



**Sacred Moon Circle:
Prototype Learning & Possibilities**

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1. Introduction

The Winnipeg Boldness Project is an Indigenous social innovation initiative¹ working alongside the North End community to identify effective mechanisms to improve outcomes for young children in the Point Douglas area. The Project is working towards a Bold Goal:

Children and families in Point Douglas will experience dramatically improved wellbeing in all aspects of self: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

Currently, about 50% of kids in the Point Douglas are doing really well in terms of early childhood development (ECD) and are starting school at a point where they're ready to begin learning and take on the world. What The Winnipeg Boldness Project is aiming to do is raise that number, because we believe that every child should have the same access to opportunity.

The three core objectives that will work to not only increase school readiness but also achieve the Bold Goal include to:

1. Design a 6-year Early Childhood Development (ECD) intervention strategy for future implementation that will help young children in Point Douglas develop the tools they need to succeed in life.
2. Create a strength-based narrative that highlights the positive and spirited aspects of Winnipeg's North End through community perspectives.
3. Build a child-centred model focusing on best practices for raising children through the deep community wisdom that exists within the North End.

Our starting point in the design process was to engage the Point Douglas community in defining success for their children. Residents, parents and leaders also identified many of the roadblocks to success for their children and are driving the development of solutions to these roadblocks. A large proportion of the residents, parents, and leaders we engage with are Indigenous and espouse an Indigenous worldview and value base. Therefore, Indigenous perspectives and methodologies form the foundation of our problem definition and solution finding. We believe that the solutions generated will

¹ Social innovation is defined as 'a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs. Such successful social innovations have durability and broad impact' (Westley & Antadze 2010, p. 2).

lead to better outcomes not only for Indigenous children, but better outcomes for all children.

Boldness is Community-Driven

The Winnipeg Boldness Project operates using community development principles; the highest level of accountability is to Point Douglas community residents, families and their children. This guiding principle is understood at every level of the Project's governance. Our community partnerships, through families, leaders, and community-based organizations are at the core of this project. They provide knowledge and direction as well as direct hands on work to test some of the ideas that they feel could produce possibilities for success and wellbeing for children and families in the community.

Boldness is Strength-Based

The Winnipeg Boldness Project has employed a comprehensive strategy of community engagement through diverse arts based methods. These methods have allowed community to share in the design of the project while also sharing their own experiences raising their families in the North End of Winnipeg. These arts-based methods have included a Photo Voice Project and a Tile Mosaic Project.

Boldness is Community Wisdom

The Winnipeg Boldness Project has been undertaking a deep community engagement and iterative knowledge mobilization process since April 2014. This process has brought together wisdom of community members and community service providers into a model titled: *Ways of Knowing, Being, Feeling, and Doing: A Wholistic Early Childhood Development Model*. The implementation of this model, combined with community defined indicators of healthy children and families will produce a bold goal: Children and families in Point Douglas will experience dramatically improved wellbeing in all aspects of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual being.

Winnipeg Boldness & Sacred Moon Circle

Sacred Moon Circle was chosen as a prototype during the third year of the Project. Connection to culture and strengthening of relationships are two priority areas identified by families in the first year of the situating and solution building in

community. The prototype was chosen as a possible mechanism to support development of identity and belonging. Both concepts contribute to a strengthened understanding of the roles and responsibilities that individuals hold in relation to themselves, their families, and their communities. This in turn provides a strong foundation for understanding parenting before conception.

Sacred Moon Circle is a previously developed curriculum for young women, which was implemented in 2014 in a North End community organization. The rationale for including this prototype as a possibility to compliment a healthy baby strategy was the recognition of the need to strengthen intergenerational relationships and build a foundation where young men and women understand who they are and where they come from, two pivotal outcomes necessary to health and wellbeing (insert citation) The Community Leadership and Traditional Knowledge Keepers Guide Groups have indicated that there currently exists a gap in formal and informal opportunities for families in Point Douglas for knowledge and skill building in the preconception stage of life. This gap means that teachings that directly relate to roles of young men and women in their development into adults who will eventually begin a family are missing. Youth and young adults are missing out on opportunities to build knowledge about their roles in relation to this stage. The following document outlines the background to the development of this prototype, prior community driven implementation, connection to the Child Centered Model, possibilities for scaling, and a framework for evaluation and tracking of the learning for the prototype.

2. Opportunities for Impact

The Sacred Moon Circle is seen as a promising practice² that seeks to support Indigenous peoples resurgence by creating strong intergenerational connections to serve as avenues for reconnection with culture, language, ceremonies, and opportunities for self-examination to facilitate development of identity and belonging.

This work connects to what parents in Point Douglas identified during the first year of knowledge gathering and have reiterated consistently each year of the Project. Connection to culture, access to teachings related to development across the lifespan, and relationship building were shared as key priorities for positively impacting the health of families in the community. This provides a strong foundation for identity.

Identity is the development of our understanding of self in relation to everyone and everything around us. Identity is the way that we answer the question: “who am I?” It is a search for a place to belong, to connect to those around us in a way that can provide safety and meaning in how we understand who we are. Individual’s search for belonging, membership, and ultimately connection is a natural human desire linked to wellbeing and health. (Rowe, 2013, p. 11)

Health is experienced at physical, spiritual, emotional and mental dimensions, but also across the varying stages within the life course. Wexler (2009) examines the process of historical consciousness and memory and how it interacts with cultural identity and the impact on the health of Indigenous youth. Wexler (2009) asserts that while there has been agreement among scholars that historical trauma³ has severely impacted health

² A process or program that has demonstrated, through qualitative and quantifiable evidence over a sustained period of time, to be the most efficient way of accomplishing a goal; is continually analyzed, reassessed and refined. In Ojibway and Cree languages "promising" means "I will do as I say", and "I will show you how", and implies a long-term commitment [The information shared here is adapted from the Community Learning Centre for Promising Practices Community Steering Committee and Community Learning Circle discussions held in 2009 and 2010, the Maori experience, and from website <http://www.bigsisters.bc.ca>]

³ Historical trauma has been defined as “a combination of acculturative stress, cultural bereavement, genocide, and racism that has been generalized, internalized, and institutionalized. Such trauma is cumulative and unresolved, as well as both historic and ongoing.” According to Indigenous people and researchers, historical trauma can be implicated in many of the current health problems experienced by Indigenous communities. (Wexler, 2009, p. 268)

the processes of impact have remained unexamined. Similarly the literature has shown the positive influence of cultural affiliation to health and wellbeing of Indigenous youth but the methods and process of this impact remain unknown. An area of agreement is in the fact that a strong link resides within cultural affiliation and wellbeing, which can be evidenced in a youth's ability to answer the questions: "Who am I?" "Who are we as a people?" and "Where am I going?"

The impact of social determinants upon children, youth, and adults while similar in the modality, vary in the outcomes and manifestations (Loppie-Reading & Wien, 2009). Social determinants of health also interplay and manifest upon sense of identity, and therefore expression of that identity. The impact of social determinants of health upon the relationships of parents, grandparents and community have intergenerationally compounded upon children searching for the answer to the question, "who am I?" Anishinaabe Elder Art Solomon shared that:

In order to know where we are going we need to know where we are; to know where we are, we need to know who we are; to know who we are, we need to know where we come from.⁴

Elder Solomon outlines an Indigenous developmental process that ensures a strong understanding of identity and relationships. The Conventions on the Rights of the Child, Section 8, states that a child is entitled to the preservation of their identity (Bolzman, 2009; & Herrmann, 1991). Despite this political convention as well as recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015) Indigenous identity has not been seen as a priority in strategies to support positive development.

Simard & Blight (2011) outline that a key challenge with work in the area of life course development and Indigenous peoples is that outcomes continue to be measured by non-Indigenous standards. The authors assert that instead Indigenous development must be viewed in the context within present day issues faced by Indigenous peoples, which must also address cultural safety. Indigenous life course development must be founded upon Indigenous worldviews, cultural structure, cultural attachment, identity development, relational development, and task achievement (Simard & Blight, 2011, p. 32). Cultural attachment theory asserts that a child's attachment to a culture contributes to the health development of Indigenous children. Cultural attachment is reinforced through a strong and ongoing knowledge of family, extended family,

⁴ Page 12, Rowe, G. (2013).

community, and Nation and their relationship to each other and the world. This provides Indigenous children with a strong foundation from which to explore and positively interact with the world around them and serves as a conduit in the successful transition to adulthood (Simard & Blight, 2011).

In cultural restorative practice model, cultural identity is a result of cultural attachment to cultural structures, thereby creating the spiritual essence of an individual. Cultural identity is the foundation from which all other domains of development will grow this will include physical – *inamanji'owin*, emotional – *naanaagaji- inendamowin*, social – *maawanji'idiwin*, and cognitive – *waawaanendamowin*. Cultural identity begins with understanding of who you are and what your sacred purpose is while you are here on turtle island. It is living with spiritual purpose grounded in the cultural structure of the Aboriginal nation. Spiritual purpose in one's life does not mean dogmatic structure, what it means is that the individual is grounded in the values of the culture and can live in sacred harmony with oneself, his or her relations, and the world. (Simard & Blight, 2011, p. 41)

Cultural identity development is strengthened through opportunities for participation in cultural activities that exist within a community. Such opportunities should allow for the expression, practice and experience of activities that enrich the spirit and provide the knowledge and skills that are a part of their cultural background. This can include sweatlodge ceremonies, berry fasting, sundance, drumming groups, and full moon ceremonies (Simard & Blight, 2011).

Culturally restorative practice links to concepts of resilience, when taken from an Indigenous perspective:

Although resilience tends to be framed as an individual characteristic, it may also have systemic, collective, or communal dimensions. At the level of family and community, resilience may reside in the durability of interpersonal relationships in the extended family and wider social networks of support. What is needed then are alternative frameworks that take into account the dynamic processes on many levels that may confer on the individual, communities, and whole peoples better prospects for survival and positive development. Indigenous concepts provide ways to approach a dynamic, systemic, ecological view of resilience. (Kirmayer et al, 2011, p. 85)

A culturally restorative practice is also supported in Indigenous resilience models, where resilience is seen to lay external to the individual and can feature the work of whole communities. Communities build moral economies through the assertion of the worldview and practicing of core values. Traditionally the mechanism for this transmission has been orally and through stories that ground individuals in an understanding of themselves in relation to the world around them. This links the individual to the community (past and present) and to the land and environment (Kirmayer et al, 2011). Establishment of a clear and healthy collective identity is necessary in order for individuals to be able to see themselves within that collective. This relationship-based foundation of identity is essential in personal Indigenous identity development (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012).

3. Prototype Background

The Sacred Moon Circle Program, designed and delivered by the Community Education Development Association (CEDA), in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is a culturally grounded response that works to strengthen opportunities for relationships and interconnections with students in grade 7 & 8 and positively impact their personal and academic development. The Sacred Moon Circle Program was developed with the following goals:

- To establish a women's place of cultural wisdom and empowerment; the Sacred Moon Circle
- To celebrate womanhood and her connection with her culture, the universe and Grandmother Moon
- To create a place of belonging and safety for young women of all nations
- To reclaim young women's connection and access to Grandmothers, both past and present
- To help empower young women to create a vision for the future⁵

3.2 Organizational context: Delivery of the Sacred Moon Circle in Point Douglas

Located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1979 by a coalition of inner city parents, parent councils, and residents with a mandate to *help communities help themselves*⁶. Governed by a board of directors representing community parents, residents, service organizations and schools, CEDA has worked collectively and collaboratively with community "to create innovative and culturally relevant education programs that work to address power inequities and enhance educational success for inner city families, especially youth"⁷

The Pathways to Education Winnipeg program is one of CEDA's most celebrated collaborative efforts. As the host organization, CEDA and a list of several funding partners like, Pathways to Education Canada, Province of Manitoba, City of Winnipeg, Winnipeg School Division and the University of Winnipeg play a large role of support to the Pathways to Education students, parents and staff. The Pathways to Education program was developed to address the increasing dropout rates seen in high schools

⁵ Sacred Moon Circle Program Proposal, December 2014

⁶ Cedawpg.org

⁷ Sacred Moon Circle Program Proposal, December 2014

within the inner city while also providing students access to culturally sensitive and relevant, post-secondary education and to support students in their journey toward realizing their potential for success and independence.

Pathways to Education program recently piloted the Winnipeg Peer Tutoring Initiative Feeder School Support Project. The overall goal of this project was to increase graduation rates of community youth and give them the tools they need to successfully participate in the economy. In classroom supports are provided to students through a Support Worker, who helps students with all of their subjects, working on group projects and reading with students on a one to one basis. They also attend various field trips including school tours and camping trips.

It was anticipated that through the development of the Winnipeg Peer Tutoring Initiative Feeder School Support Project all students would benefit from increased social literacy skills. It was also thought that grade 7 and 8 students would benefit from an improvement in attendance, better grades, and a successful transition to high school. Simultaneously, through mentorship opportunities, senior students could gain employment skills while enhancing levels of self-confidence and self-esteem⁸. As an enhancement to the Winnipeg Peer Tutoring Initiative Feeder School Support Project, CEDA Pathways to Education program developed an entry-level program for grade 7 & 8 girls, who have just joined the CEDA Pathways program, called the Sacred Moon Circle.

⁸ cedawpg.org

4. Prototype Design & Implementation

The following section outlines the design and implementation of the Sacred Moon Circle prototype. This prototype differs then previous work of the Project in that the Sacred Moon Circle was identified as a promising practice within community that had already been designed⁹, funded, implemented and evaluated within a local organization. The program was implemented at the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) starting September 2014 and culminated in April 2015.

This 13 week program worked to support young women in grade 7 & 8 to explore and journey through personal and academic development in four key questions: *who am I, where do I come from, what is my purpose, and where am I going?* The intention is to create a safe place for the young women to find a healthy sense of identity and to increase their self-acceptance and pride.

The Sacred Moon Circle Program, led and co-facilitated by an Elder and a Facilitator, was offered from January through to April to participants of the Winnipeg Peer Tutoring Initiative Feeder School Support Project at CEDA. The group also included 2-3 School Support Workers, 2 older role models who assisted with the group, and when available the Program Director would sit in circle with the young women.

The Sacred Moon Circle Program was initially located in the library of the Niji Mahkwa School. However, after the first few weeks, programming was relocated to the CEDA office. Programming took place in a large open space with a sitting area that had couches and a small carpet to set chairs in a circle. At the other end of the room was space to set up tables and chairs for hands-on small group and creative activities. Covering the walls of the programming space was flip chart paper filled with previous weeks small group activities. Ground rules of the group were posted as a visual reminder of respectful expectations.

The program was offered on a weekday right after school, during regular program time for the students who had been participating in the Winnipeg Peer Tutoring Initiative Feeder School Support Project. Sacred Moon Circle Program ran for 90-120 minutes each session. Healthy snacks were offered before the beginning of the circle, and transportation was provided after programming.

⁹ The proposal for the Sacred Moon Circle Program was developed by Debra DiUbaldo and Elder Mae Louise Campbell, who also served as facilitators and mentors throughout the Program.

To begin each session a student offered tobacco to the Elder followed by a smudge ceremony and an opening circle. During the opening circle a sacred eagle feather would be passed around to allow participants to reflect on a question posed by the facilitator. This could include how the previous week was, how the day was, or any thoughts or questions they had from the last week's teaching.

After the check in, the Elder would begin her teaching of Grandmother Moon for the week. The teachings shared include:

Months	13 Moons	Teachings
January	Spirit Moon	Connection
February	Bear Moon	Visioning
March	Sugar Moon	Balance
April	Sucker Moon	Healing Water
May	Flower Moon	Spirit Medicines
June	Strawberry Moon	Reconciliation
July	Raspberry Moon	Kindness
August	Thimbleberry Moon	Spirit World Truth
September	Corn Moon	Responsibility to 7 th generation
October	Falling Leaves Moon	Gratitude Spirit
November	Freezing Moon	Seven Sacred Teachings
December	Little Spirit Moon	Health/Healing

After the teaching was completed, the students would participate in an activity connected to the Grandmother Moon teaching that week. Activities ranged from sharing their thoughts on flip charts as dyads and reporting to the larger group their work, reflecting on their gifts and creating dream catchers on large paper, and creating talking sticks to reflect each week's teaching of Grandmother Moon. At the end of each session a check in and closing were completed.

The final week of the Sacred Moon Circle Program took place on the land of the Elder with ceremony, teaching, and singing. During this time a Sacred Fire was lit followed by a Water ceremony, and a Full Moon ceremony. At the end of the ceremonies, everyone took part in a feast and shared stories around the fire.

5. Evaluating the Prototype¹⁰

5.1 Methods and Data Gathering

The evaluation was designed to encourage program facilitators, staff, and participants to share the story of their journeys and learning as a result of their participation in the Sacred Moon Circle Program. These stories, coupled with observations of the evaluator can provide key insights into the effectiveness of the program and key elements that contributed to success. Learning captured within the implementation of the project and the evaluation report can be applied in future planning and development to strengthen and enhance the program.

5.1.1 Key Questions

In order to elicit these stories, the following **key questions** guided the process of story gathering:

1. **What core elements of the project are essential for its effectiveness?**
2. **Can the project inspire younger students to attend school and continue the path to higher education?**
3. **What awareness have students gained as a result of participation in the project?**
4. **What changes have occurred within the students and what contributed to those changes?**

5.1.2 Evaluation activities

Over the period of April-June 2015 the evaluator had the opportunity to learn stories of the Sacred Moon Program through four key evaluation activities:

1. Review of program proposal and evaluation needs

Initially the evaluator met with the Program Director of the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) Pathways in March 2015 to understand the theory of the Sacred Moon Circle Program and to review expectations and considerations for the evaluation of the program. A review of the funding proposal for the Sacred Moon Circle Program was completed in order to understand the theory of change, program framework, goals and objectives. This helped the development of the evaluation framework that was reviewed by the Program Director.

¹⁰ This section is a direct citation from the unpublished evaluation report: Rowe, G. (2015). *The Sacred Moon Circle: Learning from the Stories*. Prepared for CEDA Pathways to Education.

2. Participant Observation

During the evaluation period the evaluator attended three program nights: April 7, 14, and 21, 2015. This time was used to become familiar with the setting of the Sacred Moon Program and the facilitators, staff, and students. The evaluator shared the purpose of the observations and sat in on the program. Permission was received from the students to photograph the work that they created during some of the program sessions.

3. Key Informant Conversations

Four key informant conversations with the Sacred Moon Circle program Elder, facilitator, and two CEDA staff members who participated through the duration of the program. These were completed in May and June 2015. The conversation guide can be found in Appendix 1.

4. Reflections of learning and found poetry

In June a circle was facilitated where students and staff were welcomed to share their experiences in participating in the Sacred Moon Circle Program. During this circle 3 students and 2 staff participated. An outline of the key questions and agenda for this group can be found in Appendix 2.

5.2 Evaluation Reflections and Observations

At the beginning of the 13 weeks of sessions, a talking stick¹¹ activity was introduced. With each week's teaching, the students would add a marker to signify the Grandmother Moon teaching. Students enjoyed completing this activity, however there was difficulty with consistent attendance that posed a challenge in completing the talking sticks for each of the 13 Grandmother Moon teachings.

¹¹ For more information on a talking stick and its use:
<https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/history/events/talking-stick-and-feather-indigenous-tools-hold-sacred-power-of-free-speech/>



Image 1: Talking Stick created in the Sacred Moon Circle Program

Celebrating womanhood and her connection with her culture, the universe and Grandmother Moon occurred through the ceremonies, teachings of Grandmother Moon, and the activities each week. During the sessions students displayed their learning through small group work on what it means to take care of self and others and the importance of this care to the sacredness of who we are as women. Students learned about connection to their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves and being responsible for their body. This work is shared in the photographs below.

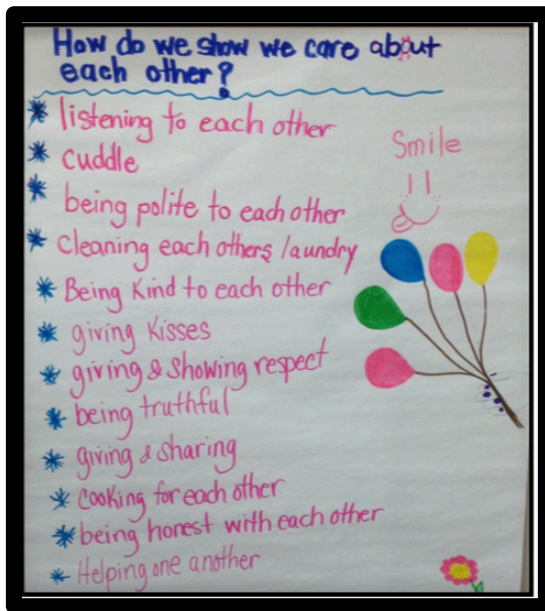


Image 2 & 3: Group activities from Sacred Moon Circle Program

The Sacred Moon Circle Program created a place of belonging and safety over the course of the 13 weeks. Intergenerational relationships that were developed and nurtured and created an environment where all were welcome and respected. The girls learned how to be open with older women, how to talk to staff and open up, strengthening relationships, and expanding their circle of relationships. This opportunity for building trust was facilitated within the circle. Through the use of the circle and

sharing of the teachings and stories, each woman in the circle enacted respect through their actions and interactions with the facilitators, staff and students in the program. A common theme that was shared throughout the conversations and stories was about identity. Women talked about their experience of being Indigenous and being a woman. Discussions occurred about how do they take care of themselves, how do they take care of others, the circle provided an opportunity to make these connections. There was appreciation for connectedness and relatedness. Students began to see how development must always start with you, that self is important to nurture. From this teaching you can then be respectful and responsible to other relationships such as family, community, and school. Activities reinforced these interconnections and how choices we make affect family, siblings, and extended family.

Teachings of Grandmother Moon and the activities each week reinforced the importance of reclaiming young women's connection and access to Grandmothers, both past and present. It is important that we listen to the words that are shared within stories; they have something to teach us (Thomas, 2005). "When we listen with open hearts and open minds, we respect and honour the storytellers. I find this process incredibly comforting and respectful. I believe that storytelling respects and honours people while simultaneously documenting their realities" (Thomas, 2005, p. 244). During the final evaluation activity, participants were asked to reflect on their answer to the four questions: who am I? Where do I come from? What is my purpose? Where am I going? The following photographs represent their reflections on their growth during the Sacred Moon Circle Program.

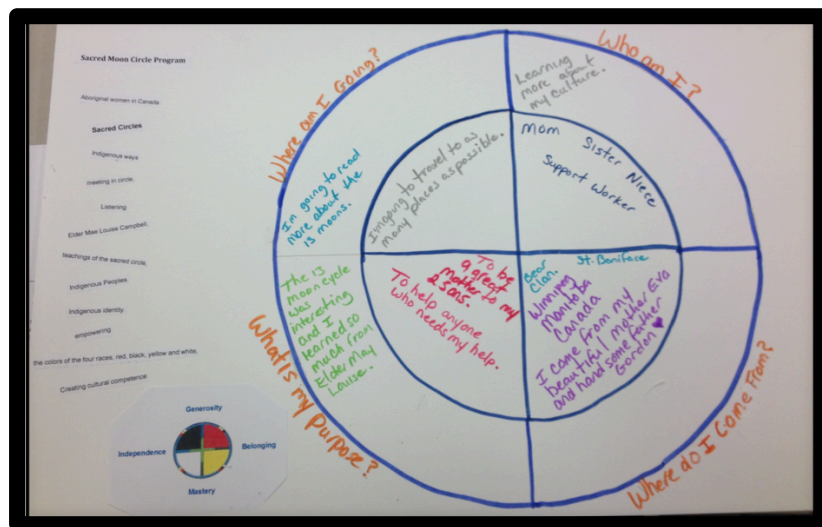


Image 4: Evaluation activities from Sacred Moon Circle Program

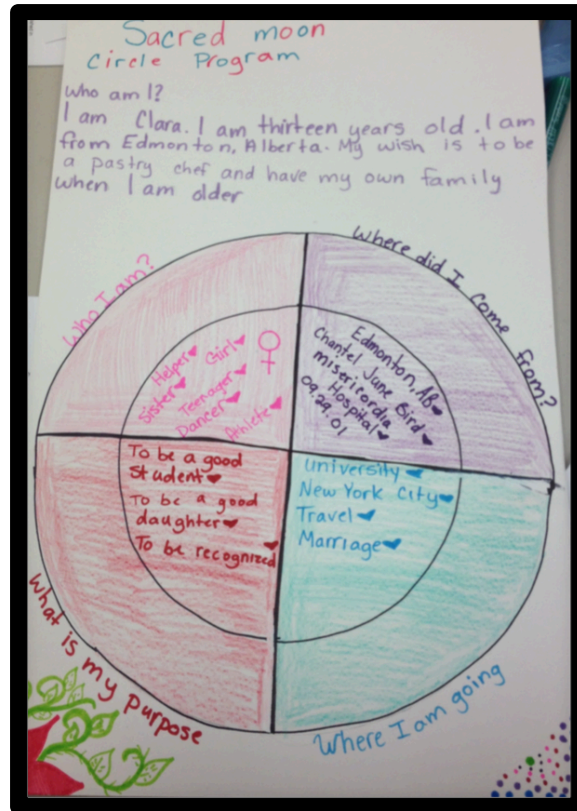


Image 5: Evaluation activities from Sacred Moon Circle Program

Stories were shared about life experiences and relationships that are important to successful personal and educational development. Students shared their vision of themselves in the future. These visions are encapsulated in photographs of the dreamcatchers.

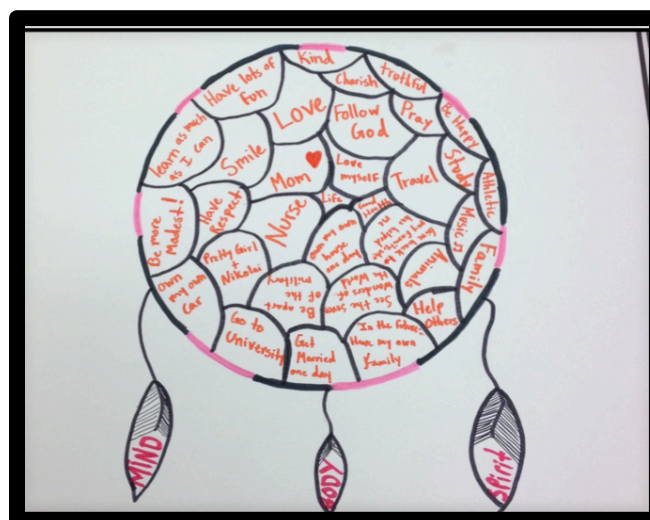


Image 6: Dreamcatcher activity from Sacred Moon Circle Program

It was a privilege to be welcomed into the Sacred Moon Circle as an observer and participant. Throughout the sessions there were many opportunities for relationship building and strengthening our understanding of who we are as women in relation to ourselves, our families, our communities, and in relation to creation. The following section summarizes observations such as key strengths, learning opportunities, and relationship of the experiences of staff and students to the overall goals of the program.

5.2.1 Strengths

Through evaluation activities I was able to observe and learn about the strengths of the Sacred Moon Circle Program. It is clear that the program created an environment that nurtured and modeled the value of relationships, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity. Opportunities were made for the Elder, facilitator, support workers, role models, and students to share stories, building trust and relationship in a respectful manner. The purpose of this strategy is to strengthen participants' sense of relationality. A relational worldview focuses on coming together to support one another through fostering and nurturing supportive, meaningful relationships (Hart, 2002; 2010). The teachings provided each week, coupled with the ceremonies and activities, allowed for reinforcement of the values during the sessions.

For the weekly sessions, the physical space at CEDA was preferred over the school library. The Elder, facilitator, and staff all reflected that the change in space created a positive energy for students to focus and participate in a respectful manner. Each week support workers and role models took responsibility setting up the room for the session and cleaning up the room after programming. While this location was preferred, at times it was not large enough to provide adequate space during creative activity and small group work.

During the opening circle, the teachings, and the activities storytelling and sharing of experiences occurred. This opportunity for intergenerational relationship building is critical for mentorship and nurturing potential and leadership within younger generations. Indigenous knowledges are communicated through *oral transmission*. There is a responsibility inherent within oral transmission of knowledge for both transmitter and learner. The transmitter is responsible for passing knowledge that the learner is ready to receive, considering whether the learner is ready to use this knowledge in a responsible manner (Brant-Castellano, 2000). This responsibility for knowledge also indicates that a relationship between the two are necessary for responsible transmission— knowledge is passed on within context of this relationship

that reflects both an intellectual and emotional interaction based upon shared experience or relationship (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Traditionally, stories have been a vehicle used to share the teachings of our ancestors. Stories are recounted in ceremonial settings and are repeated in order to teach without intrusiveness (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Indigenous knowledge is a [w]holistic experience that requires we engage in learning through all of our senses. This [w]holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge and experience is often visually conveyed through the use of a medicine wheel representing the circle of life, past, present and future (Brant-Castellano, 2000). The medicine wheel is a tool that teaches us to seek balance within our own lives, to form and honour our relationships. The small group work, individual reflection, and creative activities that allowed students and staff to place their understanding of the teaching into action were a favourite part of the sessions for students. This worked to reinforce that collaborative relations are essential in order to work towards individual balance, in other words, to strive for *mino- pimatisiwin* (Hart, 2002).

Respect was an integral expectation within Sacred Moon Circle Program. This was enacted through ceremony, for example in smudging, ensuring that the Eldest in the room was offered the smudge bowl first and allowing the time for each person to participate in this ceremony. Building relationships and trust was central to the respectful environment. Clear expectations and posting of the ground rules for participating in a respectful manner created a reminder of this responsibility and this was reinforced through actions and role modeling.

5.2.2 Learning Opportunities

During the evaluation of the Sacred Moon Circle Program, the evaluator observed and learned of opportunities for growth as the program is offered in the future. In general, this includes preparation of staff and students for the journey of the program including selection of students and activities to build into future offerings.

Key informant conversations and observations indicate it would be important for the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) to consider implementing a voluntary selection or interview process for participation. Consistent participation was a struggle within the group, with some students not attending. An important factor in the success of a program like Sacred Moon Circle Program, is the opportunity to build and strengthen trust and relationships in order to aid personal and educational

development. One method that could be used to increase the likelihood of consistent participation is to develop a selection process. This could include a combination of information session(s) and/or one on one conversations where students would learn about the opportunities provided by the Sacred Moon Circle Program, meet the Elder and facilitator, and share their own understandings or expectations of what they would hope to achieve by attending the 13 week program. The commitment to the program could ensure that a consistent cohort of students would attend the group, strengthening relationships and the opportunity to create a meaningful impact. An ideal cohort size would be 13 to 15 students per 13 week offering.

Timing and length of the program was seen to be a challenge. While students were committed to regular attendance at the CEDA programming, consistent with the timeslot of the Sacred Moon Circle Program, Sacred Moon ran 30-60 minutes longer. This seemed to be a difficult time period and commitment right after school. While it may be difficult for grade 7 and 8 students to come back to programming if there was a break between school and Sacred Moon Circle Program, this was one of the challenges that may have contributed to sporadic attendance. A possible solution for these challenges would also include having a committed cohort of students who self-select to participate based on clear expectations. Additional incentives for regular attendance at this program could also support consistency.

Pre-program communication between Elder and facilitator & support workers and role models would also strengthen the program. Prior to the implementation of the 13 weeks, it would be beneficial for the group to meet to share priorities, goals, and expectations to ensure the success of the program. This could include providing staff with an outline of the weekly requirements to ensure that they can be prepared. Additionally, it would be beneficial for communication to the students about the Sacred Moon Circle Program to be strengthened pre-implementation. A clear understanding of role and expectations facilitated by open communication will strengthen the work already being done to ensure success of the program.

While the weekly plan followed a set routine, it was identified that there is a need to simplify the teachings that are being shared with the students. This would also allow for more time internalizing and reflecting on personal meaning of the teachings through activities. It may also be beneficial for the students to receive a booklet or binder to keep reminders of the teachings each week. This, in combination with the weekly circle connections, and work hung on the walls as visual reminders, already being done, could reinforce students' retention of the material from week to week.

Overwhelmingly it was agreed that the time spent during the last of the 13 weeks on the Elders land was the most profound for the group. With this reflection, opportunities to increase land-based learning through outings should be explored. This could include medicine picking, a day of ceremony and teaching on the land, and field trips where students can apply learning in action.

Ceremony was an integral component to the Sacred Moon Circle Program. Expanding the opportunities for students to increase their knowledge and participation in ceremony was identified. This could include naming ceremonies, building hand drums, and learning songs, for example.

6. Alignment with the Child Centred Model

6.1 Child Centred Model Summary

The foundation of the work developed through the Winnipeg Boldness Project relies on the wisdom and direction of community leaders who have, from the beginning, informed a *way of working* in the North End of Winnipeg, Manitoba that promotes success for families. This way of working has been brought together into the Child Centred Model as a promising practice. Each of the prototypes designed and implemented by community partners with the support of the Project are demonstrations of the Core Values and Attributes of Promising Practice.

The model is a way of working with families that honours the strengths, knowledge, passion, and commitment that families bring to raising their children. The model honours this and provides opportunities to learn, build, grow, experience, and belong to a community. The underlying belief within the model is that children are at the centre of a community and members, organizations, structures, and policies that are a part of that community are in interrelated and interdependent relationships with children, families and communities. These relationships are important and need to be led by families and those who are in their circles of support.

6.1.1 Implications for Designing and Implementing based on the Model

1. Early childhood development initiatives will need to see sacredness of the whole child, within the context of history, culture, family, community, their full human potential, and right to the fullness of life.
2. Supports to parents must include teachings that affirm sacredness, dignity, value and worth, healing from trauma, and hope. Keeping families together must be priority. A variety of learning experiences must be accessible, affordable, culturally safe, and drawn from strength-based perspectives, with opportunity to spend some time on the land.
3. Healing strategies and modes of healing must integrate trauma counseling and restoration of balance in healing relationships between professionals and ones seeking help. The help of Elders, medicine people, sweat lodge ceremonies,

healing circles, should be offered as an integral part of healing when the need is expressed.

4. Community Learning Circles should be implemented to share knowledges, wisdom and worldviews of the community.
5. The community has its own answers. Service providers can only be facilitators in the process of building strong, vibrant communities. The community is enriched with wisdom, knowledge and experience that can be drawn from in future initiatives.
6. Human resource development strategies must include multicultural proficiency education and training.
7. The whole community of service providers, everything that touches the lives of our children, must be fully engaged with, and invested in the early childhood development initiatives.

Based on the values and principles of the Child Centred Model, promising practices have been outlined and the Sacred Moon Circle prototype is a demonstration of this model.

6.2 Sacred Moon Circle & the Child Centred Model

Sacred Moon Circle addresses the following Core Values and Attributes of Promising Practice in the implementation of the process:

Children are sacred: Sacredness is especially observed in children, who are closest to Creator. Babies are a gift and a responsibility.

The Sacred Moon Circle Program was designed to provide a strong foundation for young women to understand their cultural backgrounds, to build awareness about themselves and their relationships and responsibilities. The goals of the Program are critical elements within an Indigenous life course development model. The Program provided opportunities for the youth to learn about their roles and relationships in particular when transitioning from youth to adulthood.

Self-determination: “We are put here by the creator to care for each other and for mother earth. We should therefore be responsible for ourselves, for our families, for the

next generation, and for our community.”¹² Having voice and volition to make choices to attend to individual needs leads to recognition of the responsibilities to family and community.

Women talked about their experience of being Indigenous and being a woman. Discussions occurred about how do they take care of themselves, how do they take care of others, the circle provided an opportunity to make these connections. There was appreciation for connectedness and relatedness. Students began to see how development must always start with you, that self is important to nurture. From this teaching you can then be respectful and responsible to other relationships such as family, community, and school. Activities reinforced these interconnections and how choices we make affect family, siblings, and extended family.

Person Centred: Services are responsive in considering people as wholistic beings who have competing needs and differing priorities; therefore, services are flexible.

The Sacred Moon Circle Program is about working with youth where they are at - this means that the facilitators understood that each person attending the group came with a variety of gifts and experiences as well as challenges. Each week the facilitators came with a plan, which at times needed to be adjusted based on the day. Intergenerational relationships were developed and nurtured and created an environment where all were welcome and respected. This created a space of belonging where the youth learned a bout how to be open and communicate in respectful way with peers and with older women.

Relationships/Trust: Time and care is taken to develop relationships and build trust with individuals and families; it is the essential foundation required to be effective and respectful in dealing with all people.

The work of the facilitators in the Sacred Moon Circle Program centered largely on building trust with the youth in order to facilitate a meaningful learning journey that was unique to each individual. The Program created an environment that nurtured and models the values of relationships, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity. Opportunities were made for the Elder, facilitator, support workers, role models, and students to share stories, building trust and relationship in a

¹² KSCS (Kahnawake Shakotii'Takehnhas Community Services). *Aboriginal values and social services: The Kahnawake experience.* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development) 1994 at 22.

respectful manner. The purpose of this strategy is to strengthen participants' sense of relationality. Through the use of the circle and sharing of the teachings and stories, each woman in the circle enacted respect through their actions and interactions with the facilitators, staff and students in the program.

Non-judgment: All people are welcomed and respected regardless of situation or circumstance. People are met where *they* are at: services recognize that people are at different stages in their own journey, face different challenges, and have varied gifts.

The Sacred Moon Circle Program is built on core values that includes respect, reciprocity, love, honesty, truth, humility, and wisdom. The application of these core values created a space where youth were welcomed and safe. Youth were encouraged to share their experiences and each were validated and honoured in the circle. The commitment of the leaders of the program to ensuring this was a safe space for youth to feel nurtured, loved, and valued was clear through the actions each week.

Peer-to-peer learning: Services provide opportunities for community members to build their capacity to become mentors for their peers; this respects the diverse gifts of peoples' experiences and provides meaningful support.

The Sacred Moon Circle Program incorporates multiple opportunities for mentorship and peer-to-peer learning. Program staff, youth mentors, and older role models participated in the weekly groups and shared their own perspectives and experiences that strengthened the teachings of the week and brought authenticity to the circles. During the opening circle, the teachings, and the activities storytelling and sharing of experiences occurred. This opportunity for intergenerational relationship building is critical for mentorship and nurturing potential and leadership within younger generations.

The Child Centred Model is based on the work of leaders in the North End of Winnipeg. Using the model in conjunction with their work with families organizations have seen tangible and meaningful successes for families. The application of this model is evident in the design and implementation of the Sacred Moon Circle Program and will positively impact the sense of identity and belonging, understanding of roles and responsibilities, and connection to future generations. The application of this model is consistent with the review of the literature, completed in Section 2 & 3, which outlines key learning from previous research in this area.

7. What Did We Learn

I think one thing we kept repeating every time was that we loved them. And I don't think they believed us in the beginning, but they did by the end
(Sacred Moon Circle Program Facilitator)

In reviewing the stories gathered through the evaluation of the Sacred Moon Circle Program it is clear that the work undertaken by program facilitators, staff, and students accomplished each of the goals outlined in section three. A summary of key areas of learning are provided below.

Identity is a critical process for development. Understanding who you are, where you come from, and where you are going is an important stage of development. For Indigenous peoples, identity and connection to generations before and to generations to come is held within the worldview.

Intergenerational relationships provide a strong foundation. The girls learned how to be open with older women as well as how to talk to staff and open up. Learning how to communicate in a variety of relationships provides tools to strengthen important relationships that allow young women to expand their circle of support. This provides opportunity for strengthened belonging and community building.

Taking care of your self is critical. Strong and healthy development begins with caring and understanding self. This means nurturing and paying attention to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of self. Sessions made connections about the sacredness of the young women and how to be responsible and care for their bodies in a holistic manner.

Have a vision for your future. The ability for young people to be hopeful for their own future is strengthened through the points made above. Students shared their vision of themselves in the future and built skills to ensure they had the ability to achieve those visions. Hope and dreaming are critical elements to wellbeing.

The physical and relational space occupied by the program built a women's place of cultural wisdom and empowerment - the Sacred Moon Circle. Each session this space was reinforced through participation in an opening and closing circle where teachings were offered and stories were shared.

Respect is learned. A clear outcome of this work is that students learned the protocol and expectations of what it meant to sit in the circle including how to express respect through sitting quietly and listening to the Elder's teaching, and when others are sharing. Each session this goal was strengthened through the repetition of the expectations for what you do when you are in circle, using teachable moments to learn about smudging, respecting the sacredness of the circle, and cooperating with one another.

8. Possibilities and Recommendations for Scaling

The journey offered through the Sacred Moon Circle Program is meaningful and offers opportunities for transformation. Core elements identified as essential for the effectiveness of the program include:

- The use of the circle, ceremony, and teachings;
- Reinforcement of values of respect, relationships, reciprocity, and responsibility;
- Intergenerational connections; opportunities for creativity and activities to integrate and reflect on personal application of the teachings; and
- Connection to land.

Future offerings of the program could reinforce personal and educational development by expanding leadership opportunities. The intergenerational aspect of the Sacred Moon Circle Program was a key element of success. One way to enhance this opportunity is by preparing previous participants in the program to return as mentors, similar to the role of the role models.

Building opportunities to share learning and experiences with younger participants strengthens relationships that will allow for not only educational success, but will further support the answering of the four questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? What is my purpose? Where am I going? Identity experiences and how we make sense of who we are is a personal process that involves reconnecting and nurturing relationships (Anderson, 2000; Palmater, 2011). Answers lie within our selves, our families and our communities and this allows us to uncover the gifts we possess (Hill, as cited in Anderson, 2000). A personal journey of decolonization includes that we understand how we are related to our history, family, community and nation. We can begin to uncover the ways that we are related and connected through sharing of stories, both personal and ancestral. From this we can begin to repair connections and rethread the fabric of who we are.

The program could be adapted for different age groups as well as for young men. Considering the disconnections from culture that have occurred across many generations, it can be asserted that the opportunity for the Sacred Moon Circle Program to be adapted to meet the needs of both young men and young women as well as adults would produce positive impact. One caution lies in the absolute transfer of the program as it stands into new contexts. There are teachings that relate to each stage across the lifespan and speak to responsibilities held by different groups. The teachings of the moons for example may not be the foundation for a program with young men, but the

rationale, process, and values upon which such a program would be delivered would be consistent with the Sacred Moon program.

9. Conclusion

The Sacred Moon Circle was chosen as a prototype in demonstration of the positive impact of implementing programs based on the Child Centered Model. This prototype provides a strong opportunity for youth to connection to culture and strengthen relationship – both of which are priority areas that parents in Point Douglas identified as key to a strength-based strategy for child and family wellbeing. This prototype, delivered with young women in junior high in the North End of Winnipeg, provides indication that the ability for Indigenous individuals to answer the questions of who am I, where do I come from, what is my purpose, and where am I going is critical and can be transferred to other areas across the lifespan. Teachings provided by knowledge keepers, which facilitate an intergenerational connection and understanding of self in relation to others have traditionally been the basis for strong and healthy communities. This will be the basis of resurgence for Indigenous peoples. Opportunities, space, and funding of initiatives based on this prototype are examples of reconciliation in practice.

The Sacred Moon Program is an example of a culturally restorative practice based on Indigenous resilience and Indigenous life course development. The historical and ongoing contexts for Indigenous peoples in Canada require that solutions to the inequities, oppression, and disparities in social and economic wellbeing for children and families be founded upon understanding such contexts. Any solution must be driven *by* Indigenous peoples, *for* Indigenous peoples, and *with* Indigenous peoples. Re-connection and strengthening of cultural identity is a significant cornerstone to many of the solutions being advocated for. This also includes renewed and strengthening of connections to land and language. It is for these reasons that the Winnipeg Boldness Project viewed the Sacred Moon Program as an exciting opportunity to put forward as a prototype, which produced promising practices for working with youth.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Key Informant Conversation Questions

- 1) What core elements of the project are essential for its effectiveness?
 - a) Can you describe the core elements and process of a typical weekly gathering?
 - b) What elements contributed positively to each weekly gathering?
 - c) What could use strengthening from each weekly gathering?
 - d) Were there any challenges? How were these addressed?
- 2) What values were important in each weekly session?
 - a) How were these values displayed?
 - b) Did the enactment of these values contribute to the experience within the circle?
- 3) Do you feel the project inspired younger students to attend school and continue the path to higher education?
 - a) What activities do you feel supported educational inspiration?
 - b) Were there other elements that would have strengthened inspiration for future higher education?
- 4) What do you feel students gained as a result of participation in the project?
 - a) How do you feel the program supported an increase in student's sense of identity?
 - b) How do you feel the program supported an increase in student's connection to community?
 - c) How do you feel the program supported an increase in student's sense of self?

Appendix 2: Key Questions and process for group reflection and learning

In order to elicit these stories, the following **key questions** will guide the process of story gathering:

- 1) What core elements of the project are essential for its effectiveness?
- 2) Can the project inspire younger students to attend school and continue the path to higher education?
- 3) What awareness have students gained as a result of participation in the project?
- 4) What changes have occurred within the students and what contributed to those changes?

Agenda:

Introductions/ice breaker

Sharing your journey: Guided Activity

1) **Part 1: Words/Images/Brainstorming**

- a) Draw two circles inside one another in the middle of your poster board. Separate them into four sections like a medicine wheel. In each of the sections please write

- i) Who am I?
- ii) Where did I come from?
- iii) What is my purpose?
- iv) Where am I going?

b) **Questions:**

- i) **Before you started the program what words or images would you use to answer these four questions:**

(1) Who am I? • Where did I come from? • What is my purpose? • Where am I going?

- ii) **After the first few weeks, how did you feel about the program?**

(1) What were the most important parts for you? • What would be important to include for next time? • What could be added to make it even better the next time?

- iii) **Now that we are at the end of the program can you share words or images that you would use to answer these four questions:**

(1) Who am I?

- (a) **Are there specific activities or teachings that you remember the most?**

(i) What makes you remember these the most?

(ii) Do they have a special meaning for you?

(iii) Was there an activity or teaching that you feel connected to your heart?

- (b) Where did I come from?

- (c) What is my purpose?
 - (i) **Did you know about ceremonies before this program?**
 - (ii) What other learning did you gain from participating in ceremonies with this program?
- (d) Where am I going?
 - (i) **Has participating made you think more about your vision/goal for your future?**
 - 1. What does your future look like?
 - 2. Does your vision for you future include education? What does this look like?

2) Part 2: Found Poetry

- a) Go through the pages in the Sacred Moon Circle proposal
- b) Cut out words that stand out or are meaningful for you
- c) Arrange the words in front of you
- d) Do they tell a story? Do you have a story you want to share with these words about you, the program, or what you have learned?
- e) Try arranging them a few different ways, filling in any missing words with handwritten ones of your own
- f) Once you have this figured out, find a space to paste them on your poster board.
- g) Give your creation a title and/or illustrations

3) Sharing

- a) What have you created? Does anything surprise you?
- b) Do you have any final thoughts about your experiences with sacred moon circle program you would like to share?