In *Mapping the Healing Journey*¹³⁶, the process used at CHCH was succinctly outlined:

¹³⁵ The Four Circles of Hollow Water, p. 118-119

¹³⁶ Mapping the Healing Journey, p. 28-30

1. Following the disclosure of abuse, an intervention team consisting of representatives of all the stakeholders conducts an initial investigation to determine the facts. The victim's story is recorded while their safety and ongoing support is ensured.
2. Once the allegations have been confirmed, the victimizer is confronted and charged. The power of both the law and the community is used to encourage the victimizer to take responsibility for their behaviour. Victimizer's are offered a choice to: a) plead guilty and be sentenced to probation requiring full co-operation with the healing process, or b) take their chances in court, with incarceration as the probable outcome.
3. If victimizers agree to the healing road, they then begin a three-to-five-year process, which results in restitution and reconciliation between the victimizer and the victim, the victim's family and the whole community.
4. The CHCH team requests a minimum of four months to assess the authenticity of the victimizer's commitment since many victimizers agree to take the healing option out of fear of going to jail.
5. Over the four-month period, victimizers are asked to undergo a process of looking deeply into themselves and breaking through the denial to admit what they have done and how their actions have hurt others. This process involves four circles:

- a. The first series of circles ask the victimizer to share what they have done. Often they try to avoid sharing details but eventually can admit to all that they have done. The goal is to help the victimizer become a healthy and productive community member.
- b. The second circle requires victimizers to tell their nuclear families what they have done, and to deal with the family's response.

- c. The third circle repeats the second circle process with the family of origin (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles etc.).
- d. The fourth circle is the sentencing circle. In this circle, victimizers must tell the whole community what they have done and the steps they have taken on the healing journey. CHCH maintain that if a person goes fully through all of these steps, they are convinced of the commitment to the healing process.

In all, the CHCH process for dealing with victimizers has thirteen steps:

- a. Disclosure
- b. Establishing safety for the victim
- c. Confronting the victimizer
- d. Supporting the spouse/parents of the victimizer
- e. Supporting the families that are affected
- f. A meeting between the assessment team and police
- g. Circles with the victimizer
- h. Circles with the victim and victimizer together
- i. Preparing the victim's family for the sentencing circle
- j. Preparing the victimizer's family for the sentencing circle
- k. A special gathering for the sentencing circle
- l. A sentencing review (after three years)
- m. A cleansing ceremony¹³⁷

This model does not only focus on the victimizer. Victims receive a great deal of care, love and skilled therapeutic attention to deal with the trauma of their abuse.

137 Mapping the Healing Journey p. 30

One of the unique features of the Hollow Water CHCH Model is how it brings the Canadian legal system into the circle of the community. Doing this creatively uses the justice system to help heal the community. There is also a strong emphasis on the ownership of the abuse and the accountability required of victimizers. Incarceration does not achieve this result, but restoring loving, caring relationships does.

The success of the Hollow Water program is reflected in the very low rates of recidivism in offenders who participate in the program. Of the 48 offenders who have been involved with Hollow Water at the time of the report, only 2 have been charged with subsequent sexual offences.¹³⁸ This works out to a rate of 4.2% compared to the 13% recidivism rate found by Corrections Canada in a study of sexual offenders who had gone through a mainstream process.

The real advantage of the Hollow Water program is its holistic basis which integrates the treatment of the offender, the victim, their families and the whole community. It is particularly effective because it operates within a small community.¹³⁹ To apply it to an urban setting would take some adaptation. The key of course would be to ensure the program operated from a holistic model that incorporated traditional healing.

The CHCH process has been used as a model for other communities who are addressing a range of issues. The next model discussed has adapted the CHCH model for their own community, also becoming very successful and earning the respect of the various arms of the justice system.

138 The Four Circles of Hollow Water, p. v

139 The Four Circles of Hollow Water, p. 84

Biidaaban: The Mnjikaning Community Healing Model

The Biidaaban Model was developed by the Mnjikaning community in response to disclosures of sexual abuse in the early 1990's. The program is based on the Hollow Water Model with adaptations that reflect the unique needs of this particular community.

The report reviewed on this program did not indicate that the program dealt specifically with family violence. However, a response to a situation that involves victimization may certainly be applied in a range of similar situations that also involve victimization. What follows is a summary of the Biidaaban history and process.

Following the disclosures by some young women of previous sexual abuse, a group of social workers and the band council's Human Services Committee mobilized the community to deal with its buried history and moved to initiate the project. In 1994, the community began to develop the project. The community undertook research and analysis to develop their own model and in 1996, a band council resolution was passed which formalized the protocols and structure of Biidaaban.¹⁴⁰

Traditional training was begun with staff and volunteers to assist them in recognizing how traditional teachings would fit in, guide and become the core of the evolving healing process. The group also worked on their own personal healing and growth to address issues from their own backgrounds.¹⁴¹ This was identified as a crucial step and is an ongoing part of the process. Healthy workers can better serve the clients who access their services.

140 Biidaaban: The Mjiikanning Community Healing Model, p. 33

141 Ibid.

Biidaaban has undergone a concerted effort to prove itself to the justice system. This has been accomplished through initiating discussions and training with police, probation, parole, the Crown and judges. Their passion for their work as well as their desire for a true partnership has led to a mutually respectful relationship between Biidaaban and the various arms of the justice system in their area. They began dealing with relatively minor justice cases such as misdemeanours but due to the respect they have garnered, are now involved with more serious cases such as sexual abuse.¹⁴²



The program and the community have earned the respect of the justice system as well as outside agencies. The community has benefited greatly from the healing process in place at Biidaaban.

142 Biidaaban: The Mnjikaning Community Healing Model, p. 34-35



Not only has the justice system found value in Biidaaban's work, those who have attended Community Gatherings have been powerfully affected by the healing power of the Circle. From family members of the person who has harmed, the one who has been harmed, to friends, relatives, community members, casino employees, police, probation officers, the Crown, lawyers – the list goes on. To each, something positive has occurred. Hearts have been opened, behaviours changed. Something personal happens, in some way, to each person who participates. In little or big ways a change occurs. The “ripples” of connectedness are holistically experienced – mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Just one person, who has begun his or her healing journey, also begins healing the community. As more and more heal, the community becomes more balanced. The healing ripples extend outward in larger and larger ever expanding circles. In the circular motion of the medicine wheel, the ripples continue to enlarge as they move outward. Pain is released, the ripples soften, the circles blend, healing occurs, the outer rim comes to rest with the water... the water calms; the community heals.¹⁴³



143 Ibid. p. 40

This statement clearly outlines the intrinsic value of a holistic approach to healing and the restoration of justice. Personal change impacts on each level of the social system within which every individual exists. This reflects the holistic philosophy imbedded in the medicine wheel. The success of the Biidaaban program is seen in the increasing numbers of disclosures of abuse as well as the lack of recidivism in offenders that have attended the program.

1. The Biidaaban process is presented in brief below:¹⁴⁴
2. There is a disclosure of abuse.
3. The Biidaaban coordinator arranges for protection of the victim, confronting of the victimizer, and support for families connected with the situation. There is a meeting of the circle/abuse validation process and decision. Each victim, offender and/or family has a designated support person.
4. The offender appears in court to take responsibility for his or her actions (plea)
5. The victim, offender and families are prepared for court.
6. At court, there is a meeting of the Biidaaban circle to review input from all parties and to prepare the healing contract.
7. There is a formal Gathering of the community which includes:
 - a. Traditional opening, Declaration of Purpose, Explanation of offence, Offender acceptance of charges and procedures.
 - b. Educational segment, Offender accepts responsibility, Family responds to offender

144 Biidaaban: The Mnjikaning Community Healing Model, p. 97

- c. Solutions/treatment plan is agreed to, Offender apologizes to victim and families agree to treatment plan, Ceremonial closure, Circle debriefing.
8. The Healing contract is implemented with steps of treatment outlined for victim, offender, and family members, which might include individual, group, family, couple counselling and/or traditional healing.

Biidaaban is involved in virtually every community activity and also uses a local newspaper to draw attention to these events. They also publish healing directed information that allows readers to take in information regarding abuse, stress, addiction or other unhealthy aspects of one's life. This vehicle builds awareness and trust which readies the individual to come forward for healing.

“Just” Therapy

Now let us take a look at an alternative therapy developed for Aboriginal people in New Zealand. This framework suggests that it is of utmost importance to take into account the multilevel factors that contribute to ongoing issues faced by Aboriginal people. While this model was developed as a model for therapy, this author believes that it has merit for application in the consideration of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal victims.

A team of Maori, Samoan and Takeha¹⁴⁵ therapists from New Zealand have developed a reflective approach to therapy that underscores the role of historical, social and economic factors in perpetuating ongoing “sicknesses” of indigenous people.

145 An Indigenous term for New Zealanders of European origin.

Just Therapy takes into account the impacts of colonization, marginalization and poverty, as well as social, political and economic inequities between men and women due to gender discrimination.



A Just Therapy is one that takes into account the gender, cultural, social and economic context of the persons seeking help. It is our view that therapists have a responsibility to find appropriate ways of addressing these issues, and developing approaches that are centrally concerned with the often forgotten issues of fairness and equity. Such therapy reflects themes of liberation that lead to self determining outcomes of resolution and hope.

Social Justice and Family Therapy: A Discussion of the Work of the Family Centre, Lower Hutt, New Zealand

Dulwich Centre Newsletter, No. 1, 1990



As do many other indigenous cultures, the peoples of New Zealand view the process of therapy as sacred. Stories of pain and suffering are considered “gifts that are worthy of honour”.

By listening respectfully and facilitating the search for new meanings, resolution and hope, therapists honour their clients’ pain.

In a *Just Therapy* model, new meanings or interpretations re-place a person’s clinical “symptoms” within a broader social and political context. Instead of experiencing overwhelming feelings of failure or helplessness, this approach encourages people to identify aspects of the problem that are beyond themselves.

Understanding the social and political context of people’s pain reduces feelings of self-blame and guilt that are often roadblocks to moving forward. This empowers people, when they are ready, to join with others in advocating for social change and ending injustice.

Therapists who are unaware of, or who deny, avoid or minimize the impacts of social and historical injustice “ensure ongoing self-depreciation and dependency” instead of empowerment.



The benchmark of a service provider’s commitment to social justice, is the extent to which its’ programming reflects themes of liberation, empowerment and cultural self-determination.

Social Justice and Family Therapy



What is being suggested here is the requirement for a holistic healing approach to the provision of services to Aboriginal people. It also highlights the crucial importance of ongoing education on the historical and current realities of Aboriginal peoples as part of that process of providing services.

Conclusions

It is clear that a holistic approach to family violence and victimization is the primary model used by Aboriginal communities to address issues of abuse and victimization. The examples provided strongly indicate the importance of including all of those affected by violence and victimization in the process of healing. In this way, we may return balance to individuals, families, and communities.

These models also strongly share a belief and practice in a team approach within healing agencies/organizations as well as between the agencies and the justice system. Another commonality which strengthens agencies and ensures quality service to clients is the recognition that team members must deal with their own healing prior to assisting others.

A number of communities in Canada who are involved actively in developing healing programs were asked about the lessons learned about healing and the healing journey. Some of those responses included the observations that:

- Healing cannot be confined to issues such as addictions, abuse or violence.
- Interventions and programs have the most impact when they take place within the context of a wider community development plan.
- Community healing requires personal, cultural, economic, political and social development initiatives woven together into a coherent, long-term, coordinated strategy.¹⁴⁶

The next section of this document will discuss further findings and suggestions for best practices in this area.



146 Mapping the Healing Journey, p. 43

Recommendations for Best Practices

We have discussed the history of Aboriginal peoples and how that history has contributed to the high incidence of victimization and violence in Aboriginal communities. We have also reviewed some of the current programs developed by Aboriginal peoples to address these issues in their communities. The next section will explore some recommendations for best practices in the provision of victim's services for Aboriginal people extrapolated from the material reviewed as well as suggestions from other sources.

Common Features

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation conducted a survey of thirteen community-based programs related to family violence and abuse. Following the survey, general observations regarding the scope and nature of the programs reviewed were published in *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada*.

A primary focus of all but one of the programs was to ensure the safety of victims of abuse and family violence.¹⁴⁷ Another study of promising healing practices identifies the establishing of safety as a prerequisite to healing from any trauma. This safety includes ensuring both physical and emotional safety while providing services in a setting that reflects the culture and traditions of all participants.¹⁴⁸

The majority of programs also provide emergency shelter, healing, and empowerment through counselling and mutual support, and referral to other resources/agencies as required. It was also noted that the majority of the programs recognized the importance of cultural teachings in the involvement of Elders and the use of traditional healing as an essential foundation of the work.¹⁴⁹ Cultural interventions have been identified as one of the three pillars of healing for Aboriginal victims of abuse in residential schools¹⁵⁰

Many of the agencies surveyed recognized the need for service in certain areas but due to funding shortages, understaffing or lack of resources, were unable to offer services in all areas. These needs include but are not limited to: longer-term support for victims of abuse through second-stage or transition housing; life skills or employment training; addressing the healing and learning needs of children and youth who have witnessed or experienced violence; reaching out to communities through public awareness campaigns, prevention services and follow-up activities for victims and offenders.¹⁵¹

Many of the programs have found inter-agency collaboration to be useful in providing services that are needed but otherwise unavailable. This collaboration includes such agencies as substance abuse treatment counsellors, mental health workers, child protection services, police and primary health providers. A minority of the programs surveyed provided training or sensitization to these other frontline service providers.

147 *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada*, p. 74

148 *Promising Healing Practices in Aboriginal Communities*, p. 13

149 *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada*, p. 75.

150 *Promising Healing Practices in Aboriginal Communities*, p. 13

151 *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada*, p. 75

The programs that focus on building healthy individuals, families, and communities rather than focussing on the immediate effects of abuse seem to have a greater impact on community norms and values and also enjoy a broader base of support in the community.¹⁵² This would seem to support the idea that engaging in prevention of abuse may be more effective than the current practice of reacting to abuse after it has occurred.

Comprehensive approaches to working with men around the issue of violence have yet to be incorporated by the majority of programs surveyed. Several programs offer men's circles and other limited services such as one-on-one counselling. Some programs have experimented with anger management programs and men's circles but are struggling to find an effective approach for their communities.¹⁵³

In discussions with some service providers in the city of Ottawa, the primary difficulty in the provision of services to men involved with abuse is ensuring the feeling of safety for victims who may be accessing the same facility for support and assistance. There is as yet no clear answer to this dilemma.

The survey of service providers found also that the type of funding made available through various sources has shaped programming aimed at addressing family violence and abuse. Funding has enabled the establishment of shelters for women and child victims of abuse but this is only one part of the equation if you are attempting to look at this issue in a holistic manner.

152 Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 76
153 Ibid.

Without funding incentives, other aspects of the work, such as services for men, long-term services for families and prevention/education for communities have been slow to get off the ground.¹⁵⁴ According to Lane, Bopp and Bopp, the primary conclusion to be drawn from their study of current responses to Aboriginal family violence and abuse is:



*The types of programs that now exist reflect the type of funding that is available. What is now needed is a paradigm shift related to funding for Aboriginal family violence and abuse. Nothing less than a dramatic shift in orientation will make it possible for Aboriginal communities to take on the full range of inter-related challenges that must be addressed if the emerging human tragedy, which is now being incubated within abusive Aboriginal families, is to be averted.*¹⁵⁵



154 Ibid
155 Ibid. p. 81

Suggestions for Best Practices

The aforementioned study of fifteen Aboriginal agencies providing services related to the issue of family violence and abuse also provided some observations on the key lessons, successes and barriers to success. In 2004, another study provided some insight, arising from interviews with Aboriginal service providers on the key components of Aboriginal based family violence intervention programs.¹⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, these two separate studies have made many similar conclusions. These conclusions are also consistent with other findings.

Recommendation Number One: *Recognize the importance of the involvement of Elders and the use of traditional teachings and ceremonies for both healing and advocacy.* Most of the programs reviewed make use of traditional teachings and incorporate the experience and wisdom of the Elders into their programs. The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health also recognizes the importance of culture in healing and wellness and supports the idea that traditional teachings modeled by the Elders transmit the values of respect and sharing to clients in a variety of ways. Ceremony is a crucial part of any healing program, which enables victims to find their voices and assists Aboriginal people in reclaiming their Aboriginal identity. The use of ceremonies and increased understanding of history and traditions provides a secure base from which individuals and families may begin healing.

156 Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program, p. 9

Recommendation Number Two: *Education of both the clients and the public are essential program components.* Victims and all family members need a healthier understanding of self and family. This would be accomplished in two ways; Firstly, the program should include recognition of the historical dimensions of family issues for Aboriginal people. Education that compares Aboriginal family and community life both before and after contact with Europeans would provide insight into current behaviour patterns.¹⁵⁷

It is important to understand fully where we have come from before we look at where we are going. The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health actively promotes this type of community education which is built into every program. The second aspect of this educational program should include knowledge and skill components that focus on power dynamics. Family members would be provided with education and traditional teachings that assist them in understanding that they each have power that, used in a healthy way, promotes and maintains balance and harmony between family members.¹⁵⁸

One of the biggest challenges is to change the norms and beliefs in the community so that violence is no longer considered acceptable. This change may only be brought about through education, whether that takes place in schools, homes, talking circles or community gatherings. This sort of legacy education has also been recognized as one of three pillars of healing in a study of promising healing practices in Aboriginal communities.¹⁵⁹

157 Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program, p. 9

158 Ibid.

159 Promising Healing Practices in Aboriginal Communities: A summary of research findings., p. 13

Recommendation Number Three:

Networking with other social service agencies is crucial to ensure that victim's needs are being met. For the most part, the primary focus of networking is to provide better services for meeting the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of families in crisis. The difficult challenge of transforming the root causes of family violence and abuse still remains outside the current scope of most Aboriginal agencies that are attempting to respond to the issue of family violence and abuse.¹⁶⁰

Family violence programs need to operate as a “hub” for clients to access services in a streamlined manner. Fragmentation of service delivery can be an issue for victims who are attempting to navigate the ins and outs of multiple systems such as legal, justice, health and various other social services.¹⁶¹ The development and maintenance of working relationships with other agencies can also foster mutual understanding and respect between partners.

Recommendation Number Four: *Skilled, self-aware program staff.* Consistency is important both in terms of maintaining a low turnover as well as consistency in approach by program staff. It is crucial that all staff have dealt with their own issues. Although clients may more readily identify with staff who have “been there”, having “been there” has consequences that must not be overlooked.¹⁶²

160 Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 75

161 Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program, p. 7

162 Ibid. p. 6

Staff members need to have appropriate formal training and relevant life experience which has led them to serve for the love of the people and not just for the salary. The personal integrity and compassion of the workers, the trust and love manifested by all staff is essential.¹⁶³ Many Aboriginal people feel more comfortable dealing with Aboriginal service providers. It provides a place of common understanding and creates a sense of comfort and belonging that would usually be lacking in mainstream agencies. A capacity to heal is therefore reflected and role modelled for the community.

Recommendation Number Five: *A solid administrative structure to support programs and staff in “getting the job done”.* A family violence program needs to be one component of a larger agency. The agency providing service needs to have a healthy infrastructure, honest intentions and Aboriginal administration. There needs to be a clear understanding of program limitations and there also needs to be adequate screening and comprehensive reporting procedures.¹⁶⁴

There is more to a solid administrative structure than simply good management. An Aboriginal family violence program should be part of a broader service delivery system in which victims and their families could access services that might fall outside the mandate of that particular program. A sound agency administrative structure is responsive to and facilitates easy access and movement between services for program clients.¹⁶⁵

163 Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 77

164 Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program, p. 5

165 Ibid. p. 6

Recommendation Number Six: *Secure multi-year funding for programs.*

Coordinating funding from both provincial and federal sources presents a somewhat distracting challenge to agencies and diverts energy that could be better used to serve client's needs. Funding should also be sufficient to meet staff training needs and to also offer them reasonable terms. Consistent funding speaks to the need for long-term investment in the community. This type of support filters down to clients with the message that the program will be there for them to follow-up as needed.¹⁶⁶

Short-term interventions in some ways can do more harm than good; setting clients up in a situation that opens them up then shuts them down before their healing is complete. Individuals, families and communities need support over the long haul. This type of long-term support has been sorely lacking to date.

Recommendation Number Seven:

Programs must be multi-dimensional. This means that men, women and children may be served separately and, as appropriate, together. Individual, parent-child, couples, family and/or group counselling are necessary options depending on the motives and readiness of clients. Traditional teachings and ceremonies need to be tailored to individual and family needs with Western content included as necessary.¹⁶⁷

Many of the programs currently in operation to address Aboriginal family violence and abuse integrate both traditional teachings and Western content with good success. Each individual, family and community has different needs and will respond to different combinations of healing and therapy. An effective program is flexible to meet those needs.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 7

¹⁶⁷ Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program, p. 10

Recommendation Number Eight: *Ongoing community consultation.* Program staff and developers need to listen carefully to the community about what the needs and realities are and what makes a real difference.¹⁶⁸ At the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health community consultation is built into every program as it develops as well as in the evaluation phase. This has enabled the centre to respond appropriately to community needs as they arise. Other Aboriginal healing programs have also made good use of this ongoing community consultation and, in fact, many programs have arisen out of a community commitment to make a lasting change.

The findings of these studies are not restricted to those documents alone. In the review of programs for this manual, similar themes and recommendations have been stated categorically or referred to in the practice of the agencies. These are our best practices; they are what we need to ensure that the needs of our people are being met. Some of these recommendations are not yet a reality for us, such as secure long-term core funding for programs. Identifying that this is a need for best practices is a step towards making that best practice a reality.

Conclusion

The authors of "Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program" summarized the findings of their study in a very culturally appropriate way through the teachings of Grandfather Tree. We will conclude with those teachings:

¹⁶⁸ Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada, p. 77

Grandfather Tree's roots are placed deep within Mother Earth. These roots must be strong to sustain the pressure that exists above ground, laying a healthy foundation so that Grandfather Tree grows toward the sky. Likewise, essential components like sound administration and secure funding must exist as a foundation or root for First Nations programming. Strength is built from the ground up to ensure that a program can withstand the many issues clients and staff bring to a program. A sound administration ensures accountability, which increases funding potential.



Grandfather Tree's trunk provides a direct path for information and medicine to flow through the roots toward its many branches. Qualified staff, personal and family awareness, and education are essential medicines that strengthen the path toward the provision of effective services. We can only walk as far as we ourselves have healed. Professionals who have moved from family violence victim to service provider possess a gift that is meant to be shared if it is done within a circle of self-care. Links with other community organizations is also a necessary component, allowing programs and clients access to a circle of safety and support. We must nurture and feed our community connections much like we ensure that Grandfather Tree is fed and cared for.

*Roots with a solid foundation give way to a healthy trunk, which gives birth to branches that burst and stretch forth toward Grandfather Sun. Each branch is unique in its design and direction. Likewise, essential components of a family violence program must include a multidimensional approach that is grounded in the traditional teachings of each community. These components include the reality that children; family members; and if safety permits, the abusive partner can move and grow toward healthy change. Healthy branches give birth to many more, creating a multitude of support for the entire tree. A program cannot effectively address healing and change unless it reflects the voices of the Elders and the community it seeks to serve.*¹⁶⁹

The primary message in all of the programs and literature reviewed has been the importance of culture in healing for Aboriginal people. Culture sits at the centre of who we are as a people. It is the key to reclaiming our identity which has been lost through the process of colonization. Reclaiming our identity, returning to who we are as a people will allow us to heal from the effects of colonization as individuals, families and communities. Our nations will become strong and we will reclaim our place on Turtle Island as a whole people.



169 Components of an Aboriginal-based Family Violence Intervention Program, p. 10-11

Some Guidelines for Aspects of Best Practices: Aboriginal Healing Techniques

Healing as Sacred: Stories, Dreams, Dance, Drum & Ceremony

This section provides a brief introduction to Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices that are used to restore and maintain physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.¹⁷⁰

In Aboriginal cultures, individual health and healing is integral to a balanced family and community life. In this context, healing is a group process involving all those who are impacted by an individual's dis-ease, whether of the mind, body, heart or spirit.

The Elders teach that, if a problem is due to ignorance, meaning the person lacks the knowledge or skills required for balanced relationships or a balanced life, the situation requires teachings. If the person possesses the knowledge and skills, but the problem persists, the situation requires healing.

Through Elders, traditional healers and cultural teachers, these beliefs and customs live on whether in remote, rural or urban Aboriginal communities.



Traditional teachings have always included behaviour modification, cognitive therapy and narrative therapy. Our children learned through the stories of the Elders, making the connections from the stories to their own life journeys.

Eastern Ontario Trauma Retreat Participant, 2000



¹⁷⁰ For further information, contact the Aboriginal Cultural Centre nearest you.

Circle Theory and Process

Indigenous people worldwide use the structure of the circle for council meetings, spiritual ceremonies, healing, sharing and teaching.

The circle is holistic in that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and each voice is valued and respected; what one individual shares in the circle is equally as important as any other.

In many indigenous cultures, silence indicates respect; therefore full participation requires an understanding of both oral and aural functions.

When a person shares in the circle, there is no interruption. Non-interference and the value of holistic listening are paramount.

According to Inuit Elder Meeka Arnakaq, holistic listening means to actively and with empathy listen with the heart, the mind, the body and the spirit.



Everyone has their time to speak; even children were asked for their opinions.

Listening was a major characteristic in Native society. Everyone honoured the speaker because they wanted to have the same attention when they spoke.

Seneca Elder Twylah Hurd Nitsch
In the Words of the Elders



Healing Circles

When used in healing, the function of the circle is to re-connect individuals with the parts of themselves that have been injured and to connect with others through a process of voluntary, personal, mutual disclosure.

Sharing circles allow everyone to actively participate as teachers as well learners: to be healed as well as to heal. The most sacred teachings are those that arise out of the collective insights of those who fully participate in the circle in a good way.

Smudging

Smudging is a sacred ritual using smoke from burning medicine such as sage, sweetgrass, cedar or tobacco, to cleanse people, places, food and objects.

When used to cleanse people, a smudge is usually led by an Elder or traditional teacher who may have a helper or may engage one of the participants to assist. Smudging is used to dispel negative energy, creating an opening for positive, healing energy and to ground oneself.

Depending on the preference of the Elder or traditional teacher, elements such as fire and water may be placed in the centre of the circle to help participants stay focused.

Once everyone has smudged, the burning medicine may be placed in the centre of the circle. Fire in the centre of a circle symbolically connects participants to their inner sacred fire and to the collective sacred fire.



Prayer/Giving Thanks

Prayer is a ritual reminder of our most deeply held principles and convictions and is one way of communicating with the creative spirit of the universe. For many First Nations “the words that come before all else”¹⁷¹ are important ritual openings for gatherings of people. Once everyone has been smudged, an Elder or traditional person may offer up an expression of thankfulness and hope for the gifts of creation, affirming for those within the Circle, their shared commitment to speaking in a good way. For Inuit, openings and closings can also take the form of drumming and/or song.

Sacred Items

Traditional people and Elders often use sacred objects such as an eagle feather or talking stick to guide circle process. The sacred object may be passed from person to person around the circle or placed in the centre of the circle to be picked up by the next person wishing to speak. Some examples of other sacred objects used in ceremonies are the drum, pipe, drumstick, and rattle.

171 Mohawk Elder Paul Skanks and Ojibwe educator Sally Gaikexheyongai speak of these teachings.

Sacred Medicines

The most sacred of medicines, tobacco, sage, sweetgrass and cedar are used in traditional ceremonies and for healing as well as in everyday life. Tobacco is offered to express thanks or to ask for help in a good or respectful way. Like the three other sacred medicines, it is also used in ceremonies and teachings to cleanse, purify, calm and protect.

Dreams

Dreams occupy an important place in Aboriginal customs. It is believed that dreams provide significant information about our past as well as our future, including warnings of impending misfortune or needs that must be fulfilled to promote healing.

On a community level, dreams guide the planning of feasts, the choreography of dances, the message of songs, the design of costume and regalia and the rules of games.

When used in healing, dream imagery provides insights about each person's life path and the spirit guides who are there to help on that journey.

Sweat Lodge

For many Aboriginal people the foundational remedy for maintaining and restoring health is the cleansing and purification ceremony known as the sweat or smoke lodge. Sweats are conducted in sacred lodges, constructed in a traditional dome-shape representing the womb of Mother Earth.

During the sweat ceremony, the vapours of medicines such as cedar and steam restore strength and promote healing by cleansing the body, mind, heart and spirit.

Ceremonies

Ceremony is used the world over to mark important life and community transitions. Some Aboriginal people believe ceremonies have the power to strengthen the body's ability to fight disease and the ability of the mind and heart to move from suffering to joy.

Aboriginal cultures are rich with ceremonies designed to build strength, restore balance and promote healing. These include but are not limited to, seasonal celebrations such as the Sundance, Strawberry festival, and Green Corn festival as well as Medicine Walks, Feasts/Give-Aways, Welcoming Ceremonies for Newborns, and Naming, and Death ceremonies.



Lighting of the Qulliq

A qulliq is a boat-shaped soapstone lamp that burns oil and cotton as fuel for its flame. For millennia, Inuit used the oil of sea mammals such as whale or seal and a cotton-like material harvested from plants as a wick. The flame and warmth of the qulliq were the only source of light during the dark months of northern winters.



Although for convenience, the materials have changed to cooking oil and cotton, the Lighting of the Qulliq has become an important ceremony for contemporary Inuit. It is lit at the start of most community events to symbolically reconnect Inuit of today with life in the past and to honour the spirit and wisdom of the ancestors.

Dance

In Inuit, Métis and First Nations cultures, dance is a form of non-verbal expression that defines and strengthens at a personal level while also honouring connections with community. Drum dancing is a central feature of Inuit gatherings and ceremonies, Métis jigs are performed at “revallions” and dance is a central feature of First Nations Powwows and Sunrise ceremonies.



Each dance carries its own unique meaning expressed through the dancing style and song as well as design of the clothing worn for it. For First Nations, dance is also a way of honouring people who are ill or have passed on.

Vision Quest

The vision quest is a highly personal ceremony and an integral part of the process of self-reflection and self-understanding. In many cultures, vision quests are an important developmental ritual for both boys and girls at adolescence. Thereafter it is part of a lifelong process of learning, balance and growth.

Fasting

Fasting usually takes place each spring and fall to help seek new direction in life by shedding old or negative energy and replenishing positive energy. Fasting may take place in the woods, a fasting lodge or on a vision quest.

Silence

Whether for communications or in healing, silence is a traditional skill highly respected, especially among Inuit who have the longest pause times of any other culture. According to some Aboriginal counsellors and group facilitators, speaking too much or too quickly may undermine trust. While silence is considered a form of healing in itself, it also affirms the value and importance of non-verbal forms of communication.

Seven Sacred Gifts or Teachings

A fundamental belief underlying most Aboriginal spirituality is that everyone was given gifts from the Creator at birth to use as medicine for the mind, body, heart and spirit. These sacred gifts are **Respect, Humility, Courage, Honesty, Truth, Wisdom and Love.**

Each gift comes with a teaching that offers direction and guidance in finding balance and purpose in life by:

- accepting who we are,
- understanding our responsibilities, and
- doing as we ought to the best of our abilities.



Teachings are the wisdom that arise out of the collective insights of other people, not the singular insights of one person, although one person can enhance the wisdom of the collective.

Mac Saulis,

Mi'kmaq Professor of Social Work



Art

In oral cultures, art is the primary means through which ideas, emotions, hopes and dreams are communicated. In Inuit, Métis and First Nations cultures, the colour and design of beadwork, quilts and other crafts is carefully chosen to express a specific meaning or purpose.

Artistic expression is an important, non-verbal method of communication and most Aboriginal arts and crafts are created in a group setting. As such, art has an important role in healing through relationship and community building. Art inspired by vision quests is also considered an integral part of balanced mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being.

Humour and Play

Humour and play for both adults and children was integral to good physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, especially during the long winter months of confinement. One example is an Inuit game where one person tries to make the others laugh while remaining completely impassive. Other games include lacrosse, lawn darts (played with shucked green corn) and high kicking.

Story Telling

Traditional stories are a lens through which Aboriginal people recall and honour the past, understand the present and envision the future. They are the primary method for teaching children the complexities of an indigenous philosophy or worldview. Anishinaabe people distinguish between two types of stories or legends: *tabatacamowin* are anecdotes or narratives about exceptional experiences while *atiso'kanak* are the sacred stories of the ancestors.

The Wisdom of Traditional Healing Ways

As the modern world struggles with increasingly complex health problems such as cancer, AIDS and mental illness, greater attention is being focused on “alternative” healing methods. Some contemporary healing practices that borrow from traditional Aboriginal teachings and customs include the following.

1. Holism:

The importance of a holistic approach to health is becoming more common and most self-help books now offer a range of healing strategies encompassing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. They also emphasize the key roles of family and community supports in fighting disease.

Recent cancer research has proven the effectiveness of positive healing imagery in promoting healing as well as managing the emotional, mental and spiritual distress induced by a major illness. Using strategies that help the mind to heal the body and the body to heal the mind are now considered crucially important complementary therapies to chemotherapy and radiation.

The role of physical exertion in restoring mental health is also gaining new attention. Researchers at Duke University Medical Centre found that exercising 3 times per week for 4 months was just as effective as Zoloft, a depression medication; and after another 6 months, there was less likelihood of relapse. This study also concluded that physical exercise is more potent than a pill because “people felt a greater sense of achievement, a sense of being in control and of mastering something”.

2. Art and Dance Therapy

“New” forms of so-called alternative therapies such as art and dance therapy are now accepted in the mainstream health system as legitimate, non-verbal strategies for expressing repressed emotions.

3. Relationships and Connectedness

There is increasing recognition that healthy, growth-fostering relationships are the fundamental human requirement for a healthy life. The therapeutic relationship has become an important model for helping Survivors move away from unhealthy patterns of interaction to relations based on trust, empowerment and mutual respect.

4. Dream Therapy

Dream management is a popular contemporary strategy for furthering self-awareness as well as trauma recovery, especially for Survivors experiencing post-traumatic nightmares as a symptom of PTSD. Imagery from nightmares is now understood as the brain's way of processing repressed or dissociated memories; therefore accessing and understanding dream imagery, can be a key to recovery.

Traditional Healers Today

The De dwa da dehs nyes Aboriginal Health Centre has produced the following guide for Traditional healers.

Medicine People: consider themselves channels or mediums in healing work. They diagnose and treat a full range of spiritual, mental, emotional and physical problems using the pipe, drum, rattles and other sacred objects. Treatment plans can include ceremonies such as sweat lodges or fasting, offerings, feasts, and traditional plant medicines.

Elders: have knowledge of traditional teachings and model living in a Good Way. They transmit the teachings and values in sweat lodge and other ceremonies, teaching and healing circles, and individual or group consultations and/or counselling sessions.

Herbalists: know the traditional uses of a variety of medicinal plants. They often work in conjunction with medicine people, seers, or medical doctors.

Traditional Teachers: may be “Elders in Training” who know the traditional teachings and are committed to sharing this knowledge for the good of the people. They may conduct ceremonies, and will work in conjunction with medicine people.

Seers: are able to look into the past and future of a person to identify problems that need attention. They may suggest ceremonies to be carried out or refer to a medicine person or medical practitioner.

Ceremonialists: are people who do certain types of ceremonies on request and know the songs and protocols for conducting the ceremonies.

Traditional Midwives: know the traditional teachings for bringing new life into the world and the ceremonies required. They work with the woman during pregnancy, labour, childbirth and for a period of time after.

Who is an Elder?

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation describes an Elder as “...someone who is considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture and the teachings of the Great Spirit. They are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, their humour and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation. The community looks to them for guidance and sound judgement. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labours and experiences with others in the community” (Program Handbook, 3rd Edition, 2001:4).

Aboriginal services and communities rely on the proven wisdom and cultural knowledge of Elders for guidance. Examples of what one Aboriginal health service considers essential qualities in an Elder are as follows.

1. Disciplined and committed to a lifetime of learning.
2. Knows traditional teachings; committed to helping people within this framework.
3. Physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually healthy.
4. Born with, or seeks the gift of healing in apprenticeship with a traditional healer.
5. Walk their talk, i.e., lives a healthy lifestyle within the parameters of traditional values.
6. Provides help when asked, although may not provide this help immediately.
7. Able to bring traditional values and life ways into contemporary urban life and living in a practical way.
8. Treats their family, spouse, children, parents, Elders and other traditional healers in a respectful and caring manner.
9. Is a positive role model for Aboriginal people.
10. Able to teach and correct behaviour with kindness and respect without humiliating the individual.
11. Always hopeful of people and able to see the goodness in people.
12. Does not use alcohol or drugs or engage in other destructive addictive behaviour.
13. Does not set a fee for their healing service or request gifts in payment.
14. Know the medicines and ceremonies.
15. Evidence of their success exists among the people and the communities.

The Continued Relevance of a Culture-Based Approach to Healing

Although colonization interrupted the passing along of traditional teachings and practices, Indigenous people worldwide are now making significant strides toward reclaiming and revitalizing them.

Non-Aboriginal counsellors and therapists must be open to seeking guidance from respected Aboriginal Elders and traditional people and to referring Aboriginal clients to culturally-based services as needed.

By definition, culturally-based approaches to healing:

- are holistic;
- include a central role for Elders and traditional people;
- use the structure of the circle and outdoor physical settings,
- include traditional teachings and medicines, storytelling, and ceremony.

In process of revitalizing traditional customs, some Aboriginal people and communities choose spiritual beliefs and teachings that predate the arrival of Christian religions.

Others choose to integrate their traditional customs and beliefs with Christianity. Personal choice in these matters should be the central guiding principle.

The wisdom and teachings of Elders and Traditional Teachers visiting or living in Ottawa contributed to this section including: Dr. Terry Tafoya, Dr. Mac Saulis, Jim Albert, Irene Lindsay, Angaangaq, Reepa Evic-Carleton and Paul Skanks.

Some Guidelines for Aspects of Best Practices: Working with Clients to Promote Safety and Prevent Re-Victimization

The material in this section is included to as a guide for service providers who wish to respond to Aboriginal clients needs. It is hoped that the preceding information in this manual has provided valuable background information and that this next section will solidify the connection between knowledge and practice.

Cultural accountability and prevention of re-victimization were recurring themes at the 2000 retreat for Aboriginal frontline workers and Elders. In the view of those who contributed to this manual, there are several important aspects of cultural accountability crucial to trauma recovery in the context of residential abuse that are important for helping people recover from family violence.

They include:

- the capacity to communicate respect in ways that have meaning for Inuit, Métis and First Nation people;
- a non-judgemental attitude;
- warmth and flexibility vs. rigidity or institutional indifference;
- empathy, and
- a tolerance for ambiguity.

Effective communication skills (both verbal and non-verbal) and sensitivity to the needs, values, aspirations and ways of Aboriginal people are essential.

Because trust building is so crucial a first step in healing, counsellors and frontline workers must understand the importance of building relationships slowly and informally, in incremental stages.

Direct or personal questions should not be asked too quickly at the onset of a counselling relationship. Before any explicit questions are asked and before the issue of abuse is even addressed, the counsellor must foster an atmosphere of safety and hope.

Once the counsellor understands the client's basic reason for seeking help and has a sense of his or her unique conversational pace, more probing questions can be posed.

Unconditional compassion, moving slowly and softly, and staying centred and strong outside of the client's chaos, all help to build trust in the relationship. Only when trust has been achieved, can the counsellor/helper and client begin to explore issues of safety and risk management.

Helping to Prepare Clients for the Criminal Justice System

Victims who are thinking about using the courts to address family violence issues need practical information about the legal system and their options as well as emotional support through the process.

People who have not been involved with the criminal justice system are often surprised by the acrimony and injustice they encounter there. Victims need to be aware the western criminal justice system is based on an adversarial approach to winning and losing; therefore the role of the defence is to discredit and disprove their testimony. Many victims report feeling humiliated, shamed and re-victimized, by their experience within this justice system.

Victims need to be prepared for the sense of powerlessness they might feel in this process. Telling one's story over and over again, especially to unsympathetic listeners, requires great courage and resilience. Victims will need help identifying a range of supports before, during and after legal procedures.

Helping Prepare Clients for Psychiatric Intervention and/or Institutionalization

Even though the rate of suicide is significantly higher in the Aboriginal population, there are at present, no culturally-based psychiatric facilities available. As a result, many clients are unintentionally re-victimized in the process of seeking help.

Re-victimization in this context can take many forms: a rigid, institutional setting with many rules replicates the institutional indifference of the residential school environment.

Procedures used by psychiatric personnel to subdue clients, such as forcible restraint and solitary confinement evoke memories of force and restraints used against children who tried to escape from the residential schools.

Frontline workers and counsellors must work in partnership with psychiatric services to create new procedures that do not re-victimize clients. The clients, especially those who are unsafe due to aggression as a result of solvent abuse or psychotic episodes must be partners in developing these procedures. This empowers victims to take a more proactive role in managing their own healing.

Family members or friends of victims who are experiencing the impacts of their destructive behaviours also need practical information and ongoing support. Many Aboriginal friends and family members report being ignored and feeling helpless in the course of accessing psychiatric services for their loved ones.

Information about the stages of depression, suicide ideation or addiction withdrawal and the characteristics that define each stage is crucial to involving clients and their friends/family in the healing process.

As well, families and victims need specific information such as who to telephone in an emergency and what the process will be from that point on, what to expect from assessment, intake, and hospitalization procedures, what the timelines might be and how they can best support their loved ones throughout the process.

Helping to Prepare Addicted or Solvent Abusing Clients for Detoxification

Aboriginal frontline workers and counsellors have been strong advocates for culturally-based addictions and detoxification services. If culturally-specific services are not available in your area, the following general guidelines are suggested¹⁷² to help bridge Aboriginal clients to mainstream services.

172 Provided by the Addictions Case Manager for the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Ottawa.

Do's

- ✓ Do ensure the client is fully aware of the process to which they are agreeing by informing yourself about all aspects of the service. Tour the facility, talk to the staff, and create formal, interagency case management and follow-up mechanisms.
- ✓ Do your best to convey that the client is safe and you are trustworthy.
- ✓ Do your best to assess the needs of the client vs. your own needs or the agency's needs. Include as many of the resources at your disposal as possible in client evaluation and planning.
- ✓ Do continue to provide emotional and practical supports to the client as needed.
- ✓ Do show you value the client's humanity, remembering we are all the same people.
- ✓ Do instil a sense of pride in the clients as they continue their healing work in partnership with you and staff of the detox/treatment centres.

Don't

- ✓ Don't ever put a client below you in esteem or worth.
- ✓ Don't enable a client with money or material objects.
- ✓ Don't pass on to other workers or agencies your responsibility to a client. Foster a team approach that includes the client and shared responsibility for outcomes.
- ✓ Don't assume you best know a client's needs.
- ✓ Don't do everything for the client. Provide practical support and assistance but promote skills that build self-reliance and encourage inter-dependence and mutual help.

Frontline workers and counsellors who are new to working with addicted or substance abusing clients need to make themselves aware of the differences between detoxification centres and drug/alcohol treatment centres.

Preparing for Detoxification

Detoxification is required when the person is experiencing severe physical sickness such as convulsions, profuse sweating, vomiting (dry heaves), tremors and/or hallucinations. For clients in this condition, and depending on the available services in your area, the following are presented as general procedural steps.

1. Contact a medical practitioner such as a community nurse or family physician for assistance.
2. If a medical practitioner is not available, contact the nearest detox centre or hospital. In many rural communities, hospitals provide this service.
3. Make the client as comfortable as possible under the circumstances by providing limited amounts of water, mainly for rinsing. Try to discourage too much intake. Provide a cold compress and rest in a quiet, dimly lit room.
4. Ensure the client is near to a toilet facility or provide an appropriate container for vomiting.
5. Do not provide any medication such as aspirin, Pepto-Bismol or Gravol without professional guidance.
6. Remain calm and reassuring that everything will be okay.

7. Relay all pertinent information to the detox centre or hospital and any persons who will be in contact with the client. At this time include any information specific to cultural needs such as smudging or access to Elders while in the detox centre.
8. Make arrangements for travel to the detox centre or hospital.
9. If the client agrees by signing a release of information agreement, contact a trusted friend or family member of the client to inform them of her/his whereabouts and plans.
10. Request information about joint case management options and follow-up concerning client outcomes.
11. Provide a written report to your supervisor detailing the steps you have taken as well as the contact people's names, roles and telephone numbers.

Preparing for Addiction Treatment Centre Application

The following guidelines may be beneficial to counsellors or frontline workers who are new to their positions or have not fully accompanied a client through the treatment process. They are offered as general guidelines only and should be adjusted based on individual needs and available services.

1. Obtain copies of the "Canadian Directory of Substance Abuse Services" and the Directory of the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP). These directories provide an overview of treatment options as well as criteria for entrance/restrictions.

2. To the best of your ability, identify the services in your area you believe will be most beneficial to your clients. Contact these services and ask for copies of their application forms to have on hand. Take this opportunity to introduce yourself and to talk about your position and the needs of your clients.
3. Schedule a time and safe place with your client to assess treatment needs.
4. Considering your contacts and the services you have identified as being the most appropriate for your clients, present a range of treatment options for the client to consider.
5. Schedule another appointment in a safe place to fill out the application and/or referral forms with the client.
6. Ensure all application forms are COMPLETE. Incomplete application forms will delay services for your client.
7. Should your client or staff of the centre have questions or concerns, try to make sure your client is always part of the discussion. This way everyone concerned is clear about what is being stated and there is less chance of miscommunication or misunderstanding.
8. Make sure the decision of the client to enter the treatment service is based on full and informed consent.
9. Ensure all articles a client will need while in treatment are available. Most centres provide a list of what to/not to bring.
10. Once you have received confirmation of acceptance, inform your client immediately so preparations to enter may begin.
11. Arrange for travel and/or accommodation as required.

12. During any waiting period, begin weekly counselling sessions with your client and/or inform them of other options such as Alcoholic's Anonymous, men's or women's talking circles, cultural events, workshops etc.
13. Once the client is in treatment, and with the client's written consent, contact the family to see if any assistance is required. Be prepared to offer options and bridge family members to appropriate services for women, children or seniors.
14. Make contact with the treatment centre on a weekly basis for updates on your client's progress. Ask for a role in case management and coordination as well as follow-up plans to reduce the likelihood of relapse.
15. Review all client goal plans and identify areas where you can best provide support and those areas where the client will benefit most from referral to another service.
16. Celebrate the client's courage and commitment to a healing path.

Helping to Prepare Clients for Linkage to Elders and/or Traditional Healers

Cultural reclamation through linkage to cultural supports is a foundational principle of accountability in effective healing work with Aboriginal people.

What Cultural Reclamation Means

1. Reclaiming cultural pride and the identity that was stolen from individuals, families and nations.
2. Revitalizing the wisdom of traditional teachings, customs and practices.

3. Respecting and honouring the roles of all: women and men, children, Elders and gay/lesbian/Two-Spirit people; ensuring a place of belonging for all.
4. Reclaiming ceremony and celebrations of our survival.
5. Reclaiming a nation-to-nation relationship in political life.

Cultural reclamation as a healing strategy helps transform the pain of disconnection and humiliation into pride, honour and strength.

Aboriginal organizations have a responsibility to ensure the spiritual teachers and guides they recommend are safe for clients. The increasing uses of "traditional medicines" or drugs to induce visions, as well as openly discriminatory attitudes toward gay/lesbian/2-Spirit people among some traditional healers/Elders are considered forms of re-victimization.

The following guidelines were developed by the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in Ottawa (2000) to protect clients from re-victimization.

1. A thorough screening and reference check (including police check) should be conducted for each Elder or traditional healer brought into the organization as a resource for clients.
2. Elders and traditional people should be screened for sensitivity to client needs, and should have extensive experience with residential school Survivors.
3. A helper should be provided to assist and be present at all times to ensure the safety of clients as well as Elders and traditional people. The helper should also be knowledgeable about safety precautions relating to Survivors.

4. In a holistic healing model, Elders and traditional people are part of a larger team or Circle of Care that includes therapists, family members, friends, and/or other Elders with whom the client feels safe and comfortable. (These individuals should be available as back-up, in case of an emergency.)

The key questions for counsellors and frontline workers underlying all of the above strategies to promote client safety are:

- ✓ Are you as informed as you need to be about cultural issues in order to be an effective counsellor/frontline worker for Aboriginal clients?
- ✓ Who else should be included in building a strong network of support for Aboriginal clients?
- ✓ Are you willing to work cooperatively and with mutual respect with Elders, traditional people and staff of Aboriginal services?

Checklist to Prevent Re-Victimization

Frontline Workers/helpers and traditional people developed the following checklist as a tool to help prevent re-victimization. (These guidelines apply from intake through to follow-up and/or referral.)¹⁷³

- ✓ Offer unconditional compassion and support within a safe, confidential environment.

173 Contributors: staff from the Aboriginal Women=s Support Centre, Paaktuitit Inuit Women=s Association, Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre and Wabano staff.

- ✓ Understand holistic needs: provide resources for clients that are culturally appropriate and support all aspects of well-being: mental, physical, spiritual and emotional.
- ✓ Understand and model the Seven Teachings with clients and co-workers: **Respect, Humility, Courage, Honesty, Truth, Wisdom and Love.**
- ✓ Use a client-centred approach: the client directs the healing journey not the counsellor. Move at the client's pace trusting them to know their needs. Respect their choices.
- ✓ It is important that clients do not have to repeat the details of their traumatic experiences over and over again. Becoming more aware of feelings and coping strategies leads to positive change more readily than reinterpreting past factual events.
- ✓ Use appropriate terms and proper names, i.e. calling a client "sweetheart" or "honey" may trigger a memory of sexual abuse. Use language the client can relate to and understand. Don't use language based in theory or jargon.
- ✓ Counsellors must "walk their talk". Counsellors can take clients only as far as they have gone on their own healing journeys. Don't abuse substances when you counsel clients on relapse prevention, for example.
- ✓ Fostering a confidential, safe and calming atmosphere creates comfort for clients. Focus on internal as well as physical safety. A healing-centred space and physical comfort is crucial for recovery.
- ✓ Active listening, positive feedback and attention to body language are crucial aspects of helping clients feel safe.

- ✓ Never try to force a client back from a flashback or dissociated state. In a soft voice talk to the client about what you see and hear. Allow time for re-grounding, and then talk about what happened, how it felt back then and how it feels today.
- ✓ Set healthy boundaries with clients. Inappropriate relationships are dis-empowering for clients and unethical for counsellors.
- ✓ Minimize power imbalances between client and counsellor.
- ✓ Counsellors do not tell clients what to do, or make judgements or have expectations. Clients must be empowered to find their own answers, make their own decisions and take control over their own lives. The counsellor/helper's role is to facilitate this process.
- ✓ Respect diversity: understand different cultures and faiths, know your own roots. Assumptions and stereotypes based on gender, race, culture, sexuality, age and/or physical and mental ability serve to further dis-empower and re-victimize clients and diminish the helper's effectiveness.
- ✓ Each client is an individual. Although patterns exist, it's important to recognize the unique resilience of each individual client. One person's experience is never rated more or less traumatic than another's.
- ✓ Exposing clients to controlling, punitive or threatening attitudes or behaviours, even in a joking a way, is a form of re-victimizing them.
- ✓ Screen/educate referral services about attitudes or practices that may either trigger or re-victimize Aboriginal clients.

- ✓ Discuss openly the counsellor's obligation to report suspicions of child abuse/neglect or danger to self /others.
- ✓ Ask clients who self-harm to help identify creative ways of minimizing risk that don't re-victimize themselves or others.
- ✓ Each organization and counsellor should have a formal process for client safety to assess triggers and create strategies that will prevent use of harmful forms of intervention, such as physical restraint.
- ✓ Every organization should have a Code of Ethics that all staff sign and agree to respect. (The Seven Teachings can be used as a guide.)
- ✓ Every organization should re-view its service environment through new eyes to assess whether, from an Aboriginal perspective, it is a place of hope and belonging, (i.e. whether Inuit, Métis and First Nations people are represented, respected and welcomed there).
- ✓ Healing work is sacred work. Clients deserve counsellors and frontline workers who honour their own healing paths and can model self-care/respect of the body, mind, heart and spirit.

Conclusion

It is hoped that readers find the information in this manual helpful. Our people are hurting and we need to learn from each other in order to ease their pain. We are happy to share our understanding and practice. Any feedback would be most welcome.