

# Cultural Solutions Evaluation

December 1-3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021



## Introduction

Cultural Solutions Training was offered 27 participants over the course of December 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. Throughout the three days, participants were immersed in “Indian Thinking” as Little Birds. Specifically, the training was intended to,

*“Provide professionals in human services with an educational and experiential opportunity to potentially explore traditional First Nations and Métis ceremony and protocols, in relation to the practice of human service delivery”.*

Indigenous people continue to have negative experiences with most if not all western systems. Maintained by state and structural violence, systems such as justice, employment, and housing continue to impede the achievement of cultural health and healing for Indigenous families suffering from abuse. Perpetrated by systemic racism, lack of support or advocacy for family’s western norms have individualized complex social problems, not recognizing the systems complicity and impacts of history. For workers unfamiliar with the devastating impacts of historical trauma among Indigenous people, this results in a systemic failure to recognize the social and psychological complexity behind family problems, further revictimizing those seeking help. The cumulative effect of poor systemic responses (healthcare, police, mental health, etc.) compounds the risk of enduring multiple harms and creates an ever evolving and continued failures.

To begin the hard work of Reconciliation in both programming and systems areas, facilitators shared traditional stories and teachings, meant to deepen understanding and personal experience of ceremony and parallel process, to be used in the delivery of human services with Indigenous service users. Sessions were facilitated by four Elders and one Knowledge keeper who delivered both oral and written training materials that together, explored concepts, and relevant service theories typically used in a First Nations and Métis contexts. This evaluation is being prepared for two reasons:

- accountability back to the funder of this session
- for continuous improvements for future sessions

As each session was facilitated by a different individual, the evaluation will report back separately for each facilitator and as well, overall learning’s. All quotes were pulled from 12 returned evaluation surveys then themed into the most common areas of learning.

All my relations.

## **Please tell us about 2 Ah-ha moments you had during the training....**

### **Overall Comments:**

*"The time for Awareness is Over - "Solutions as awareness hasn't been enough". I am now more in tune of how easy it is to be aware and say that is a solution. Action is now required".*

*"Hearing the stories of an actual account of someone being in residential school, what he thoughts and feels were and how that truly must have felt. Stopped and reflected on the whole thing".*

*"The importance of validation and the validation song. The use of song to document history and validate knowledge".*

*"Hearing of all different types of Elders, Never realizing that before, each have their own speciality".*

### **1) Ceremony and Spirituality as a Teacher – "To have patience – the smudge connects us all. All my relations".**

We all belong to some form of culture and identify with that culture in varying degrees. Our understanding of our own cultural identity begins at birth and is developed by the environment in which we grow up. It may be a loose affiliation or the guide that directs our daily activities. Whatever the connection, our cultural identity provides a sense of belonging.

For Indigenous people's culture, ceremony and spirituality is the essence of who they are, who they belong to, where they come from, how they relate to one another. Culture, ceremony and spirituality also function as the teachings - teachings of ancestors. Culture permeates all aspects of life and is essential to the overall well-being of Indigenous communities and individuals. Cultural teachings are found in traditions, customs, protocols, values, spirituality, ceremonies, language, ways of knowing and being, and connections to the land and the life-sustaining resources of the land. This way of knowing and teaching is active and iterative as compared to most western forms of education.

### **Participant comments:**

- *Mr. Daignault – Buffalo being the Spirit guide meets the storm (adversity). Need to earn the rights to ceremony and to sing the songs. Buffalo songs only sung in ceremony.*
- *The concept of Sanctified kindness and using that as our approach with each other, indicating that we are to work together and not individually, and the importance of smudging was quite significant. The way Elder Reg described that the smudge is unifying and indicates that everything discussed thereafter is truth was very eye opening.*
- *Talking about VALS and that circles are about making relatives through connection and sharing stories. I also appreciated hearing that circle is about getting conformity in a kind way. As opposed to western conformity which is very authoritative.*

- *When Adrian, Reg, Patrick, and Kerrie explained the Why behind the ceremonies, protocol, Elders it really helped me to respect and understand the process and its need for time and resources.*
- *The training gave me a clear understanding of the ways of life of indigenous people. My aha moment was learning new concepts and understanding that different ceremonies and celebrations happen for different reasons. Our cultures define who we are, and we learn from our elders and ancestors, there is nothing new everything is built on culture*
- *The meaning of songs and songs from different nations. Also, when it is sung through hi and low notes is by feeling, hearing, and listening which is passed on through generations.*
- *The Spirit of The Buffalo and how it acts as a guide in conversation and life and how the buffalo will NOT turn its back on the storm.*
- *Understanding the meaning and purpose of the songs and of smudging. This opened a door of understanding that is so meaningful!!! Understanding the “why” or the purpose connected to the actions broadened my awareness and understanding of the bigger picture and how all the pieces fit together.*

## **2) Paralleling Oral & Written Systems to Create Change – “Oral Systems vs Written Systems and the importance of finding parallels to help create solutions”.**

The cultural principles of a parallel approach include discipline, responsibility, respect, accountability, and sanctified kindness are critical when working in this way. Parallel work preferences oral practice instead of the default written systems used by Western organizations. Communication, decision making, and implementation of actions are all facilitated using ceremony or talking circles as required. As traditional knowledge and worldviews are embedded within oral practice, the use of venue, action language and song (VALS) are key components of any oral process. Contextually, the complementary parallels between the oral practice and the written practice can be seen in the following example of a community engagement.

Oral knowledge is a system of education and communication contrasting written knowledge. Oral knowledge retains the history of Indigenous communities by passing cultural information from one generation to the next. For community’s creation stories, connections to the land, historical accounts, traditional ecological knowledge, teachings, language, and culture stories have been kept alive through oral traditions for thousands of years. These stories and accounts have been passed from generation to generation without ever being transcribed.

### **Participant comments:**

- *Connecting common words like the strategic plan and policies to Indigenous ways and parallel meanings.*
- *The examples Elder Reg shared afternoon on Day 1 related to the worldviews. His educational background and experience working with agencies and Roberts rules of order versus bundle and conversations in a circle.*
- *There were so many!!! The first would be when I made the connection on parallel systems – the smudge and gavel, the vows and the agenda and the resolution and the song and value of both. I envisioned a train track with two parallel rails extending into the distance, both moving forward together, and I realized it’s the ties that bind the*

*two rails that keeps them working in unison – the piece that connects the two. Neither rail is more important or less important than the other but without the shared piece that keeps them united, things can derail. When you did the comparative analysis between what is similar in the Indigenous perspective to that of the white perspective. We have so many similarities that we can easily understand. This provided a fantastic frame of reference for me.*

- *Elder Reg had said that “Transformation happens through the kindness of making relatives”. Thinking on this and the aspect of relationship building needing to be prioritized more in western structures to gain trust, respect and for the western and Indigenous systems to be able to work together.*
- *I learned a lot about the importance of not breaking down western systems, but rather to move forward it should be about making parallels between traditional oral systems and western systems.*
- *Understanding the difference between white man concept of thought and Indigenous concept of thought. This was truly an aha moment for me because I cleared never had a clue about the two concepts or their existence. I am glad I got enlightened about it.*
- *The fact that Indigenous world views culture and approaches are extremely different from the West for instance written vs oral systems, hierarchy of needs etc.*
- *When Elder Reg spoke about the importance of oral tradition and oral history. He spoke about how certain records of colonial times were only recently discovered by western historians; however, these teachings had been passed on already through oral tradition through Elders many decades ago. These teachings were a part of the Indigenous records for so long. It was interesting to discover that oral tradition is not given its rightful place in historical record keeping. It was very interesting to listen to Elder Reg speak about this.*

**3) Trauma and Brain Development/ Healing** – *“It is important to be sensitive and not expect that just because someone is Indigenous, that they will have a strong understanding about certain cultural practices”.*

The science of epigenetics proposes that we pass along more than DNA in our genes; suggesting that our genes can carry memories of trauma experienced by our ancestors and can influence how we react to trauma and stress. Traumatic events such as exposure to stress, trauma and abuse can affect how a child’s brain develops and have lifelong consequences including how that child will go on to parent their own children.

The brain is the key organ of the response to stress because it determines what is threatening and, therefore, potentially stressful, as well as the physiological and behavioral responses which can be either adaptive or damaging. Our bodies are strongly influenced by experience. When adrenaline; the hormone associated with the fight or flight response is released intergenerational trauma experiences often “switch on” negative responses to stress and trauma. The cerebrum, or front brain controls speech, *judgment, thinking and reasoning, problem-solving, emotions and learning* as well as vision, hearing, and other senses. As seen in the picture, the amygdala initiates the automatic part of the *fight or flight response*. Deep within the brain these lobes can't distinguish between a real threat and a fake threat to survival. Quite simply individuals who have experienced repeated or intergenerational trauma whether physical or emotional, can become “stuck” in a state of fight or flight. This can lead to survival-related emotional states and an inability to access or respond to programmatic teachings no matter how well developed.

### **Participant comments:**

- *I learned a lot from Kerrie about trauma; how it evolves, and how it affects the brain function. She also spoke about the difference between emotional thinking and brain thinking.*
- *Kerrie spoke about how lots of Indigenous cultures teach emotional thinking, which focus on how actions affect people's emotions. She also spoke to the importance of understanding trauma when dealing with families that have been uprooted from their culture.*
- *And an aha moment because when Kerry imparted the importance of finding spirit first in-order to shift from the middle brain to the frontal lobe it was an aha moment!*

### **Elders Reg and Rose Crowshoe**

#### **General Comments:**

*"I would love to hear more about their healing journey. What did/does it look like for them and what does healing from trauma mean to them as it relates to Indigenous Cultural Solutions"?*

*"It was great to hear about traditional early childhood learning. It would be good to hear more about what the teachings were".*

*"Realistic it would be nice to hear everything their whole life story not in a rushed format. Very, very interesting people lots of knowledge and wisdom".*

#### **What else would you like to learn more about?**

##### **1. More information on ceremony, and respecting and reintroducing families to Indigenous practices**

- a) I would have loved to learn more about how to incorporate traditional ways of learning within the modern ways of learning and living.*
- b) What is the meaning behind the shawl?*
- c) How can we get our young people today to love culture, what strategies can be used to engage young people today into traditional practices and beliefs to preserve culture*
- d) I really enjoyed learning about narrative and oral tradition. I would like to learn some more about some specific teachings that had been passed on through oral teaching, such as some songs or teachings about local animals or the natural world.*
- e) I enjoyed how Elder Rose spoke of her upbringing and how she was taught to respect herself and others from a young indigenous girl. Another women's teaching from Rose.*

##### **2. More information on oral and parallel practice in services, business, and everyday life**

- a) I am also curious about solutions with regards to creating a more oral culture in our business world today. I think it would help to increase actual relationship building and*

- accountability. Nothing specific from any one speaker, all of them would be able to assist with teaching me more of what I hope to learn.*
- b) I've learned so much and am so grateful for all the knowledge imparted because ALL of it contributed to me gaining a richer understanding. It was the beautiful picture of Elder Reg's parents that made me start thinking about marriage how it is or was traditionally validated and the differences between oral and western systems. What are the oral traditions around marriages versus the western requirement to fill out paperwork and apply for a license before the union is considered legitimate or legal? What would a traditional experience look like for two ingenious people committing to a lifelong union without the western system influence? Thank you for sharing your childhood picture and the picture of your parents – I enjoyed that so much!!*
  - c) How Western Organizations can engage with Elders to create a holistic Indigenous program. Where does one start?*

### **3. More information on the impacts of colonization on parenting and trauma and service needs today**

- a) What affected us as Indigenous people – The Indian Act, the diseases, Residential school and the 60's scoop*
- b) When Elder Reg shared about his own trauma and his inability to hug it would be good to spend some time talking about nurturing and touch and how that is very important for children and their sense of identity. If others in Indigenous communities struggle with touch in the same way Elder Reg did how do we repair so that families can bring good touch back to their communities.*
- c) Elder Reg spoke about the historical trauma caused by residential schools and the Indian Agents and shared that his grandmother helped bring him and Rose back to the Smudge. I would like to hear more about some of the challenges he felt when trying to heal from the trauma caused by residential schools. He spoke about the residential school denial that Canadian society and the government engaged in, and I would like to hear about how that affected trauma healing.*

**Kerry Moore** – *“Our Niitsy is our spirit. We need to be grounded before we can learn. The more I practice smudging the more I realize it as grounding and connecting to the Creator and the grandmothers and Fathers”.*

#### **General Comments:**

*“Kerry caught my attention talking about our spirit and that our spirit comes from our belly button. I loved the story about how the teacher was so concerned for his students that he was seeking ways to connect with his students. It was the seeking that was powerful. He was invested, compassionate, and motivating by how he connected with his students. It is sometimes not the outcome, but the process and how one gets there”.*

## What else would you like to learn more about?

### 1. More time overall to talk about brain science, trauma, and healing

- a) *The whole process of trauma, the effects that this has on people, knowing about it before but hearing how it effects different cultures and what works best to get people grounded.*
- b) *You have been such a gift – you’ve given me insight and a missing piece to my own personal healing journey which I was expecting but couldn’t be more grateful. I would enjoy learning more about epigenetics and the science behind drumming which I’m sure you elaborate more on in your full day sessions so hopefully one day I can attend one of your workshops! Thank you so much for your wonderful presentation!*
- c) *How to account for chemical imbalances in the brain as they relate to depression, anxiety, and the connection to the spirit.*
- d) *Kerry mentioned that trauma affects everyone the same way. This is something I would benefit from hearing more about.*
- e) *Kerry spoke in length about the process of trauma and how the brain rewires to release certain chemicals to signal the body. She spoke about how too much cortisol production is toxic for the human body and can cause long term depression and anxiety. I would love to hear more about the best way to make a person who going through anxiety and chronic stress, feel safer around us.*

### 2. More time to talk about implementation, working with Indigenous families

- a) *How drumming for toddlers up help with shifting our brains and how we think. I am curious and would like to explore this further. I plan on drumming with my families to connect.*
- b) *Story of how an adult’s journey may look and feel like they are working on strategies to address trauma.*
- c) *More strategies to support adults to move to the frontal cortex when they get stuck. I appreciated that Elder Kerry spoke about intergenerational resilience. It would be good to hear more about that.*
- d) *How she bridges western and Indigenous healing practices.*
- e) *Solutions to intergenerational trauma or advice on methods or resources on how to treat childhood trauma. We covered diagnosis but didn’t get to the cure.*
- f) *How practitioners can better integrate trauma considerations in their work from an indigenous lens.*

**Adrian Goulet** – *“Vibration is healing, each being. I know we all have Spirits but did not now that each being has a song. I can see and feel it now”.*

#### General Comments:

*“I found his love and passion for the songs and drumming was moving. You could hear it when he sings and when he provides explanation. His knowledge and background were well appreciated”.*



*"I must apologize. I was thinking we had to learn the validation song. I always get ahead of myself and worry about things I don't have to worry about. I hope one day to know a song. I enjoyed listening to your songs and learning about the purpose and protocol of the songs, singers, and drums. You are so warm and welcoming and made me feel so comfortable to be there so thank you for that".*

## **What else would you like to learn more about?**

### **1. More information about the significance of the drum and songs and the rights and privilege to songs**

- a) *I would have loved to hear further about the history and importance of drumming as it relates to Indigenous cultural practices.*
- b) *When dancing the dancers put up their fan or regalia and the drum beats faster. I have seen this but never knew it was related.*
- c) *I would like to know more about if singers and drummers are always men or do women sing and drum as well? Do the Elders and or singers write new songs, or do you only sing songs that have been passed down or both?*

### **2. More information on planning events and the use of venue and ethical space**

- a) *I appreciated when Adrian spoke of VALS. I had no clue about this and was interested on what this meant and how it applied.*
- b) *An important point I learned from Adrian Goulet was about making sure that when planning events, it is important that the venues are suitable for the audience. For instance, when working with children, it is important to choose venues with enough space, so the children have space to run around and be active. He also talked about the importance of working with people who have special privileges and understanding when it comes to cultural events (e.g.: Round Dance), especially when the event is new for you. Adrian also spoke to the difference between social events and ceremonies and the different protocols needed for each.*

## **Last thoughts..... What can we do better next time?**

### **General Comments:**

*"To be fully engaged we cannot be working. To have a sharing circle more than their names to be when we sit in a circle it brings our thoughts a feelings to the forefront".*

*"Listening to the songs was so incredible and it would be amazing if there was time to listen to another song".*

*"Agenda and important information sheets were so important. It was all fantastic from beginning to end!!! I didn't want to leave the nest and fly – I was chirping to myself, no... wait.... let me stay...!!!"*

## **1. Offer Cultural Solutions 2 - In-person when its safe to do so**

- a) It was a great training. I would like a description of Cultural Solutions 2 and am eager to sign up. Also, very eager to have this training available to my staff and contract agencies in 2022 or 23.*
- b) I appreciate how you have all be able to shift to virtual. I do think with how relational this experience is it will be great to have future groups participate in person.*
- c) It was so great to attend this training and move forward as a little bird. I am hopeful that we will be able to meet in person for future trainings.*
- d) I know due to COVID virtual had to be the venue, but I would have loved to experience this training in person. To pick up on the vibrations of others would have been transcending.*
- e) It is wonderful to see that this training is offered through zoom, I can't imagine how much more powerful it would be in person. I hope that soon that we can experience training in an in person setting as I feel through the oral teachings would be that much more impactful when we are physically together*
- f) Well-paced and perfect for beginners learning about Indigenous ways.*

## **2. More time for information on trauma**

- a) I have nothing additional to add the presentation was great just the way that it was, the only thing the piece from Kerri would have been nice if it was longer, her information is very important from an indigenous perspective*

## **3. More group discussions**

- a) I loved the group discussions; we could have more of that added to the training.*