



Walking the Red Road

Our community's journey to help each person live a good life

Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive Project
Report and Action Plan for North Bay's Urban Aboriginal Strategy

North Bay Indian Friendship Centre | June 2014

Cover and Photos

Our community members provided all of the photos and artwork for this report. Often, we include their names and home communities.

Lindsay Sarazin took our cover and Shine-A-Light Gala photos. Lindsay was born and raised in North Bay; his family is from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. Lindsay is Founder of Wolf Eye Productions and a graduate of Broadcasting: Television and Video Productions at Canadore College.

On the front cover is Richard Assinewai, a Spiritual Leader and Elder in our community. Richard is from the community of Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island, speaks his Anishinaabe language fluently, shares traditional teachings, and conducts naming and healing ceremonies.

On the back cover is Katherine Sarazin, a mother, Grandmother and volunteer at the Friendship Centre for over 20 years. Following Algonquin culture and Anishnaabe traditions, Katherine lives off the land, cooking wild game, tanning her own hide, gathering her own medicines, and helping her family and community.

Design and Logo

Thanks to the Aboriginal Business Directory, we found Andre O'Bonsawin, Owner and Creative Director of Studio Eleven 17. Andre, and the research team of Patty Chabbert, Paige Restoule, and Dawn Lamothe, are the creative team behind this report. With the help of our community members, Andre designed our logo with much meaning behind it. The logo is in a circle incorporating a feather to represent the path that each individual takes. The urban community (in blue) and the teepees (in different colours) are displayed in balance through reflection. The land is represented as sweet grass in a braid, signifying the strength of both communities, as well as one of the four medicines. The sunburst behind the teepees and in the water represents the "shine," as one Elder commented, "It's our time to shine!"



U-ACT | URBAN ABORIGINAL
COMMUNITIES THRIVE

Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive Project
North Bay Indian Friendship Centre, North Bay, Ontario, Canada

© North Bay Indian Friendship Centre | June, 2014





AANIIN, BOOZHOO, WACHIYA SHEKOLI, SHE:KON, TANSI, WACHAY

Welcome to all!

On behalf of the members of our Community Action Circle and the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre, we are excited to share the stories of our work together. In this report, we describe how we learned to work together as a community to help each person live a good life. We thank everyone for participating.

Walking the Red Road



For each of us, walking the red road may mean something different. For our community, it is a symbol of the journey we are taking together to help each person live a good life.

Through a research and social action project called Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive (U-ACT), we came together to learn how we could better support our community members to walk the red road.

When the researchers asked, "What is research?" our community members responded clearly: "Research is a way to gather knowledge on problems facing the community and then find solutions."

Now that we've been on our journey together for almost two years, we know that Aboriginal culture and some key elements will help us to address racism, mental health and addictions challenges, unemployment, and homelessness. Throughout the project, we were inspired by the strength, wisdom and leadership offered by our community members.

Together, we created a model for urban Aboriginal community development and an Action Plan so that we can continue gathering knowledge and implementing solutions in our community.

Together, we can support our community members to walk the red road and live a good life.

Living your life in a good way is walking the red road" said one of our community members. "Being selfless, being a helper, and reaching out to people that look like they need help but may be too afraid to ask is the best way." For another community member, "Walking the red road is about reclaiming identity and embracing traditional knowledge."



Table of Contents

AANIIN, BOOZHOO, WELCOME TO ALL.....	3
WALKING THE RED ROAD	4
THIS REPORT IS FOR YOU	6
HELLO FROM NORTH BAY INDIAN FRIENDSHIP CENTRE	7
RESEARCH - PEOPLE, MOMENTS AND LEARNING ALONG THE WAY.....	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
INTRODUCTION	10
REZ TO THE CITY – MY LIFE AS A CREE	12
NORTH BAY AT A GLANCE.....	14
BEFORE U-ACT BEGAN	15
SHARE	
Aboriginal Culture is the Centre	20
North Bay Urban Aboriginal Community Development Model.....	21
Eleven Key Elements	23
LEARN	
Our community members want to find home in North Bay.....	46
Racism persists, but we can overcome it	52
Aboriginal worldviews influence our experiences with services.....	56
Our mental health is strengthened through culture.....	61
Our youth want to connect to culture, help the community and each other.....	70
The Arts are culture, strengthening community and increasing awareness	76
Aboriginal festivals promote culture and tourism.....	78
Cross-cultural partnerships build relationships and boost economic opportunities.....	80
ACT	
Moving to Action	85
Action Plan	86
MY JOURNEY TO A GOOD LIFE	88
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Government of Canada - Urban Aboriginal Strategy	90
Appendix B: U-ACT Project Timeline.....	92
Appendix C: <i>USAI Research Framework</i> Highlights	94
REFERENCES	95





This report is for you

Our community members.

The people and organizations who have supported us.

Those who support our goals and want to join us on our journey.

Those interested in Indigenous research, urban Aboriginal community development, and Urban Aboriginal Strategy development.



”

I am proud to share the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre's U-ACT project with you. I want you to know how important and successful this project has been for our community

One event that still stands out for me is the Shine-A-Light Gala. Its purpose was simple: shine a light on Aboriginal community members. But it accomplished so much more. It also shone a light on the Friendship Centre and our community.

The people who came out to the event were really impressed, including the media. They were not only impressed with the gala itself, but also to see everyday people acknowledged for their contributions. Some of the people honoured came from struggles themselves, so to see people surviving and going about their lives and being recognized was a really nice aspect of the project. People feel good when they are recognized.

We also developed new relationships and formed partnerships with non-aboriginal agencies that had never visited our Centre. People used to say, “What is that big brown building on the corner of Cassells and Fifth?” Now they know who we are and what we do. We now work together, not in silos, but by connecting with each other. After all, we’re not the only agency in the community working with Aboriginal peoples. It’s really important for all of us to come together. Forming community relationships and establishing respectful communication and healthy partnerships is the formula for a successful, strong community.

Although we had some funding challenges during the project, one of the other strong points is that these challenges didn’t really hinder us. We did more with less. While that might be typical of Friendship Centres in general, in this



**Nancy Potvin, Executive Director
North Bay Indian Friendship Centre**

case, it was the community relationships and partnerships that came through for us.

Another highlight was the youth involvement. The project staff really engaged the youth and the youth stepped up to the plate. It was also amazing to see the connection between the young people and the Elders.

This was a project where good things happened from the very beginning. By respectfully building relationships and connections, we not only raised awareness about our community, we shared our community with others —our challenges and our strengths.

Good things are already coming out of this: we’re starting a housing project proposal and we have many community partners interested and onboard from the get-go. The cross-cultural work and policy development accomplished during the project will go a long way. We’re going to develop protocols and agreements and move forward on increasing cross-cultural awareness. All of these steps will continue to create tangible improvements for our community members.

We’re optimistic that we will receive funding to implement our Action Plan and we will continue to shine the light. Come and visit us in the big brown building anytime.

Nancy Potvin



Research...

people, moments, and learning along the way

By Patty Chabbert, Lead Researcher

Patty Chabbert is of Algonquin, Golden Lake First Nation descent and was born and raised in North Bay. With extensive experience in research, community development, and policy analysis, Patty is dedicated to working with and supporting Aboriginal communities and organizations to achieve their goals. She also assists mainstream organizations in creating culturally safe spaces and services for Aboriginal children and families.

Hello! Welcome to our community's journey. This project has occupied nearly two years of my life and there are so many reflections I would like to share with you.

First, I remember sitting in our office after a busy event, coaxing the genius thoughts out of my two associate researchers. Immersed in their community, their language and culture, they understood the need for cultural safety and respectful dialogue with community members. They knew that tobacco was needed for consent or that a Grandmother was required to guide and support sensitive discussions. People were drawn to them and this sparked community engagement. When they shared their observations with me, each would then say, "...but that's not research, it's just my experience." Supporting community participation was so familiar and comfortable, they couldn't accept that what they were doing was research. In exasperation, throwing my hands into the air, I would respond, "But that *is* research!"

The only reason we managed to complete hundreds of hours of interviews, focus groups, and events, was because of them. It has taken me nearly two years to convince them that they indeed are amazing researchers.

I also remember the times when people gently corrected me. To reflect and honour their own teachings, community members stepped in to rearrange chairs for an important community meeting. Or, the youth telling me that a focus group "sucked" and that we should do it again with a sharing circle, medicines and an Elder! These gentle corrections always made me feel that people cared enough to make sure things were done right. It also showed me that they wanted to do more than "participate" in research; they wanted to help, they wanted to give more of themselves, they wanted to lead, and in doing so, they continued to teach me about "community-driven" research.

I have also come to cherish the small moments like when an elder held a rock out to me and said, "Is this rock alive?" And when a young boy handed me a sweet grass braid that now hangs beside my son's crib. And another, when a Grandmother jokingly nudged me to offer her tobacco, because I was a little too eager and excited in my request. In these moments, I felt the truest meaning of this project. The gathering and sharing of knowledge doesn't just happen in research facilities or in recorded interviews, it happens in everyday life, between individuals.

A final highlight is when my experiences as a policy analyst, Indigenous researcher, mother, and community member would all collide—in a good way! We need to connect these worlds more often. That's what this report is—a bridge, connecting you to our community's path.

Thank you to the community for sharing your experiences and wisdom. I hope this report presents the knowledge you have so generously shared in a respectful way.



Acknowledgements

Our work together would not have been possible without the leadership and support of our community members and many organizations.

Elders visited often, contributing their advice, inspiring us with their stories and humour, and offering prayers at our meetings.

Our community members offered their minds, hearts and hands to help us work together on our journey.

Community Action Circle members, representing community organizations, businesses and government, came together offering leadership and showing we can work together to put the community first.

Youth Action Circle members offered nonstop ideas, energy and leadership.

North Bay Indian Friendship Centre (NBIFC), a trusted Aboriginal community resource in North Bay, was the hub for the project, providing a warm home and administrative support.

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) invited the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre to continue the work begun in phase one of the Urban Aboriginal Task Force and provided seed funding, research, policy, and project coordination and support for the U-ACT sites.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), a key funding partner, enthusiastically supported us to carry out our work and achieve our ambitious goals.



Introduction



This project has brought the youth and the elders together, creating a lot of activity in our urban setting. It is just such a beautiful thing that we could have a program like this, to really enhance what is already here.

Dot Kennedy Beacauge, Board Member
North Bay Indian Friendship Centre

Photo Voice. Shine-A-Light Gala. Community Action Circle. Coffee Houses.

What do all of these things have in common? These are some of the ways we did research during our project. Through workshops, events, sharing circles, and planning meetings, we learned about our community's challenges and its solutions. Our motto was "share, learn, act."

The project that brought us together for this purpose is called Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive (U-ACT), a community-driven research and social action project. This report tells the stories of how we worked together in North Bay.

The project came about because of important work that had been done earlier and because our community members continue to face many barriers. Securing employment and housing and living with the effects of inter-generational trauma with few culturally safe services and supports are some of the challenges.

Building on the work completed in 2007 by the Urban Aboriginal Task Force, the Ontario Federation of Indian (now Indigenous) Friendship Centres (OFIFC) invited the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre, along with two other communities, to participate in Phase Two in May of 2012. The OFIFC provided seed funding and supported the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre to apply to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding. In November 2012, funding was granted and this project was born.

With a research team hired to support the project, the overall goal was to create a Community Action Plan for our urban Aboriginal community. To do so, we knew we needed to approach research

differently—we needed research tools and techniques that would work for our Indigenous community members. The OFIFC's recently launched *USAI Research Framework* would provide a strong foundation for community-driven research and Ontario Trillium Foundation funding would enable us to reach specific goals identified by our community.

These goals included mobilizing members of the Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities to work together to address racism, promote cross-cultural learning, and increase awareness of and respect for Aboriginal culture.



*We want to break down barriers
- connect youth to Elders. We want
to work with the Elders to address
needs and wants. We want to
see through your eyes, what has
happened, what is happening
now, and what will happen.*

Member, Youth Action Circle



As the project unfolded, we realized that it was becoming more than a research project: it was becoming a lesson in community engagement and community development.

Indigenous research principles and practices including promoting “cultural safety” (rather than “cross-cultural awareness”) and supporting “community-driven” research (rather than “community-based”), ensured our Aboriginal community members remained the authors and drivers of the process, their experiences and voices at the centre.

Along the way we learned there were some key elements—dedicated funding, being housed in a trusted community resource, and community participation and leadership, to name a few—that were contributing to our success. With Aboriginal culture as the foundation, these elements now make up North Bay’s model for urban Aboriginal development. This model is the basis for our Action Plan.

Mobilizing the community and creating an Action Plan reflects some of the common steps and goals of the Government of Canada’s Urban Aboriginal Strategy program.¹ Established in 1997, its purpose is to strengthen the social and economic welfare of Aboriginal peoples in urban settings.

We are extremely pleased and excited to share this report with you. In the first section (“Share”), we talk about our process of working together, ultimately creating a model for urban Aboriginal community development. In the second section (“Learn”), we focus on the issues facing our community. Throughout we highlight our strengths, aspirations and recommendations. In the last section (“Act”), we present our Action Plan.

Implementing our model, acting on our community’s priorities, and becoming an Urban Aboriginal Strategy site, will strengthen the social and economic welfare of our Aboriginal community members.

Join us on our journey to help each person live a good life.

¹To learn more, refer to Appendix A.





Reg to the City - My Life as a Cree

By McKenzie Ottereyes-Eagle

Mckenzie Ottereyes-Eagle is Cree, raised in Waswanipi First Nation, Quebec. Now he lives in North Bay and participates in programs, ceremonies, powwows and mentors younger Aboriginal youth. McKenzie attends Nbisising Secondary School, located in Nipissing First Nation, and is looking forward to graduating next year, although he loves school so much he doesn't really ever want to leave.

My name is McKenzie Ottereyes-Eagle and I'm from the Cree First Nation of Waswanipi in Quebec. The roads are pretty bad up north, so it is about an eight hour trip from Waswanipi to North Bay. My parents are full Cree. My dad was born in the bush and is a residential school survivor. I'm in the middle with three brothers and two sisters. My whole family moved to North Bay three years ago when I was 16, so that my mom could attend Canadore College.

Before I talk about living in North Bay, I want to say more about my reserve. I grew up there. We spoke a lot of Cree in my community. I was taught Cree when I was just a little baby and I started learning English when I was in Grade 3. My whole family, the whole reserve, spoke Cree. Growing up, I participated in activities, went to school and played sports. I was an athlete.

We spoke so much Cree back home that I didn't even care if I spoke my language. It was just what we did. We're so isolated up there—the only thing we cared about was hockey, well, and I guess the news.

I was excited about moving to North Bay. It was different. I have family here and I was looking forward to spending time with them. Initially, I wasn't too excited about



school. I knew it was going to be different here. I guess the movies I'd seen about high school made me think I should prepare myself not to be on the nerd side.

When I first got here, I met a native kid from Moose Factory. I thought he looked Cree so I started talking to him in Cree and he just looked at me. I was pretty shocked. He was Cree, but he didn't speak the language. I told my mom about it. Then I met other natives around town, and each one said, "I'm from here" and "I'm from there" and I said, "Do you speak your languages?" And they said, "No." They looked kind of ashamed.

I was really shocked and I started talking to my mom about it. She said that residential school is one of the biggest reasons why so many of our people have lost their languages. And I said, "Oh, yeah? My people didn't lose their language because they were strong to keep it." We were so far up north that the residential school teachers and the company didn't want to come up there because it was too cold and it cost too much money, so they mostly left us alone up there. Still, I'm afraid to lose my language. Most native people don't have their language anymore. My dad was in residential school and he wasn't allowed to speak Cree to his brothers, sisters, or friends. If he did, he would have gotten slapped. As soon as he came back, he still had his language but it wasn't as strong as it was. So he went back into the bush to learn it again, learn about his traditions, hunting skills.

Every time when I am hunting or walking home in a big blizzard, I think about my dad and how much pain he went through. He's still got his language and his hunting skills, and I think to myself, "If he can do it, I can do it." My dad is my role model.

I have friends from Moose Factory who don't know their language. Our Cree is similar and one of my friends wants to learn the Cree that we speak. The Ojibways from this territory ask me about how we say certain things. And they say, "Oh, we say it like that too." That's one of my favourite parts about being here. We are learning words in each other's languages. I'm starting to understand their conversations. One day I would

like to learn another native language. I really love it here in North Bay and I love back home. But there are bad influences back home, problems with drugs and alcohol.

Here in North Bay, I go to ceremonies. I'm a powwow dancer. Pow wow dancing for me is a passion. I do it everywhere. Powwows are like sports mixed with ceremony and celebration. Everything is so beautiful about powwows. Powwows are important to me. You meet so many friends, people.

I love the school that I go to here. It is a very special school—a native reserve school. It is similar to my reserve. The school has the traditions and ceremonies so I am more connected to my culture.

I got asked to be the head dancer for the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre's powwow coming up in June. I have friends back home that are traditional and into culture and they never thought that someone like me would be head dancer in a powwow. I didn't expect to be asked, but it is something I knew I would do one day. I'm involved with the Friendship Centre a lot. I attend programs and my brother and I have brought a lot of kids here to join the programs. I don't work here, but I would love to.

I'm in grade 12 and will be finishing up next year. I don't even want to leave my school because it is so awesome. I want to be a fire fighter—a forest fire fighter and go all over the world. It would be one of the biggest, scariest challenges. I like adventures and I like the tools and gadgets they use. After that, I want to be a Cree language teacher. I'd like to teach teenagers.

I'd like to bring powwow dancing back to my community. I want to help my community get started going on the good road. I also want to go back home and learn more about my language. I still need to learn some words that the Elders use. I want to bring them back into use so that our language can be even stronger. I want to bring Cree to the Cree people here in North Bay. Our language is very strong and that made our people proud. I feel a responsibility to help keep our language strong.

I am very proud that I can speak Cree.



North Bay at a glance

North Bay's Aboriginal population is diverse and growing



Aboriginal peoples have been part of the larger community of North Bay since before it was incorporated as a town in 1891. In the 2011 Census, Aboriginal people made up 7.9% of North Bay's population, well above the Ontario average of about 2%². The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit and the North East Local Health Integration Network show higher numbers, up to 9.7%, reflecting the fact that resources based in North Bay have funding and service catchment areas that include Aboriginal people living in the surrounding area. Overall, the Aboriginal population in the North Bay area is increasing and young people between the ages of 14 and 19 make up the largest and fastest growing part.³

Many Aboriginal community members are from local First Nations communities of Nipissing and Dokis. Still, there is a great deal of diversity within our urban Aboriginal community: at one event held at the Friendship Centre, there were over 40 languages or cultural backgrounds represented including Ojibwa, Oji-Cree, Cree,

Inuit, Algonquin, French and Métis⁴. Community service providers believe that upwards of 75% of their clients are from the James Bay coastal communities and are primarily young single moms with families, who speak English as a second language. Responding to the needs of this diverse and mobile population poses unique challenges to housing and social services.

Historically, North Bay experienced growth through strong lumbering and mining sectors, three railways and the military. North Bay's Labour Market Group reports that telecommunications, retail-grocery and manufacturing are the major private employers today⁵. The Labour Market Group also suggests that North Bay's current employment opportunities result in, "a predominance of contingent, seasonal, lower-paying jobs, with few benefits and little job security."⁶

North Bay is also home to the recently established North Bay Regional Aboriginal Mental Health Centre. Opened in January 2011, the health centre provides services to clients from across northeastern Ontario. The health centre, along with the university and college, are "...the current engines driving North Bay's economy" along with provincial government services.⁷

North Bay is considered a gateway community, offering many unique opportunities for tourism and travel industries as well as community development. The *Maamwi Kindaaswin Festival & Powwow*, the *Canadore Powwow*, and *National Aboriginal Day* events offer important opportunities for the local Aboriginal community and visitors to participate in traditional ceremonies and celebrations, promoting and sharing Aboriginal culture, knowledge and traditions among Aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.

²About Ontario, Government of Ontario. ³North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. ⁴U-ACT Survey
⁵North Bay's Labour Market Group. ⁶North Bay's Labour Market Group ⁷Wikipedia.



Before U-ACT Began

Much work had already been done. Following on the findings of the 1981 Task Force on the Needs of Native People in an Urban Setting, the goal of the Urban Aboriginal Task Force formed in 2003 was to use research to learn more about the realities of Aboriginal life in urban settings in order to inform policy at municipal, provincial and federal levels.

With five communities participating, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Barrie-Midland, Sudbury and Kenora, the Task Force determined in 2007 that while some gains had been made and much work had been done by many, Aboriginal peoples living in urban settings were still facing many of the same issues as in 1981. Almost 25 years later, racism and related challenges in education, housing, employment and healthcare persisted.

Acting on this finding, the Task Force launched a second phase. Now with three additional communities participating, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins, the purpose was to expand the role of research to include capacity building and community mobilization. This time, research teams would support communities to identify and address issues.

This is how the Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive (U-ACT) Project began in North Bay. For more information on the key phases and activities, please see Appendix B.





”

*Each new day,
Each new adventure,
It brings the chance
To help myself, To
help somebody else.*

**Virginia Goulais,
Mother, Grandmother
Honoured at Shine-A Light Gala**

Virginia is from Wikwemikong First Nation, and currently calls North Bay home. Virginia is a mother of three, grandmother of three, and has been with her husband Frank for 41 years. Virginia’s mother and father raised her traditionally, to which she attributes her deep connection to and love of Mother Nature today. As one of seven children, Virginia learned at an early age the value of volunteerism and collaborating with people. She also grew up without electricity or hydro in a log cabin, where her mother farmed, her father worked in the pulp wood industry, and her brothers hunted to provide for their family. As a youth, Virginia withstood the transition from her reservation into urban life, and has been here, thriving in her respective roles as a mother, Grandmother, gardener, and employee.





was really shocked and I started talking to my mom about it. I said that residential school is one of the biggest reasons why so many of our people have lost their languages. And I said, "Oh, yeah? My people didn't lose their language because they were strong to keep it." We were so far up north that the residential school teachers and the company didn't want to come up there because it was too cold and it cost too much money, so they mostly left us alone up there. Still, I'm afraid to lose my language. Most native people don't have their language anymore. My dad was in residential school and he wasn't allowed to speak Cree to his brothers, sisters, or friends. If he did, he would have gotten slapped. As soon as he came back, he still had his language but it wasn't as strong as it was. So he went back into the bush to learn it again, learn about his traditions, hunting skills.

Every time when I am hunting or walking home in a big blizzard, I think about my dad and how much pain he went through. He's still got his language and his hunting skills, and I think to myself, "If he can do it, I can do it." My dad is my role model.

”

It comes down to the human experience. Ultimately we are responsible for how we experience life.

Patricia Gray
Psychotherapist, Artist
Honoured at Shine-A-Light Gala

Patricia’s formative years were spent in the James Bay region of Northern Ontario living amongst the Muskego Cree. This experience, coupled with her own Mi’kmaq ancestry, eventually led her to study healing and wholeness from a cross-cultural perspective. Patricia works with individuals, couples and families in our community to help facilitate healing and improve the quality of their lives and relationships. Patricia believes in the healing power of nature and spends much of the summer canoe tripping and hiking in the Temagami wilderness and Lake Superior regions with her husband.



Aboriginal Culture is the Centre

Aboriginal culture. More than an element, it is the centre, the foundation, allowing each of the basic elements to emerge, stand alone, and work together.

Every aspect of the project, whether it was community engagement, research, funding, or sharing knowledge, was influenced by culture. This is why culture is at the centre of our model.

However, we are not speaking of one, singular, culture. But rather, the many cultures and the many ways in which cultures are expressed, through language, ceremonies, how people view the world.

Our project, and the environment in which it was housed, the Friendship Centre, demonstrate how the many cultures found in urban Aboriginal communities can be supported and included.

How our cultural room, offering access to medicines, supported community members to participate in workshops, ceremonies and sensitive research discussions.

How staff speaking certain dialects helped make new and nervous community members feel welcome and at home.

How the continuous teachings and participation of elders and respected community members wrapped around and supported our Community Action Circle members.

Culture is the foundation and the lens through which everything unfolded. Culture determined how our community chose to spend our funding dollars and how meetings were run.

It is important that government and other potential funders and supporters of urban Aboriginal community development initiatives recognize that culture is at the centre. Culture is the centre.

As you read, and look at Figure 1, you will see how culture, in all of its many facets, filters through, infusing each element, each of the stories we share.



North Bay Urban Aboriginal Community Development Model

Figure 1: Aboriginal Culture and eleven Key Elements help guide our community in gathering knowledge and finding solutions to help each person live a good life.





“ We took faculty [from Nipissing University] to the James Bay coast on a bus. People were amazed that every time we stopped, I knew someone. The relationships are very different. The connections around relations.

Meeting participant





Knowing the community

means connecting with the community in many ways.

A well-known Aboriginal teaching speaks to how we must understand where we came from in order to know where we are going. Learning the story of an urban Aboriginal community can present challenges because many community members have moved to the area at different times, for different reasons, from different nations, representing different cultures, and speaking different languages. Yet, bringing all of these individual stories together and understanding how they contribute to the dynamics of a community is essential.

Consistent with an Aboriginal way of viewing the world that is holistic, with everyone and everything connected, and working with the understanding that many Aboriginal communities have experienced trauma and residential schooling, we used trauma-informed and culturally-safe approaches to gather and share information about our community.⁸

Starting with the individuals participating in the almost 30 programs offered at the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre, and depending on opportunities, funding, and partnerships, we used creative ways to gather information about many issues and topics concerning the past and current lives of community members including culture, language, racism, elder care, mental health, employment, and housing. During monthly potlucks and drumming, we could be found asking questions like, What community are you coming from? or What language do you speak? When it came to gathering information about more sensitive topics and issues like residential school, we sought guidance from Elders, participated in sharing circles, conducted key-informant interviews and supported other safe and creative activities.

⁸From a research perspective, we were putting “cultural safety” into practice. Carefully learning about the individual and collective history of community members, including that many had attended residential schools and experienced abuse, meant that our work and processes were culturally and trauma-informed. Working with that understanding increased safety for participants and promoted participation.





Respecting current reality

builds community involvement.

When the project was just an idea, the “natural place” for us to start was by approaching the existing Aboriginal community leadership groups and to begin asking some key questions like: What results do you want to see? How would you want to do it? How can we help make that happen?

In North Bay, this meant we shared the idea with the Chiefs and councils of local communities, the board, membership and staff of the Friendship Centre, and the Métis Nations Council and staff. Once we had done this, we then began meeting with members of the broader, non-aboriginal community, to tell them what we wanted to do and to invite them to join us in our work.

Those early meetings set the course for the development of the project. They also taught us that asking questions and accepting answers, along with guidance and direction, would ensure that U-ACT reflected the voices and ways of our community members. Respecting and starting with the current reality and current capacity, ensured the community drove the process, both through the structures they suggested to formalize their involvement and through the variety of community activities and events which continued to invite and support community participation.





Participatory planning and decision-making

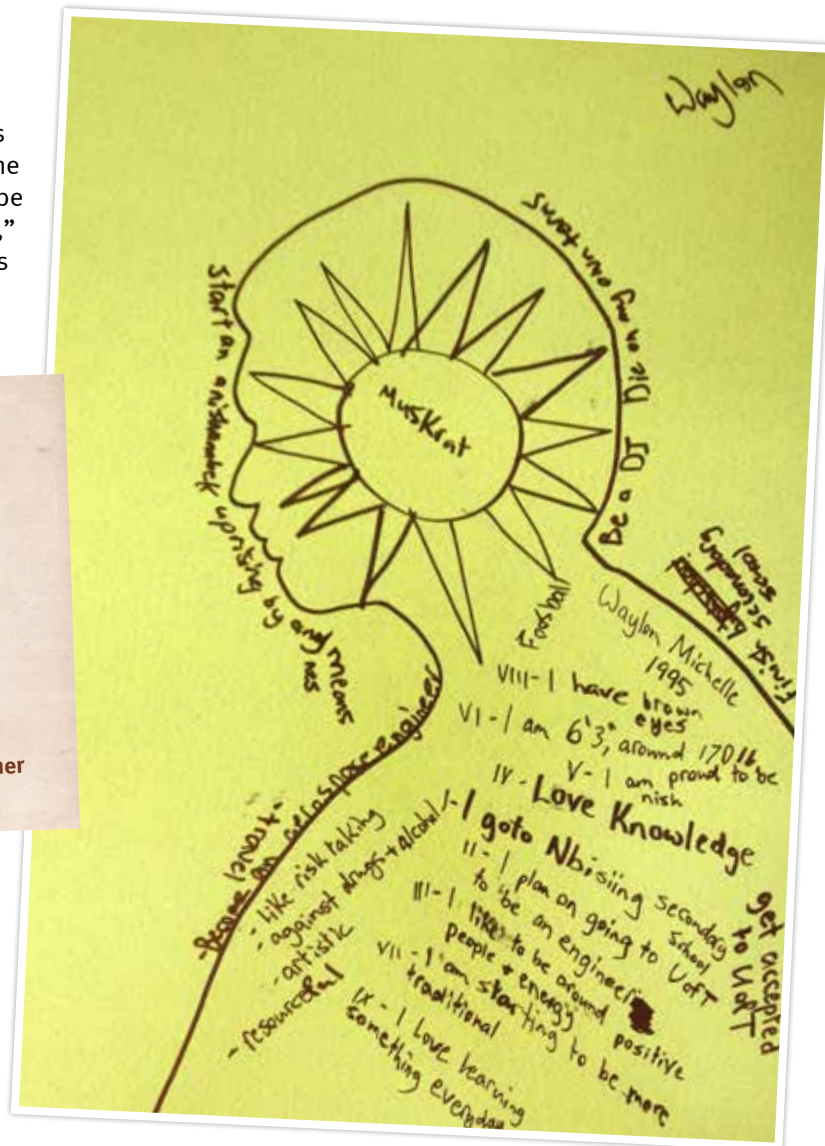
ensures the process is grounded in and driven by the community.

When the project was just an idea, three circles were created to guide and drive the project: Community Action Circle, Elders Action Circle and Youth Action Circle. Initially, the Community Action Circle was going to be a committee but when one of the members set the chairs up in a circle for the first meeting, the circle concept was formally adopted. "That is how everything is done in Aboriginal communities, so everyone is equal, everyone has a say, everyone can be seen and can make eye contact with others," said one of the participants. "No one stands or sits in front of someone. And everyone's opinion is valued."



The way each circle functioned was defined by its members. The differences between them readily confirmed why it was important to support each group to choose how they wanted to work together, rather than suggesting a consistent approach for all.

Read the story, “Three Circles in Action” to learn more about how these groups worked and their roles in the overall process.





Three Circles in Action

Made up of over 50 community representatives, including youth and elder representatives, the primary role of the **Community Action Circle** was to drive the process by identifying priority areas of research and offering guidance and leadership. Representing diverse services and interests in the North Bay area, the members, both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal, were from government and municipal services (e.g. City of North Bay, North Bay Police, North Bay Hydro), education (all school boards), business (the Labour Market Group, TD Bank), Aboriginal services (North Bay Regional Aboriginal Mental Health Service, the Friendship Centre) and the Aboriginal community, including Elders and youth.

While the focus was on supporting North Bay's Aboriginal community to identify issues and goals, because of their roles and commitment, over half of the people participating on the CAC were not Aboriginal. However, with the support of the non-aboriginal members, the Aboriginal members of the CAC, including Elders, project staff and youth, determined how the meetings would be conducted.

Each meeting began with a meal and opening prayer, representing our community's protocol of feeding the mind, body and spirit of everyone present and those who came before us. The goal was to ensure that we were starting each meeting from a unified perspective, allowing everyone to contribute to the best of their ability. This also acknowledged, thanked and drew on the knowledge of those who have come before us. All members participated in all aspects of the meetings and many, Aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, commented positively on the richness of the Aboriginal cultural experience.



The CAC met four times, each time breaking into smaller focus groups to address particular questions and issues. As well, working groups were formed representing particular sectors of the community, such as the Labour Working Group. These groups met more often to carry out specific tasks and then report back to the larger CAC.

I guess my inspiration would be my grandfather. He was the one that taught me a lot, helped me understand about who we are and to never forget who we are.

Richard Assinewai
Honoured at Shine-A Light Gala

While we initially expected the **Elders Action Circle** would function in a similar way, we soon recognized that the Elders offered guidance on their own terms, often informally and individually, seemingly popping by the office right at the moment when we had questions for them. One elder regularly led opening prayers at meetings, another shared knowledge of ethical protocols in research, and another shared stories and jokes during visits.

Sharing their gifts in meetings, in hallway visits or over tea, the Elders advised on ethical, historical and cultural matters. But they also did much more. The Elders played valuable roles in building and/or strengthening relationships within the Aboriginal community and between the Aboriginal community and the Friendship Centre. They also offered much-needed 'balance' to every aspect of the project—they were the 'ying' to every 'yang,' so to speak. The Elders helped us keep the project on a steady course, ensuring that we never pursued any one direction at the cost of another. Finally, they helped increase the confidence and professional and personal development of the researchers and other community participants, particularly the youth.

What motivates me? Meeting people. I love meeting new people, especially the youth. I've studied at the university for many years and I think I only went there because of the young people. They inspire me so much. They give you so much energy. They don't know what they give.

Georgina Pelletier
Honoured at Shine-A Light Gala

The **Youth Action Circle** was created to engage and empower youth to participate and to help ensure their perspectives, ideas, concerns and priorities were included. The YAC was also the link to the broader youth community, organizing its own events and initiatives. As the Elders created their own ways to participate, so did the youth. They created a formal leadership structure with members voting to fill five community member positions along with the leadership roles of chair, co-chair, secretary and events co-ordinator. This approach meant that every member had a role; as the leaders taught and mentored, the group members learned, and all participated in planning and organizing activities and events.

Key to all of this was the 'mentoring' model that the youth adopted, both within the formal leadership structure and the informal activities they organized. Youth participation also helped to ensure balance: just as the Elders provided balance, youth helped ensure that the project remained inclusive and connected to the community at a level and in ways that other members, such as service providers or city officials, could not.





Project hub in well-known Aboriginal community resource

draws on existing relationships, programs, and services, and strengthens them.

Serving as a comfortable and familiar gathering place, the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre strives to improve quality of life for its urban Aboriginal community members. Offering over 30 programs and holding regular community events and feasts, the Friendship Centre provided the research team with a comfortable home and a nurturing family. In turn, the relationships and activities built through the project extended the Friendship Centre's reach, raising its profile and helping to strengthen and build new relationships.

Early on we recognized that the Friendship Centre would support and strengthen the work of the project because it offered ready-made relationships with service providers, clients, volunteers, board members, partners, community Elders, etc. On a practical level, it offered in-house advice, guidance and administrative support.

When it came to engaging with the community, on the one hand, being based in the Friendship Centre also meant that our meetings and activities could take place in a familiar and trusted space, already dedicated to supporting Aboriginal life in an urban community context and strongly linked with other Aboriginal services, both on and off-reserve. On the other hand, for community members coming to participate in our research, events and activities, and for service providers and others participating in our CAC, the project was what drew them into the Friendship Centre, many for the first time. For example, over 50% of our housing and homelessness research participants shared that coming for their interviews was their first time visiting the Centre. There were also participants who shared they had not visited the centre for many years, and our project brought them back. Others said they had heard of the project through other organizations, both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal, and felt comfortable coming to the Centre, because of these 'links.' Similarly, our Labour Market Series increased the "foot traffic" into the Centre, and

”

The "True Self - Debwewendizwin" Program has the partnerships and that is what I found, because I would have not been in a healthy place today, had I not been to this program to keep my head above water through these issues I have had to face in the past year and a half. So they have hooked me in with all the necessary people, otherwise, I probably would have sunk.

Participant

If you are not related to any existing service because you are new in town, it is hard to get in for an assessment. The attending physician is a gate keeper, and if they think you are not bad enough, you will have no access. How do you support access for these people?

Participant



forged new relationships with the Centre, as the majority of service providers and funders participating acknowledged this was their first time visiting as well.

As the project progressed, we soon realized that by strengthening relationships among the Friendship Centre and Aboriginal organizations, community members and non-

aboriginal services, we were nurturing new growth, within a solid foundation. Had we created “new” services, supports or networks, they would have disappeared when the project ended. Instead, we facilitated growth within the existing fabric of the organization’s mandate and reach, and the benefits will continue.

Sharing circles offer powerful, traditional learning and problem-solving, with benefits filtering out to the community

Every other week, between five and fifteen women attend the Sharing Circle at the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre. Representing a mixture of ages and experience, from about age 16 to age 70, the group is led by a Grandmother. In keeping with tradition, the women wear skirts, sit in a circle, and medicines go in the centre, along with a box of tissues and the tear basket. The tear basket ensures that none of the tears that women may shed during the circle are wasted.

The women may already know each other outside of the group or they may be new to the community, however, they get to know each other better and relationships are strengthened.

Women use the group in a number of ways. The group offers space and time for sharing problems and sharing wisdom on many levels. Aboriginal worldviews and traditions are offered to help the women learn balance so that they can be good at whatever it is they want to do—live the red road, live sober lives, take care of their mental health. The group also offers practical problem-solving and assistance. If a woman arrives in crisis, the group attends to her. “Even if someone is not in a good place when they arrive, they leave with a smile on their face,” said one of the associate researchers. As serious as some of the discussions may be, there is always laughter in the group as well, echoing the view that “laughter is resilience.” The help offered in the group goes on outside of the group as well—the women help each other and they volunteer for activities at the Friendship Centre.





Indigenous research approach

naturally incorporates community culture, knowledge, worldviews and community-driven framework.

Why is it so important to use Indigenous research to help build capacity in Aboriginal communities? Indigenous research naturally supports Aboriginal community members to “generate and share knowledge” for their immediate and long term benefit. Based in Aboriginal history and traditions, Indigenous research ensures the process and outcomes are driven and owned by the community.

When we began, we conducted over 30 key informant interviews with staff and volunteers of the Friendship Centre and asked dozens of community partners about their vision for the project and their views about appropriate “research methods,” ethics protocols and potential outcomes.

We then developed a research agenda and work plan that would use a wide range of methods: symbol-based analysis, sharing circles, interviews, voice-box analysis, focus groups, and story-telling. Our community shaped our research agenda by answering questions, and in doing so, ensured the project reflected their voices and vision. When we asked, What is research? Our community members responded clearly: “Research is a way to gather knowledge on problems facing the community and then find solutions.”

Even with careful consultation and planning, questions and concerns arose throughout. Constantly checking in with participants helped to uncover issues related to how we proceeded. Should all activities reflect traditional ways? Is talking about people’s experiences while we cook together actually doing research? Why give tobacco? Is it okay to audio-record or write down what Elders say? What happens to the records?

For guidance, we followed the *USAI Research Framework*, an approach specifically created for use in urban Aboriginal communities by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship



Patricia Sutherland (L), mother, Grandmother, beader, and residential school survivor, standing with her daughter Dawn Lamothe (R), Associate Researcher.

Centres, one of our key funders and supporters. Having carried out community-driven research for much of its history, OFIC created a framework acknowledging that “...research, knowledge, and practice are authored by communities, which are fully recognized as knowledge holders and knowledge creators” (p. 9). *USAI* highlights are available in Appendix C.

USAI also guided our work and relationships with project partners. Together we learned that having tea with an Elder is a valid way of seeking knowledge, that offering tobacco is a valid way of ethically obtaining consent from participants, and that activities like cooking, drum-making and medicine walks are appropriate contexts for exploring research questions.

Please read Dawn’s story, “Work is Ceremony and Ceremony is Work.”



Work is Ceremony and Ceremony is Work

By Dawn Lamothe, U-ACT Associate Researcher

Dawn Lamothe is Métis/Swampy Cree born and raised in North Bay. Her family comes from Constance Lake First Nation and Moosonee and Attawapiskat. Having completed a B.A. at Nipissing University and a post graduate program in Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention, Dawn currently works for the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre as an Aboriginal Prenatal Nutrition/Family Support assistant. Dawn also mentors and supports youth transitioning from foster care to independence and attends ceremonies and a women's sharing circle.

The beginning of my journey as an Indigenous researcher involved separating myself from a western definition of a researcher. A western researcher may enter a community not being familiar with it at all and take ownership of knowledge and treat people as subjects.

“Reciprocity” teaches that in the context of ceremonies and sharing circles, I would not enter into the community as a different person, a researcher, looking to take, remove or claim knowledge as my own when it belongs to the women. Instead, I participated as an Aboriginal woman, born and raised in this community.

By regularly attending the sharing circles with a genuine, open mind and heart, inviting along my auntie, mom, and female friends to share this experience with me, I created a real relationship with the women, young, old, and in between, sharing about the values of the “front porch.”

I attend ceremonies and sharing circles regularly to stay acquainted with the community, especially since we will be drawing upon these people for their input, to share stories, or participate in our events in the future. I think it is important to build trust and be transparent. But attending provided me much more than I expected.

Entering a women's sharing circle for the first time can be daunting to say the least. If there was an analogy I could use to describe the experience initially, I would say it was a grandmother holding my hand in hers and walking with me. As I reflect upon the last year, I am simply amazed by the impact that culture and spirituality can have on life.

It is important for us to attend as we still have much to learn about ceremonies and our roles as women leading youth, and also being able to pass on the knowledge to them about their roles as they mature. For me, this is “building capacity” in its purest form. Having one of our youth from the YAC be our fire keeper during a ceremony is a great example of the good we can do when we continue to support and empower our youth. Myself and the other women were very grateful for the fire and the youth agreeing to tend to it during our ceremony. In turn, he was able to gain invaluable experience and build his confidence acting in his role as a man.

Participating in the sharing circle was not just simply sharing about day to day living, but rather spirituality, culture, and what that means to us today. Ongoing themes, beyond the values we shared about each week, were residential school, family, women's roles, and how colonization has affected us, our families, our friends and this community.

Women as the caretakers, volunteers, nurturers, knowledge keepers, and story tellers of our community are not necessarily always valued because women do not do their work for the recognition. Women pass along power. We pass along opportunities and we give back silently. But we remember the “heartbeat of our grandmothers through the drum.”

We learned together how we have all grown together.





Dedicated project team

made up of Aboriginal community members offers unique advantages.

Our research team was made up of two part-time positions, created to carry out the project: a lead researcher and an associate researcher. The lead researcher role was filled by someone who had grown up in North Bay and had experience in research (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), government, social services, funding, and policy related to Urban Aboriginal Strategy development. Having knowledge and experience with both research approaches meant that the lead could always explain Indigenous research in ways that external partners and funders could understand. It also meant that she could coach and support the more junior members of the team.

Over the course of the project, the position of associate researcher was filled by two young women, both of whom were born and raised in local Aboriginal communities, were knowledgeable about traditional ways, and had grown up around the Friendship Centre. They could virtually jump into working with the community because they had “insider” knowledge and relationships and already knew “how” things should be done respectfully.

Each member of the team brought knowledge, skills, and connections that together, with the active participation of the Elders, CAC and YAC, created a rich source of support for the project. Given the complex nature of the project and the importance of trust and relationships, we want to emphasize the importance of hiring the right people, and investing in their training, should not be underestimated. The right staff members, trained and supported, are essential to the success of the project.

Having the right staff, and building on relationships and networks, meant that we also connected easily to the service and government sectors of North Bay. This was important considering the timeline, community-driven nature of the project, as well as any strained Aboriginal/non-aboriginal relations in North Bay.

Being able to navigate various policy and broader political landscapes, also aided in our development and steady growth in capacity. Being able to use current language and trends in policy allowed us to tap into resources and relationships that many similar projects may not be able to access. For example, in the beginning planning phases, we utilized provincial and federal Urban Aboriginal Strategy programs, such as the Federal UAS Strategy, to frame the long-term vision of the project. This allowed us to begin developing relationships and potentially tap into these financial and policy supports, despite starting off as a community-driven research project.

Last, in addition to being knowledgeable and respectful of Aboriginal cultural protocols in the North Bay community, our team was also aware of the constraints and pressures under which many mainstream organizations and government offices operate. We knew that inviting government and funder representatives to participate in important forums and events here in North Bay would involve written requests, follow-up phone calls and emails, and reaching out to other contacts, to facilitate them being able to attend. These kinds of strategies, common in the mainstream, are well outside the value of non-interference that typically characterizes the communication styles of Aboriginal people. Having staff that could comfortably “walk in both worlds” was vital.



Local research Team connects partner to community members

A community partner said he was having a challenging time speaking with Aboriginal community members for a research project. The project involved looking at housing and homelessness needs in the North Bay community, and the findings would contribute to the provincially mandated 10-Year Housing Strategy.

Within weeks of linking up and partnering with U-ACT, we had dozens of participants and could not keep up with the demand of those who wanted to share their stories!

Our partnership was ethically grounded in Indigenous research (see *USAI Research Framework, Research Spaces*, p. 13) and supported the participation of an otherwise hard-to-reach Aboriginal population, in the development of the Housing Strategy. To learn more, read “Our Community members want to find home in North Bay” in this report.



7 Protocols

validate and uphold community standards and vision.

CAC members believed that by working together, they could increase Aboriginal participation in all aspects of life in North Bay. In coming together, they also believed funding could be used more effectively, service duplication could be reduced, dollars leveraged and new partnerships formed. Instead of operating in isolation or competing against each other, CAC members created a common vision and terms of reference.

Our CAC adopted the following vision:

“A community where Aboriginal and non-aboriginal service providers and community stakeholders are engaged, new relationships and partnerships are built and sustained, resulting in increased levels of Aboriginal participation in all aspects of North Bay.”

Guided by Aboriginal teachings local to the Nipissing District, CAC members developed a terms of reference addressing: vision, mission, structure, membership, meeting procedures, research philosophy, decision-making, use of sub-

committees, confidentiality and conflict resolution. Reaching agreement on these matters meant that a shared vision, philosophy and approach facilitated decision-making and priority-setting throughout the project. For example, community service providers, both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal, came together to set a standard for how Aboriginal clients will experience their services.

The terms of reference also became the basis for the research and ethical protocols we developed to guide our work with partners. As mentioned, we used the *USAI Research Framework* for guidance. Given the history of colonial incursions into Indigenous communities and the subsequent loss of ownership and control, this framework provides the “DOs and DON’Ts” for protecting and strengthening Aboriginal communities as authors and owners of the research process and promotes cultural safety throughout.

It is important for us to stress that while we created written protocols describing mutual expectations and responsibilities in order to promote shared understanding, the standards and expectations reflected were not new to us. The written protocols formalized longstanding Aboriginal community values.

Protocols pave the way forward

Networking and partnership development have become common topics in service delivery and many organizations and networks are strengthening partnerships by using protocols, developing common forms, and forming committees made up of various community organization representatives.

Some “newer” versions of these supports were also identified during our research: protocols aimed at fostering communication and conflict resolution; agreements regarding housing, i.e.

rent supplement money; common intake forms across agencies to reduce repetition for clients; referral committees that agree to consolidate and coordinate access to support spaces, etc.

The benefits of using these kinds of protocols are numerous, including strengthened partnerships—able to withstand staffing, program or funding changes. There is also great potential for organizations to work together to set cultural safety standards, which is where the field is heading.





Leaders and mentors

respect boundaries and bring new allies and partners.

Individual community members including Elders and youth, service providers, organizational representatives and others, were the project's mentors, "instigators" and "boundary crossers." Individually and collectively, they drove the process, bridging and crossing boundaries, introducing and linking the CAC and the research team to new partners and networks, new sources of funding and new resources.

With our feet firmly rooted in Aboriginal culture and traditions (through guiding and written protocols), and with the support and leadership of key participants, we welcomed new connections, relationships, partnerships and networks. Through all of this, we were building capacity. New allies and partners joined the CAC, participated in working groups, and invited us to join their initiatives, etc. As we began to see the benefits—increased understanding of Aboriginal community issues and desires, Aboriginal youth meeting with prospective employers, "shining a light" on our cultural and historical contributions—we saw our capacity growing. As

our circle of participants expanded, so did our opportunities. As you read on, you will see that our leaders, instigators and mentors came from all parts of the community and represented all ages.

”

In powerful ways, our partnership demonstrates how relationships built respectfully and in culturally appropriate ways can unite people across institutions, communities and generations, and produce meaningful results.

Katrina Srigley, Ph.D.
Nipissing University





Trust and relationships

require focus, time and space.

Running the project out of a familiar community resource, staffing the project with members of the local community, establishing action circles made up of community members and building on existing relationships, were some of the ways we fostered trust early on. However, building trust requires time and attention every step of the way. In addition to bringing the community *in* to do research, we took research *out* to the community, attending meetings and, with permission, using events like potlucks and sharing circles to explore questions. We were in a constant dialogue with the community, regularly checking impressions and perceptions of the project and integrating feedback into our planning.

Even so, we couldn't anticipate all of the issues that would arise or the diversity of views we might encounter. Audio recording one person's interview was okay, but writing down what someone else said was a problem; organizing a focus group for some community members worked well, but others preferred using medicines and sharing circles. Checking, re-checking, and acting on community feedback by "trying again" are some of the ways we continually attended to and maintained trust. Despite these careful efforts, when funding was cut during the latter phase of the project resulting in some of our activities and supports being cancelled, we lost the trust that some community members had placed in us.

Indigenous research happens through relationships: a researcher seeks guidance from a community advisor; youth meet with Elders to learn about their pasts; women discuss issues in sharing circles; CAC members work together and eat together. Every step of the project took place through relationships. And like trust, relationships need to be fostered, respected and maintained. Once again, our Indigenous research approach, grounded in the community's ways and preferences, meant that we not only worked through relationships, we also learned to use

methods and activities based in relationships. For example, the YAC wanted to learn more about the Elders in the community. They organized a series of teas and as they developed relationships, they determined when and how it would be appropriate to learn more about the Elders and their stories.

Our relationships with service providers and academics fostered partnerships: individuals and organizations with relationships to members of the research team and/or the CAC, approached us to explore opportunities that could be of mutual benefit. Partnerships formed with Nipissing University, the Labour Market Group, etc. all began this way.

Early in the project we learned from community members that they wanted more "space and time" to drop in, have tea, chat, etc. Essentially, they wanted to be able to come and spend time at the Friendship Centre on their own terms. Given that the Friendship Centre had adopted a programming model in order to support a large number of community interests with limited resources, being able to "drop in" was not as easy as in the past. As well, some community members wanted to be able to spontaneously participate in activities but hadn't gone through police checks or didn't meet other administrative requirements. Some of these circumstances were identified as barriers to participating and the Executive Director and the research team worked together to address these issues. Space is important to our community. Many of us have moved to North Bay from communities nearby and far away, and feeling welcomed and at home in a cultural space is essential. Part of that welcoming atmosphere comes from being able to drop in and socialize without having to necessarily participate in a pre-planned activity.

It may be difficult for anyone to imagine that space and time could have this kind of importance, especially when projects are typically driven by goals and timelines. We cannot stress enough how important it is to take time and make space.





DREAM

Active outreach engages Aboriginal clients

While interviewing service providers in North Bay, two philosophies emerged regarding outreach to prospective clients and networking with other organizations.

One approach could be described as “passive” — let people come to you.

The second, in contrast, could be called “active” — continuously networking, marketing services by dropping off materials, presenting workshops in new settings and bringing your services to other settings. Along this line, some organizations have created satellite offices, closer to First Nations communities. Some mainstream organizations provide their services in Aboriginal organizations,

offer placements to Aboriginal students, and use cultural resources like Elders and medicines, thus increasing links and connections with local First Nations communities.

When we interviewed Aboriginal clients, they clearly identified their preference for the active form of outreach. Many said that they stay with services that are located nearby and feel familiar and comfortable. They will try new services when they are linked to the people and places they already know.

Services using “active” outreach will be more in tune with Aboriginal clients and therefore more likely to reach and engage them.





10 Being flexible and responsive

means being in step with community rhythms.

Unlike common mainstream research approaches, Indigenous research works with the rhythms and dynamics of the community. And as much as we were prepared to do this, it took some time for us to learn how to recognize and respond to the dynamics. In time, we learned that community participation would ebb and flow, that leaders would emerge in unlikely circumstances, and that opportunity would knock when we needed it most. We also learned that rather than seeing some requests and developments as possible distractions *from the work*, we needed to see them as *part of the journey*. When Friendship Centre staff offered casual feedback, when Elders stopped in to tell a story, when youth told us a focus group wouldn't work, when community members rearranged chairs, when cooking became the way to share information—all of this taught us that the project needed to be responsive to the organic nature of community participation and community life. As such, administratively (budgets, work plans), it was difficult to plan exactly what resources might be needed when and for what. However, once we became acclimatized to “going with the flow,” we could respond by asking ourselves, Okay, how can we work with this? How can we better support this person's participation at this time? Could this become an opportunity to explore views on mental health?





Capacity-building funding

enables communities to truly build capacity.

Capacity-building funding, designed to respond to each community's unique combination of challenges, strengths, opportunities, issues and learning along the way, is what truly *enables* communities to increase capacity over the long term.

No matter how creative and resourceful a community is, funding largely determines the course and outcome of a project. We were fortunate to receive funding support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres. With their support, we learned that *pilot or project* funding is critical for concrete, time-limited, goal specific projects. We also learned that the organic and developmental process involved in building the capacity of a community requires funding support that is similarly flexible.

There is often stiff competition for funding dollars allocated to Aboriginal issues. Aboriginal and non-aboriginal organizations fight for the same dollars to work with Aboriginal clients. Typically, Aboriginal organizations do not have sufficient administrative experience and capacity to equitably compete, in part because so much energy is already going to meeting the reporting requirements of multiple funders with numerous stipulations and deadlines.

Understandably, funding support comes with administrative and reporting requirements. Even one additional project with multiple funders adds a significant administrative burden. Currently at the Friendship Centre, there is one book keeper for over 30 programs, with half a dozen funders and multiple reporting requirements.

We learned quickly that creating a collaborative environment, where many organizations come together under a common vision, immediately reduces tensions and builds capacity: we found out about more opportunities, shared skills like proposal writing, engaged in collective problem-solving, and formed new partnerships. We were also fortunate to have the involvement of community members with expertise in the areas of Aboriginal policy and Urban

Aboriginal Strategy development. But even with these unusual strengths, which helped us to leverage dollars and partnership opportunities, and attend to long-term viability issues, we were still beset by capacity challenges throughout the project.

We encountered numerous times when we couldn't do what the community wanted. We didn't have the resources or the ideas didn't fit a particular funding envelope. While we were funded to coordinate the involvement of multiple services and community members, already burdened themselves with challenges and demands, we also needed funding to help us develop our capacity to effectively look for and apply for longer term, sustainable funding. In other words, we experienced *different kinds of capacity challenges*, all of which took a toll on the project as we constantly sought and applied for additional funds, without necessarily improving our capacity to secure those funds.

Having successfully built trust, encouraged community buy-in, developed a common vision, and having begun programming and research, it is particularly distressing to then experience funding cuts. Unfortunately, this has happened before in Aboriginal communities. In our situation, we had to cancel or reduce support for programs and we lost the trust and support of some of our community members and faced skepticism from others about the future of the work. Having worked so carefully to build relationships and foster participation and support, we needed funding support that could help us weather some of these challenges. In many Aboriginal communities, there is no cushion to help with unexpected losses or unsuccessful proposals. While we have highlighted the funding challenges we experienced because it is important to share this information, we also want to recognize the significant role that project funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) played in our overall success.

To learn more about the difference one funder can make, read "How Ontario Trillium Foundation funding helped support our goals."



How Ontario Trillium Foundation funding helped support our goals

Dedicated project funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation supported us to hire a project team to work with our community to mobilize the community to address racism, increase cross-cultural awareness and promote greater respect for Aboriginal culture.

Our first task was to establish a Community Action Circle. This was taken care of early in the project and the members set to work together to meet the rest of the goals. With much of the work and accomplishments documented throughout this report, here we “shine a light” on how we worked together to address one goal:

Improving the positive social visibility of Aboriginal peoples in North Bay.

We began by reviewing the research literature and found the 2010 Environics Institute *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study* to be particularly helpful. Among younger or middle-income non-aboriginals, for example, having a relationship with an Aboriginal person or receiving education about Aboriginal culture were considered significant factors in improving impressions.⁹

We also consulted with our Community Action Circle, Youth Action Circle and Elder Action Circle members, and with their feedback, decided to focus on four key approaches:

a) Strengthening and/or increasing personal relationships between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal community members

The very structure of the CAC supported Aboriginal people to come together with non-aboriginal people, working and socializing together at meetings and events, thus strengthening and increasing personal relationships.

⁹Environics Institute (2010) *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study*.

”
Night celebrates Aboriginal
achievements, future.

North Bay Nipissing News headline

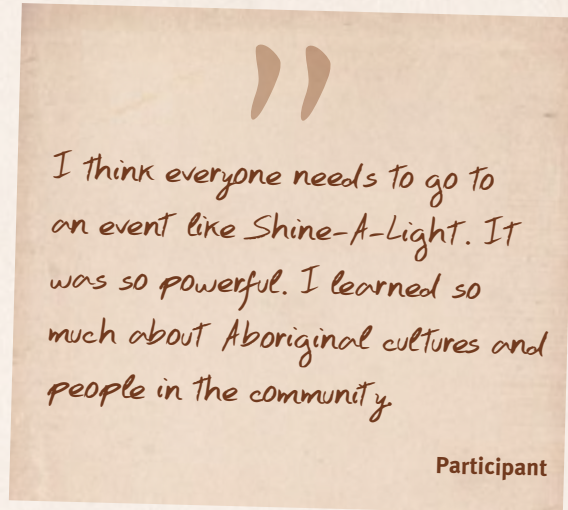
”
At first I thought, what is the CAC? And why was I asked to participate? What could a bank offer to a project like this? Once you started explaining the project and I listened to the other CAC members talk about why they were here, I understood right away we all have a role. All the sectors. I have learned so much already.

CAC Participant



b) Increasing positive visibility of Aboriginal peoples in the local community and media

The Shine-A-Light Gala, held at the Capitol Centre, a prominent arts and entertainment venue in North Bay, was the pinnacle event, the culmination of much planning and the catalyst for other related activities. Aboriginal community members were nominated for their contributions to North Bay and area. Working closely with our MPP's office to issue a press kit, the event drew significant media coverage in North Bay. Celebrating the successes and contributions of ten Aboriginal community members, the headline in the North Bay Nipissing newspaper article confirmed the goal of increasing positive visibility had been met. Behind the scenes, other activities helped to ensure the positive visibility lives on: in-depth interviews were conducted with the nominees, a documentary created, and a 'coffee table book' is being produced.

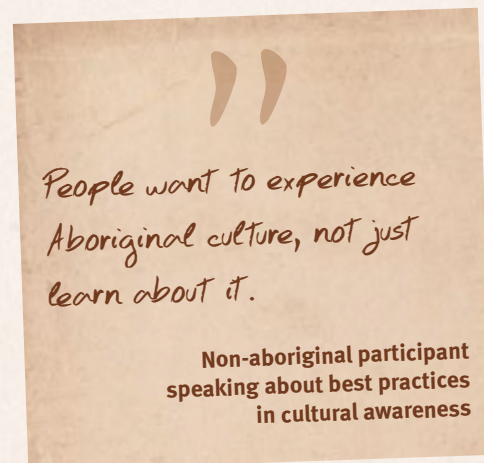


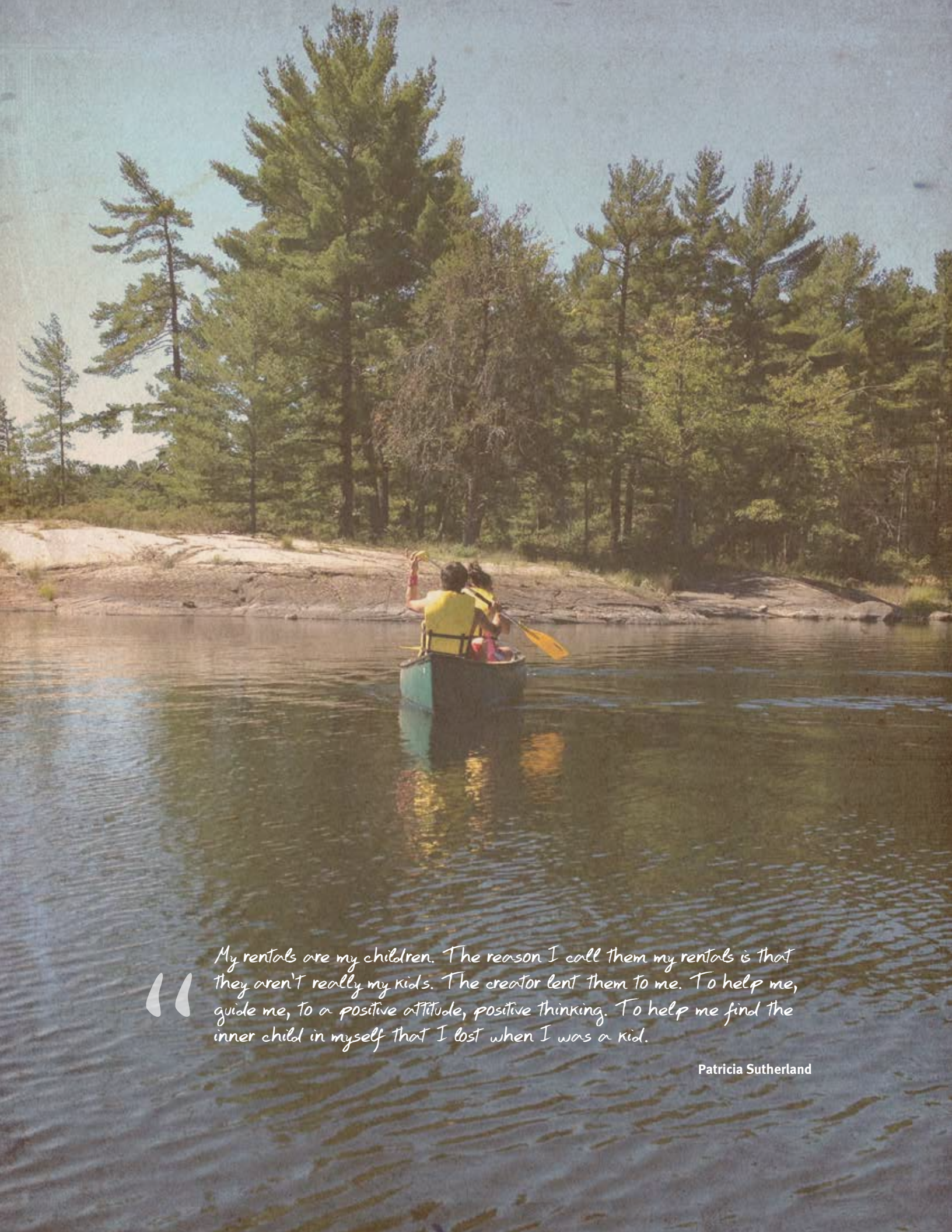
c) Increasing recognition of Aboriginal peoples' educational, social and economic gains

While the Shine-A-Light Gala increased recognition, several other research and community action activities also contributed. We researched the founding and history of the Friendship Centre and other major Aboriginal achievements in North Bay in order to document and share these accomplishments. In collaboration with the Aboriginal Student Links program at Nipissing University, their students created a directory of all Aboriginal-related businesses and services. Organized in partnership with the Labour Market Group, a series of events introduced non-aboriginal employers to prospective funding opportunities and cultural awareness tools that would promote increased Aboriginal participation in the North Bay workforce.

d) Increasing understanding of Aboriginal culture and issues through education and/or awareness efforts

All of the activities mentioned thus far also served to increase understanding of Aboriginal culture and issues. However, we also engaged in other awareness-raising approaches including hosting CAC and other U-ACT meetings at the Friendship Centre and incorporating opportunities for participants to experience Aboriginal protocols like smudges, opening prayers, or teachings on why chairs are set up in a certain way. We also attended many mainstream and Aboriginal community events to share information about the project and about how our urban Aboriginal community is thriving.





“My rentals are my children. The reason I call them my rentals is that they aren't really my kids. The creator lent them to me. To help me, guide me, to a positive attitude, positive thinking. To help me find the inner child in myself that I lost when I was a kid.

Patricia Sutherland

Share Learn OACT
Urban Aboriginal
Communities Thrive

Community-Driven Research Project

Share **your** Story

"Where we are, the good we are doing & where we need to go"

Learn

Culture

I grew up not being allowed to be who I was, and I also understand where my parents were coming from, because of all the racism that happened back then. My father did not want us to go through those problems, so he was pretty strict about who we were. It wasn't until I got married, had my son, left my husband, I decided to move away. I moved out to BC...I started to see not the typical stereotypes, Indians that I grew up with. I started seeing First Nation people starting to educate themselves, getting their high school. I was learning, hey we are not all a bunch of drunks, there is more to us; there is a different way of living. I wanted that. From that point on, my learning about who I am has never stopped.

Métis were a displaced people, but now...when pushing for rights, it has caused conflict in the community. Having a difficult time to prove rights. A lot of Métis people went to residential school, but it was easier for them to say that they were French than Métis.

There is a lot of negativity, because they just do not know. People are ignorant...because there is really no positive information about us that gets out. Even our own people don't know their own history. What little history they learn about it, residential schools, but they really don't know what has happened to us since contact.

On our journey we learned

Our community members want to find home in North Bay

Racism persists, but we can overcome it

Aboriginal worldviews influence our experiences with services

Our mental health is strengthened through culture

Our youth want to connect to culture, help the community and each other

The arts *are* culture, strengthening community and increasing awareness

Aboriginal festivals promote culture and tourism

Cross-cultural partnerships boost economic opportunities



Our Community Members Want to Find Home in North Bay



I'd really like to make North Bay my home, but North Bay is making it a challenge for me to live in North Bay.

Aboriginal community members want and need to “find home” in North Bay as easily and safely as non-Aboriginal community members. Our research, conducted through the North Bay Housing and Homelessness Partnership, shows that reaching this goal requires additional investments in affordable housing for fixed-income people and changes to how we go about developing housing solutions. Respectful partnerships that promote cultural awareness among all stakeholders, including service providers and landlords, will enable the development of culturally safe and appropriate housing, services, expectations and understandings.

The opportunity



I've noticed even in the past few years...how much the rents in the community had increased. And the lack of availability for nice...or adequate living arrangements. So when I saw the study thing, um, I thought, “Ooh, I'd like to put a voice to that.”

In February 2013, Dr. Katrina Srigley of the History Department at Nipissing University presented to the board at the Friendship Centre, seeking approval to partner with us to explore stories and experiences of homelessness and migration. With the board's approval, Srigley began working with U-ACT staff and acknowledging the traditional territory of the Nibisiing Anishinabek, we sent a letter to Chief Marianna Couchie to tell her of our work and request permission to work with the citizens of her nation. With her permission, we then took our ideas to the Youth Action Circle and to community Elders for feedback on our approach and proposed questions.

From June to September 2013, we met and spoke with 28 people, ranging in age from 17 to 59, through 16 individual interviews and two focus groups. All of the participants had experienced or were experiencing homelessness. The majority described themselves as “couch surfers,” staying with others until they found a place. 61% said they were homeless at the time of the study. While one participant had lived in North Bay for twenty years, none of the participants were originally from North Bay. The majority were from the James Bay coastal communities, with 68% speaking Cree as their first or second language.



Many of the women said they came to North Bay to stay at the Ojibway Women's Lodge (Aboriginal women's shelter) and ended up living in North Bay. The men chose North Bay mainly because they had passed through the city previously and liked it. Participants added that if the men had criminal charges, and even if they had children, they could not stay at the Crisis Centre, the only place in our community that offers a place for homeless men. The majority view North Bay as the place they want to stay, having already lived in Timmins, Kirkland Lake, Sudbury, Toronto or Ottawa.

What we did and what we learned

We asked the participants to share their stories of home and homelessness, allowing conversations to evolve. Once the discussions were completed, we reviewed the transcripts and determined the following themes:

1. Aboriginal community members want to find “home” in North Bay.



People like their privacy. People like their independence. But you don't have that...in a shelter. But when you have no other options and you have kids that are depending on you, you just suck it up and you just stay in a shelter.

There's not much out there, really. Rooms. But I'm almost fifty and I don't want to live in a room. You know. I need a little more space than that.

Across all of the discussions, a desire for privacy and a clean, safe home came through. However, the participants described facing numerous obstacles and barriers when it came to securing housing—some participants describing a “cycle” of problems.

2. Being homeless in North Bay means couch surfing and/or living in compromised circumstances.



I think North Bay is unique in the fact that we don't have people in shopping carts and sleeping...downtown kind of thing. But I think we have more of a couch-surfing population. 'Cause there are homeless people. I've taken in a few myself; young people. I mean, being an addict, we burn bridges. And quickly. So a lot of people have nowhere to go.

As one participant noted, homelessness in North Bay doesn't necessarily look like one might expect. Couch surfing and multiple families living in one home are common. Additional household members often include parents, relatives with mental and/or physical health challenges such as depression or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), children or expectant mothers, or recent arrivers from the James Bay coast.

For the participants, being homeless meant they did not have a private space to call their own with the basic amenities of a home including a kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom. Being homeless also meant no safe space for children to play unencumbered by landlords demanding quiet. It also meant living in places where mould or other conditions increased risk of illness and disease. Hotel and motel rooms, slum apartments and the couches of friends and family members were not considered homes.



3. North Bay's Aboriginal community is changing.

If I was a newcomer, which I am, coming to North Bay, I'd turn around and go back. But because I can't really turn around and go back, I need to live here.

“

Well aside from the students, I think there's also something that I've come to discover and that is while North Bay is primarily an Anishinaabe community, like, say twenty years ago when I first got here there would be a lot of people from Nipissing, Dokis, Temagami, Mattagami, and different close proximity Aboriginal communities. Now if I go to any of my circle of friends, the majority of them are gonna be Cree. They're gonna be from up north, they're gonna be from Moose Factory, James Bay, Fort Albany, Attawapiskat.

As noted, none of the participants themselves were originally from North Bay. While they commented on the influx of students attending local colleges and some of the housing implications, they recognized there were many “newer” members to the Aboriginal community in North Bay.

4. Aboriginal community members report experiencing racism and discrimination in housing.

“

I've had...potential landlords tell me, “Oh, we don't want seventeen people here in this house, like you people do,” you know, and that kind of thing.

And really, you know, when you're on a fixed income it's hard to find a half-decent apartment. Then...if you go to see these apartments, they want references; they don't want people who are on welfare or assistance.

The participants reported experiencing racism seemingly routinely when seeking housing; those receiving disability income support reported additional discrimination.

5. Available housing isn't affordable; the right housing isn't available.

“

...there's no in between. You know, it's either really, “Ooh, I wouldn't live there,” or “Oh, it's way too expensive.”

Housing development is too slow; way too slow. And the people are coming in, and coming in.

I've been on the...waiting list for...Geared to Income housing for almost five years. There's definitely a shortage of housing for families and for single men such as myself.

Aboriginal community members face unique circumstances concerning housing, particularly when coming to live in North Bay involves learning about and adapting to mainstream cultural norms. Further, the housing desired is beyond their means or doesn't exist.



6. Rules and requirements disadvantage and/or exclude particular Aboriginal community members.

But at the same time I notice too that if you are trying to get into Geared to Income housing or subsidized housing or any kind of housing agency that offers more affordable housing to families and parents, there is a...residency requirement. They mean you have to live here for a year before you can be considered. Yes. So. It sucks. So, you're coming here, you're going to school, you're trying to set up your accommodations, and you can't even apply, or you're not even eligible for the housing that's allocated to help you.

Because the Crisis Centre is different. You have to pass the guidelines to get in there. I mean, a person could have an old criminal record that does not allow them in there. And so these types of things have to come down. So the person has an equal opportunity to get a home.

And because of references, things like that, if we don't have them, you don't get the room, even.

Participants with criminal charges, criminal histories or unable to provide references said they were refused housing. Community members changing from OW (Ontario Works) provided at the beginning of the month to ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) provided at the end, identified that the almost two month gap between payments made it very challenging to maintain rent and food.

7. Aboriginal community members are thankful for the landlords and services that welcome and support them.

So when I came here I came off the bus; I only had seven dollars; pack of smokes. Got off the bus and I came here to the Friendship Centre. And I just basically walked in and said, "Hi! I'm homeless. I don't have anywhere to stay. I don't have any money. I don't suppose anybody could help me?!" [Laughs] And they did.

I enjoy living in North Bay. They've got two lakes here, the Friendship Centre, they have, uh, some programs here that are self help. Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Circles. . . They have the Farmer's Market, they have a lot of good things here, eh?

Well I do know that the Food Bank in North Bay is awesome. And there's lots of churches and organizations that help out; if it wasn't for them, people would be slipping through the cracks like crazy.

But you do get those rare landlords who don't really care what colour you are.

Participants shared that many of North Bay's services are better than those they had experienced in other communities. Many thought that North Bay's food banks, church food banks, and housing-related supports should be recognized for their work and positive impact. Transit was identified as a barrier to accessing these supports.





8. Culturally-safe and community-responsive housing supports are needed for North Bay's Aboriginal community.

“

Let's compare the non-Native homeless person to the Native homeless person. The needs of a non-Native homeless person are pretty basic. Not saying that they're, uh, devoid of culture or whatnot, but the needs of a Native homeless person is a little different in the fact that they need that extended social support there. They might feel better if they go to ceremonies or whatnot or if they have access to circles or like even feasts or whatnot. They're more or less groomed for a more community approach.

There's so many things that are different from on reserve and off reserve. It's too wide of a gap and there's nothing in there and so people just fall through all the time. They go back to the reserves, or they're here and they're disenfranchised and they turn to addictions. There's too big of a gap...nobody's meeting those needs. There's a great big hole there and people fall through there all the time.

Efforts to address housing and homelessness must take into account the historical context of colonial policies and residential schooling and the resulting intergenerational trauma. Alcohol and drug abuse, mental health issues, poor parenting practices, violence within families, and crime were all mentioned by the participants as issues affecting their lives. These issues intersect with employment and housing and must be actively recognized and addressed through housing and related social support initiatives and approaches. Essentially, housing approaches need to be culturally relevant, trauma informed and holistic. They need to be culturally safe.



Recommendations

I think North Bay needs to have something Aboriginal-specific...Because a Native person is going to approach a social service agency a little differently than a non-Native person. And not be as...not be that advocate for themselves just because of their cultural nature.

“

Open up maybe another shelter that would include maybe one for, um, women and families, and one for men as well. ‘Cause I don’t think there’s any place, really, that men can go besides the Crisis Centre, right?

But even programs like a community garden program where people who maybe are homeless who can’t work, they can go for the day and help out the community garden. ...that way they can feel useful. Yeah.

So I think that ensuring that they have the social support and the advocacy to get out there and get the resources that they need, whether it be education, employment, housing, social — all those different things, you know, even programs for children who don’t speak English very well who come into the city? They really need...to bridge that language gap.

In light of the issues and challenges identified by the participants and their many suggestions for improvements, the recommendations address three main areas:

1. **Cultural awareness and safety** - Cultural protocols are needed for everyone involved in the housing process. It is imperative that everyone, from landlords to service providers, understands the worldviews and experiences of Aboriginal clients and community members, including the history of colonialism and in particular, the ongoing inter-generational impact of residential schools. Cultural protocols involve developing and implementing policies and standards to ensure that Aboriginal clients and community members experience cultural safety in all aspects of the housing process. Education and training is needed to support the development and implementation of the protocols.
2. **Partnerships between non-aboriginal service providers and Aboriginal service providers, Elders, community members** that are culturally respectful and mutually beneficial are essential to the successful development and implementation of solutions. Partners can also include universities and other interested and/or related groups. Partnerships provide access to “on the ground knowledge” and “in the air” knowledge, promote mutual sharing and learning, and allow for more accurate identification and understanding of gaps and priorities and implementation issues as they unfold. True housing support must reflect and address the life circumstances of North Bay’s Aboriginal population.
3. **More accessible, culturally responsive, flexible and affordable housing supports** are needed for North Bay’s Aboriginal community in general. The whole continuum of housing, from temporary shelters through to permanent dwellings, must be examined, assessed and addressed from this approach. As well, people living on fixed incomes and/or living with other challenges such as FASD or mental health and addiction challenges require carefully considered solutions and supports. Housing support should reflect the ways in which Aboriginal peoples view home and offer private, semi-independent and communal living options. Common areas and natural spaces are essential for community gatherings and events, so very important to life in our Aboriginal community.



Racism Persists, But We Can Overcome It

I was always scared to go to town because I would hear a bunch of racism and stuff like that.

“

In our generation we were not taught about First Nations people in school, as it is now in the schools. However, it has to be more widespread. Our culture, our people, it has to be infused in the system...our children need to see themselves in every aspect of life and that is what we are lacking.

Our community members experience racism, yet many are optimistic that education and awareness-raising activities will increase knowledge and improve perceptions of Aboriginal peoples.

One of the goals of the project was to mobilize North Bay's Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities to work together to address racism. By developing new relationships and partnerships across cultures, working together through the Community Action Circle, and “shining a light” on Aboriginal achievements, U-ACT aimed to promote cross-cultural learning and increase awareness of and respect for Aboriginal culture.

Even so, almost anytime we brought Aboriginal community members together in focus groups and sharing circles to talk about issues such as mental health or seeking employment, or when we conducted life history interviews, racism came up.



I have heard this since I was a young child; they all think we are drunks.

We are living off Canadians, we are living off tax payers, we are tax free, we are a bunch of bums, we don't want to work, we are welfare, we do not want to look after ourselves, we are raping the land and killing all the fish, the animals. That is the perceptions. That is what is coming across from people.

“

A friend of mine was in a line up at Tim Horton's, and he could hear a group of older men talking about gill netting in a very racist way – it was stemming from an article put in the North Bay Nugget [newspaper] about gill netting changes. “They are the ones that are taking away our privileges, because they are the ones that can keep going out and fish and net all they want.” And they even said “They throw away all the fish, they just throw them in the dump.”

Everything in our life we have to fight for: to start a business on reserve, we have to wait for approval by the government. How are we supposed to get ahead when we have to wait for approval of the government? Are we children needing approval from our parents?



Given how often comments like these emerged in our various sessions, racism and stereotyping seem to be common experiences in our community.

Our youth were also interested in exploring racism and a bus trip to an Idle No More rally provided an opportunity. Equipped with audio recorders, the youth interviewed each other during the bus ride. This is another example of how we piggybacked research onto community activities and supported our youth to choose how they wanted to gather and share information. Following the road trip, they also conducted interviews with community members.

My dad was the only Aboriginal student in Gravenhurst high school. He dropped out because he was bullied. He resorted to alcohol and drugs. They called him half breed.

“

Lazy, drinking, not smart enough.

[Some people say]...we are too proud of being Aboriginal. I mean some of the stuff we wear, or stuff that represents us. It is all about mainstream. They are totally against us.

In North Bay the racism is underlying. In Timmins it's more in your face.

A community member shared a story about her encounter with a parking attendant when she visited Toronto for a conference.

“Are you Indian?” and I said “yes.”

The first thing he said, “Oh, you people like to drink.”

I did not like that very much. I asked him where he was from, and he said “Iran.”

“

I said to him, “Oh, you people are like the terrorists, and you like to bomb people.”

He said, “Oh no no no, we do not do that! We are not all like that.”

So I asked him, “How do you get the nerve to say that about me, when you know nothing about me?”

New immigrants that come to the country need to learn about First Peoples here, and that should be mandatory.

This story offers many lessons. It suggests that stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples may be widely and strongly held, so much so, that this newcomer either arrived with the perception and/or acquired it easily. It also reflects the very comments our community members report experiencing here in North Bay.

Echoing the views of others, the story teller believes education is key. Many community members believe that “not knowing” is the root of the problem and that educating children throughout school and educating the general public are critical. As one participant said, “... if you were to talk to some [non-Aboriginal people] face to face, that is when you have an open and honest communication with people...”

As well, in this case, the storyteller spoke up and challenged the parking attendant. For some community members, speaking up directly goes against their ways. For others, it is part of a growing movement of Aboriginal peoples, “taking a stand for generations to come.”



Not only is there inadequate information taught in schools, the widespread inter-generational effects of residential schooling and the sixties scoop mean that knowledge of Aboriginal culture, traditions and history is limited, even among Aboriginal community members. In some cases, parents and grandparents tried to protect their children by hiding their identities.

“

I grew up not being allowed to be who I was, and I also understand where my parents were coming from, because of all the racism that happened back then. My father did not want us to go through those problems, so he was pretty strict about who we were. It wasn't until I got married, had my son, left my husband, I decided to move away. I moved out to BC...I started to see not the typical stereotypes, Indians that I grew up with. I started seeing First Nation people starting to educate themselves, getting their high school. I was learning, hey we are not all a bunch of drunks, there is more to us; there is a different way of living. I wanted that. From that point on, my learning about who I am has never stopped.

Métis were a displaced people, but now...when pushing for rights, it has caused conflict in the community. Having a difficult time to prove rights. A lot of Métis people went to residential school, but it was easier for them to say that they were French than Métis.

There is a lot of negativity, because they just do not know. People are ignorant. ... because there is really no positive information about us that gets out. Even our own people don't know their own history. What little history they learn about it, residential schools, but they really don't know what has happened to us since contact.

Community members also identified the problematic roles that technology and media play in perpetuating racism. With limited positive attention, media coverage of civic demonstrations, for example, seems to draw attention to Aboriginal people causing problems as opposed to trying to address longstanding issues.

Racism and inter-cultural relations in our community are sensitive areas. Because of their own experiences and the consequences carried down over generations, community members of all ages have different views and concerns about how to address it. Community members expressed mixed feelings about the impact of the Idle No More movement: some believe that it promotes positive awareness; others believe that it re-ignites old issues.

“

Impressions of Aboriginal people are sometimes negative because there is misinformation or miscommunication with the news.

People's view of Aboriginal people, is it positive or negative? It is half and half ... specifically with Idle No More and the internet, people can hide behind anonymity of the internet, and the racism and the bigotry really comes out. But if you were to talk to some face to face, that is when you have an open and honest communication with people, so I don't really know. ...In movements like this, if I go and read comments [online], you see lots of racism, and I tend to think there is more racism and more bigots out there.

Over the past few years, the impression of Aboriginal people was getting somewhat better but now because of different movements, and rights, and so on, it has become a little bit worse again.



We had an opportunity to explore the perceptions of 14 grade nine students about the Idle No More movement. All of the students were non-Aboriginal and generally provided comments suggesting they had discussed the issue in the classroom. When asked, “What is Idle No More?” they responded:

Fighting for your rights.

It's the Aboriginals taking a stand for their rights.

They are not shy. I love that. They fight for their freedom and rights.

“ *A movement to be heard by the government to protect their nation.*

First nations standing up for their rights and their beliefs.

I know nothing about it – someone starving themselves.

Protecting land and their rights.

We know from the research literature that among younger or middle-income non-aboriginals, having a relationship with an Aboriginal person or receiving education about Aboriginal culture, are considered significant factors in improving impressions.¹⁰

This tiny snapshot of one classroom in North Bay suggests that we are making headway. Our Community Action Circle and cross-cultural partnerships put cross-cultural learning and relationship-building into action. Our Shine-A-Light Gala raised awareness about community accomplishments and helped people feel good about themselves—all at the same time.

One of the key recommendations coming out of the project is to undertake community-wide cultural safety training. We are excited to think about how our many partners, including the boards of education, housing and health services, will be coming together to learn more about our history, traditions, and culture and how they will put that learning into action through service protocols and standards.



¹⁰Environics Institute (2010) Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study.



Aboriginal Worldviews Influence Our Experiences With Services

**Interconnectedness, responsibility,
and balance are key**

“

When we were growing up, there was a different level of responsibility, where you had a sense of community, where you looked out for the people's children, and there was an interconnected relationship within community. I look at my children, and that is my concern. When I look at them, because they are so... everything is on that level, that they are completely disconnected within, so the holistic perspective of spirit, emotions, physical – there is such a lack – a breakdown.

While we touched on many topics and issues throughout the project, like justice, mental health, civic engagement, and housing and homelessness, certain values—or worldviews—came through our many discussions, interviews and meetings.

Worldviews—the way people see and understand the world—are made up of many concepts such as how we understand nature, time, knowledge, and spirituality, etc. For example, when we held discussions with the community about justice, we learned that worldviews clearly influence how community members view and use restorative justice programs. When we spoke about services with the community, we learned how worldviews influenced choices between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal services.

In our community, three worldview concepts emerged continually: balance, interconnectedness and responsibility. It is important to keep these values in mind to help frame and connect all of the material presented in this report.

Like threads woven together in cloth, the following views help strengthen the fabric of our community.

Teaching our children responsibility for their actions is important. It guides the choices we make and how we perceive program success.



The following is from a discussion held with a group of First Nations and Métis women at an Aboriginal women's organization in our community. Opening with medicines and prayer, the discussion centred on mental health but touched on many other issues and topics as well.

A mother talks about teaching her daughter the importance of responsibility:

“She is 19 years old and I am really proud of her. She is not a drinker. She experimented with drugs once, got caught by the police, and had to experience the court system. She was given a choice of fine or community service. She would have liked the fine. But Mom said no, community service with so many hours, and I increased the hours, because she needed to take responsibility for herself in that way. That is the way the medicine wheel teaches us. The medicine wheel teaches us that we all have our own medicine wheel. It is up to us to look after our own. I have no control over [someone else's] medicine wheel... I cannot take responsibility for her feelings or her behaviours. That is not my responsibility, that is hers, and that is what I taught my daughter. She has to be responsible for herself. So that is how I help her with her well-being, because for teenagers in today's society, there is a lot of peer pressure out there: bullying and things like that. It was important for me that she has a good self-esteem. So I fed that as she was growing up. Today, she is really good at saying no. She can say no to her mom and that is good, because she thinks things out and she gets that big piece where she needs to be responsible for herself. We have no control over other people.

Another mother describes how a program fails to help her son take responsibility:

“The youth referral program was like a slap on the wrist. It was a joke. I wanted him to take responsibility and it just spiralled him into a different direction. I found this frustrating, as we were stepping up to the plate, and they send him for counselling for one hour sessions, and I believe a quarter hour, because there was no mandate on how long he needed to be there. Then that was it, it was over. It has been frustrating, coming through what we have. So where do parents go, because the agencies are not all supporting. They are not all on the same page. That has been my experience. It is about helping next generation, connection, feelings, yes we do care. But telling them in the long run, it is all your responsibility what you choose to do.

There is balance in all things and we must strive to maintain balance and look after all aspects of our lives.

In this discussion, a mother talks about teaching her daughter balance through the medicine wheel.

“The medicine wheel teachings teach us about balance in our life. We need to be able to look after all aspects of our life, the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. This is how I raised her. She is very much about technology today, but she is also about ceremony. She knows if she needs to have a sweat, she can go approach an Elder and have a sweat. She knows that she can go and access community members when she needs that help, and she has parents that are there to support her. We work really hard to maintain our help for her, knowing that she has safe people around her all over the place that she can access. She is not afraid to ask for help when she needs it. She knows that there are people out there that are not healthy, but she gravitates toward the healthy people, which is good.



Everything and everyone is interconnected. The physical, emotional, mental and spiritual parts of the individual are interconnected; every individual is interconnected to our children, our spouses, our extended families and our friends.

This interconnection influences the way we view and seek services, as well as our path to those services. Services need to understand and reflect this interconnection.

Just as interconnection was also stressed in the above story about balance, the following is from a conversation regarding restorative justice that took place during a discussion about services in our community among seven Aboriginal women.

One woman said:

Because there was a component missing, the spiritual, it was just a formality. I sat in there, and there was so much missing and so much wrong in the process. Normally, I am not a judgemental, I am just sharing, and I am not stuck and I am not negative. It is just what I lived.

“

Can I ask a question? Are you talking about the Restorative Justice Circles the Youth Program has here in North Bay? [Yes.] Because I do know of a lot of families that have gone through that process and they say the same thing. We are looking at seeing how we can revive it, because it is important for the well-being of our youth. I have to give some credit to them for trying, but for that program they are not using the Circle the way it was supposed to be used.

Another woman said:

A lot of our First Nations families that access that circle, they just feel terrible when they walk out of there, and that Circle is supposed to make them feel good. Children are supposed to be getting the help that they need, making restitution that they need to make, and everyone leaves there feeling good, not feeling bad. It is supposed to feed their spirit.

“



Another participant added:

And that is a problem with the different services in town. “Hands off! Those are my people.” Where it should be a shared thing, so there is not a disconnect. “That is my client, do not touch my client.” But yet, “We are here to help.”

“

I am really big on Native organizations and [name of organization] is a Native organization within the city. I think it is how we look at self, right. Because, it is about understanding who you are as an individual. I just keep thinking about that diagram that talked to me about the healing journey. It starts off with self and you work on yourself first. You understand who you are as a person and then it is like a rippling effect. Then it goes out into your family, and beyond family, it goes out to your community, and then to the nation level. What that is all about, is starting with self, and centres like this one... All our programming teaches us about who we are as a person and getting to know ourselves, understanding what needs were not met for us as children, and to pick up the responsibility. It is our responsibility to look after ourselves as adults. Agencies like this are what is going to make our community better. I would like to add because some of the ones where I found barriers to be, are the ones that are not in that understanding. I have made that connection so there needs to be that awareness and that education.

And, another participant said:

“

I wanted to know the whereabouts of the tools for the younger generation, because they are even more disconnected than we are. So that is a huge concern for me and a focus. Example: I was asking my son as mother, “What is missing in your life” and my son’s response was, “We are not real, we just type. We don’t feel. We say, ‘oh yeah we are fine.’” Yet you see someone breaking down...the depression, the self-esteem, the mental abuse, not just for the adults, but really for the teenagers. Where do you go with them?

Balance, interconnectedness and responsibility are important to our community members. When it comes to addressing problems, delivering services, and/or making changes to better support our community members, these values should be at the centre.



Mental Health represents the balance of an individual, living the “Good Life” by embracing the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical components of our well-being. My picture represents Mental Health because the feather is a symbol of our journey through life—each strand and opening along the feather represents the different challenges that we face as individuals. The feather lying on the sand represents the rocky road that is given to every one of us, to remind us that life is not going to be easy and we must continue down our path.

Nathalie Restoule, YAC Member & Photography Workshop Participant



Our Mental Health is Strengthened Through Culture



Mental health is working towards maintaining balance: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in our lives. Having this balance helps to sustain a good life.

As one community member said, “working towards maintaining balance...will help to sustain a good life.” For many in our community, working towards that balance includes being involved with Aboriginal programs and services. During our research, we learned that while community members are aware of some mental health services, with additional support, the overall community could share knowledge more effectively, foster partnerships and strengthen services across Aboriginal and non-aboriginal services. In this story, we describe how we learned about our community’s views and vision for an Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre. A place that would help our community work towards balance and a good life by providing leadership, a welcoming space, a continuum of culturally responsive and safe services, training and support for information sharing and problem-solving.



Aboriginal knowledge, teachings and practices should be used more often in treatment with some describing these practices as "fundamental" and others saying that greater exposure to and participation in Aboriginal culture "is treatment."

Service provider participating in discussion

The opportunity

The Ontario Federation of Indian (now Indigenous) Friendship Centres was asked by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to work with Aboriginal communities to identify their mental health priorities, best practices, strengths, gaps and partnerships. U-ACT undertook this project in North Bay.

What we did

We initially drafted questions designed to address the goals of the request. We then shared them with two key members from our CAC and one from our Elders Circle to ensure the questions were respectful of our Aboriginal community.

Based on their feedback, two questions were added, the first intended to explore awareness of the differences between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal mental health services. Consistent with our community’s goal to ultimately develop an Urban Aboriginal Strategy for North Bay, the other question added was, “What is your vision for mental health and addictions services for our urban Aboriginal community?”



Many people participated in designing the tools and sharing information

In total, 136 people--mental health service providers, service users, youth, elders and community members--participated in designing, carrying out activities, and answering questions.

- **Surveys** were developed for mental health service providers, users, and youth. They were offered online and on paper and promoted at two health and wellness fairs.
- **Focus groups and a sharing circle** for service providers and service users were hosted by local mental health and addictions organizations, ensuring that each person had the choice to participate in the format that would be most comfortable. The sharing circle opened with a smudge and prayer and was facilitated by a community member.
- **In-depth interviews** were conducted with people identified as demonstrating “best-practice strengths.”
- **The project logo** allowed us to employ the *Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection* research tool to engage the community and learn about beliefs and priorities regarding health and well-being.
- **Storytelling - The Shadow Project** was dreamed up by our YAC members and, fostering the natural balance between youth and elders, supported youth to interview elders about their stories.

We then shared the questions with our larger CAC and there were no suggestions for changes. Each of the circles, however, had different ideas about how to approach getting answers to the questions.

Together we decided that a combination of traditional Aboriginal and mainstream approaches would be used. The Youth Action Circle took an active role in creating questions designed for youth to answer. Focusing on the Good Mind philosophy of health and wellness, they explored the ways young people commonly seek support such as through texting and face booking. They distributed surveys at events over a two month period and created photo portfolios to share youth views of mental health.

What we learned

1. **We need to increase knowledge and awareness about mental health services among Aboriginal and non-aboriginal agencies, service providers and the wider community, including youth.**

We also need to clarify what makes a mental health approach or service “Aboriginal” because services may be delivered by stand-alone Aboriginal organizations or through an “Aboriginal” program within a larger mainstream organization. Educating young people in schools and continued community education and awareness are needed to increase knowledge about Aboriginal culture and history in general.

The community is aware of mental health and addictions services in North Bay, and of some of the differences between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal services, but more knowledge is needed.

Participants were aware of the different mental health services in North Bay, although when it came to identifying them, fewer than half of the 48 Aboriginal and non-aboriginal services were mentioned. Participants tended to know non-aboriginal mental health organizations better than Aboriginal stand-alone services or healers, although Aboriginal service providers were aware of more Aboriginal mental health services than their counterparts.

Overall, youth were aware of the different mental health services available, although almost 25% said they weren’t sure.

One youth participant indicated that “more awareness is needed” and one reported being familiar with different mental health services in the community “because of the health fair.”



More knowledge is needed about Aboriginal culture in general.

Across many of the responses to questions, we noted that participants weren't aware or wanted to know more about Aboriginal culture. Educating young people in schools and community education were suggested as important ways to increase cultural knowledge in general. Partnering with schools, supporting youth leadership, anti-stigma and cultural awareness campaigns, and promoting healthy living were suggested as approaches that could be used.

2. Cultural safety training is essential to providing responsive and safe services for Aboriginal community members.

We also need increased opportunities for Aboriginal community members to participate in organizations and service delivery as students, staff, service providers, volunteers, board members, to help build cultural competency and maximize human resource capacity. Creating ongoing opportunities for Aboriginal and non-aboriginal service providers to meet regularly and talk together will promote information sharing and problem solving to address gaps and issues.

Mental health counselling knowledge and skills are uneven across services—some know more about Aboriginal approaches; some know more about mainstream approaches.

Some participants identified the need for increased mental health knowledge in Aboriginal services, while others identified gaps in knowledge and understanding when it comes to Aboriginal culture. "Almost half of my clients are now from James Bay communities and most are young moms," said one service provider. Despite the number of Aboriginal community members seeking services, several participants commented: "If a client isn't forthright at intake about being Aboriginal, it might go unseen." One said that using the term "Aboriginal" posed a number of challenges: many clients simply do not answer the question on intake forms. Another gave the example of a client saying: "What is Aboriginal? I am Inuk."

Training to build cultural competency and cultural safety is needed.

Many participants referred to the need for "increased training" for all service providers regarding Aboriginal knowledge, history, traditions and practices including the medicine wheel. This would increase understanding regarding the ongoing legacy of colonization (residential schools, impact on communities, etc.) contributing to longstanding mistrust and present day challenges.

For many youth, mental health is "living a good life."

Youth participants told us that feeling good and being happy, family and friends, life choices and identity, respect for others, staying healthy and active, and traditional teachings all play a role in living a good life.

How can you respectfully explore culture during intake?

Ask, "Who do you want to take with you on this journey?"

Participant

”
We talk about making intake procedures more culturally relevant and sensitive, but what about fostering an environment where Aboriginal people are so proud that they identify!

Participant

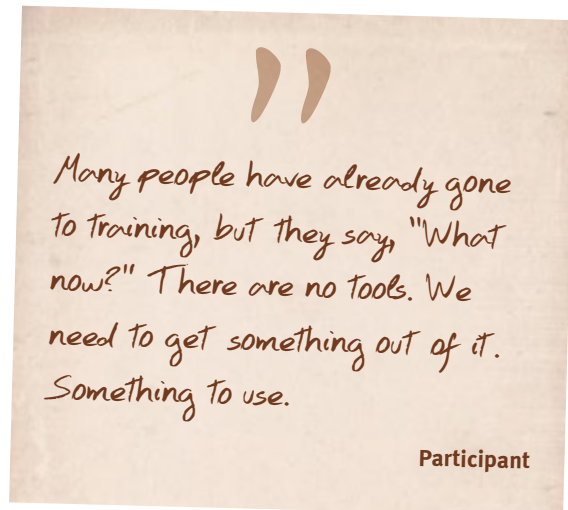


One participant's comment emphasized the need to learn "how" to incorporate traditional practices. Several commented that service providers needed more knowledge in "working with people who have mental health issues" overall. Participants also mentioned the importance of knowing more about "interventions/teachings" that are helpful and effective: "We need to measure our outcomes, have evidence-based work." Cultural safety training would increase knowledge, skills and practice accountability.

Because both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal service providers participated in the focus groups, as issues or problems were mentioned, others responded with solutions, confirming the need for and benefits of cross-cultural sharing and networking.

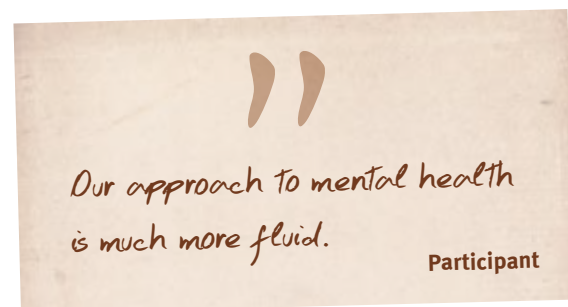
Important Aboriginal resources—people, healers, Elders—could be better integrated.

The human resource capacity of Aboriginal individuals as students, staff, volunteers, board members, Elders, and healers is not being maximized when it comes to providing culturally competent services. Participants provided examples of what is working: placement students from the Aboriginal Mental Health Program at Canadore added cultural knowledge: "placement students come, they have been a great asset, and have often stayed on." Others said, "It's not the positions, but the people in the positions"; "Individuals [traditional healers] are equally important and are utilized as resources and supports for deaths, mental health support, crisis support."



3. Aboriginal culture is fundamental to best practices, encompassing everything from physical space and time to activities and services.

There is rich knowledge and experience in our community. Cultural safety training across all services will help spread best practices and help agencies see the benefits of expanding roles for Aboriginal community members throughout their organizations. Service providers want more opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge and experience through networking.



Aboriginal culture is at the centre of best practices when it comes to Aboriginal health and wellness

Physical settings reflecting and supporting Aboriginal culture and activities invite the community in.

Settings reflecting Aboriginal culture and providing a variety of activities are welcoming and help to put Aboriginal community members at ease. Seemingly simple things like “we have artwork on the walls when people come in” or a highly visible calendar of events can have a positive effect. Having designated times and spaces for smudging and cultural practices, having materials available for beading and drum making workshops, and ensuring they are visible and acknowledged during workshops and counselling sessions, all help Aboriginal people see themselves reflected and increase comfort and familiarity with the setting.

Time and space promote comfort and trust.

Participants commented on the importance of space, atmosphere and time when working with Aboriginal clients. Trust is a key factor and allowing them time to witness programs but not necessarily participate in them right away was considered to be very important. One participant said: “We give people time to get comfortable, they can watch, and when they are comfortable, they can join in.”

Intake procedures are culturally informed and trauma informed.

Indirect approaches for gathering information about Aboriginal status during intake include introducing oneself by mentioning your spirit name, family, community and modelling sharing information such as “My dad is from Attawapiskat, my mom is from Dokis, I am from North Bay.” As well, asking questions that reflect Aboriginal peoples’ desire to situate self within family and community context is helpful such as “Who do you want with you on your journey?” and “What are your spiritual needs?”

Counselling and supports follow the lead of the client.

A number of approaches are recommended, all based on the client’s goals, wishes and preferences. The client may be traditional and want to work with a traditional healer: “being able to provide opportunities for smudging within the counselling session as this brings balance and calms the spirit.” A client may wish to attend workshops before speaking to a counsellor about personal matters. When they are ready, “approach to counselling is a life-story way.”

Cultural knowledge and practices are regularly shared.

Participants described organizations using regular in-service opportunities to have Aboriginal individuals and organizations share cultural knowledge and practices. Opening up these opportunities to a wide variety of mental health staff and healers in the community was recognized as an important practice. “Having elders and traditional healers to support the healing process” and others to help share knowledge, identify and address issues, communicate tradition, serve as committee members, “speaking up for our population” and “challenging organizations to hire First Nations healers” were mentioned as ways to strengthen mental health practices.

Aboriginal peoples and teachings are integrated throughout organization.

Employing students from the Aboriginal mental health program as well as Aboriginal staff are first steps. Few organizations incorporate Aboriginal approaches and peoples into the fabric of their operations. Many non-aboriginal organizations identified the importance of Aboriginal people having seats on boards, serving on working committees, and having opportunities to move up the ranks to staff in general, to ensure the programs housed in mainstream settings were reflective of the needs of the Aboriginal community using their services.



4. Partnerships help meet needs, create services and promote exchange of expertise.

Given some of the gaps identified and the benefits of partnerships, with support, partnerships would help mainstream organizations increase their cultural competency and Aboriginal services increase their mainstream mental health knowledge.

Partnerships strengthened relationships between organizations, between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal programs, and promoted sharing expertise across services.

Participants readily identified successful partnerships between multiple settings and sectors and the benefits such as “Nipissing mental health and housing services, want to work together, foster communication, resolutions protocols” and “between the Friendship Centre and the hospital...which makes programs more accessible.”

Partnerships need support and more are wanted because of the service, learning and problem-solving benefits.

Some participants focused on what would facilitate and help maintain partnerships: “having a dedicated position at the Friendship Centre” and “communities should partner with local community health centres, family health teams to promote service for Aboriginal People.” Others identified barriers: one participant spoke about a funder rule that excluded representation by organizations not funded by the same funder. In this case it meant Aboriginal representation was excluded.



What is needed

Services that are “culturally safe,” accessible, and responsive to Aboriginal clients are the overall priority.

These services must be able to address numerous issues—current and historical—simultaneously.

Aboriginal knowledge, teachings and practices should be used more often in treatment with some describing these practices as “fundamental” and others saying that greater exposure to and participation in Aboriginal culture “is treatment.”

Numerous current and historical issues affect the mental health and well-being of community members. Services must be able to address numerous issues—current and historical—simultaneously. One participant’s comment was echoed by others: “Self-esteem, addictions, trauma, intergenerational trauma, bring it all together.” Another added, “continue to have these services available, when needed.”

Services must be easily found, available, accessible, safe and grounded in Aboriginal culture: “crisis line,” “counselling,” “housing,” “skill-building,” “follow-up—does not matter where they are.” “Family perspective” and processes that support recovery were mentioned as well. The need to move from cultural sensitivity in service to its more outcome- and standards-based counterpart cultural safety was emphasized.

More training for all service providers in Aboriginal approaches is needed to increase knowledge and awareness, and promote cross-cultural sharing and problem-solving.

Cultural safety across services could be achieved through a co-ordinated education strategy for service providers and community members emphasizing training and tools to help organizations implement standards, policies and practices embodying the wealth of knowledge shared among both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal services and service providers. Many participants stressed the need for all service providers to have knowledge of Aboriginal history, traditions, and practices including the medicine wheel. This would increase understanding regarding the ongoing legacy of colonization.

Priority issues identified by participants

alcohol
addictions
bullying
depression
grief
overcoming abuse
relationship anger
self injury
self-esteem
suicide
trauma

intergenerational trauma
fathers suffering from the effects of post-partum

some Aboriginal people were in reform schools and treated very badly and they need the help dealing with all that

children and youth mental health

”

A young boy who was very aggressive had an addictions issue. So they had a traditional person on staff. The traditional staff was able to influence participation from this particular youth.

Participant



Additional priorities range from addressing newer circumstances (increasing numbers of youth and families coming from the James Bay coast, new additions) to better addressing interconnected current and historical issues.

Some participants emphasized the challenges for youth and new families coming from the coast, in increasing numbers. One participant described them experiencing “racism, stigma, discrimination” saying they need to be “connected” and supported with “simple” things like “how to ride the bus!” and “dentist or a doctor—having them in one place, like an Aboriginal health access centre.”

There were also suggestions for a “resource list,” “links to other community partners” and the need to identify and bridge gaps which some participants proposed could all be looked after through a more comprehensive approach such as an Aboriginal Health Access Centre. Such a centre would deliver culturally safe and responsive services, model and teach best practices and facilitate community information sharing and problem-solving.



Our Vision: Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre

In the community's vision, all aspects of the continuum of care would be available, accessible, culturally safe, holistic and supportive.

For the participants, the centre would offer: “connected community,” “seamless accessible service,” “seamless and integrated,” “culturally safe and competent” “Indigenous worldview,” “culturally relevant and responsive,” and “holistic and supportive.” Key actors for bringing about the vision were identified as the “Friendship Centre,” “crisis response workers” and “wellness teams.”

The proposed centre would:

- Respond to the realities of the lives of our Aboriginal community members (including addressing multiple issues across many domains, historical and current).
- Serve as an accessible and welcoming setting designed to promote Aboriginal health by offering a range of supports, services and opportunities to help build community and increase comfort for people of all ages.
- Support a seamless, coordinated and holistic approach to the mental health, addictions and overall health needs of our Urban Aboriginal community; introduce resources people may wish to use in their journeys.
- Serve as an Aboriginal knowledge and best practice hub; using, teaching and promoting culturally safe practices.
- Serve as a resource for the broader non-aboriginal community.
- Provide information regarding Aboriginal specific resources, including Elders, medicines, cultural practices, ceremonies, etc. through a Traditional Cultural Practices Aboriginal Directory and information and training on how to use the directory.



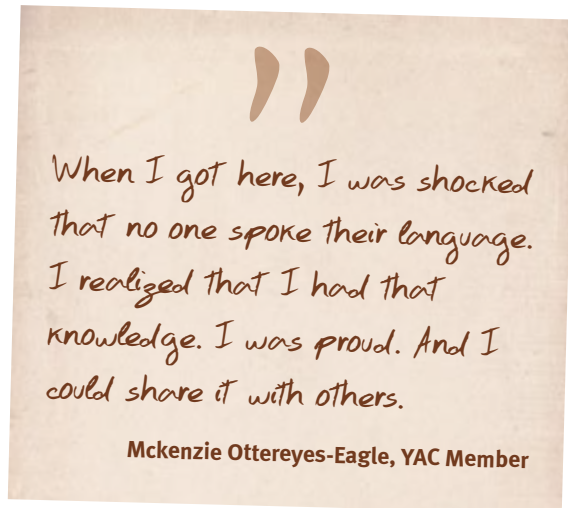
Our Youth Want to Connect to Culture, Help the Community and Each Other

The opportunity

The Youth Action Circle (YAC) was created to engage and empower youth to participate in the project. Our overall goal was to ensure that youth perspectives, ideas, concerns and priorities were included. In addition to two youth members formally participating on the CAC and offering advice, the YAC soon began organizing its own initiatives and events for the broader youth community.

When we started

We reviewed the literature regarding youth engagement, paying particular attention to the importance of using culture to engage Aboriginal youth. We found *Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A toolkit for service providers*, to be very helpful. Of specific relevance to us was the concept of bi-cultural competence: “an important idea related to cultural identity in that youth who have the skills, values and attitudes necessary to be successful in their traditional community as well as in the dominant culture will be better able to make positive and healthy choices in a range of areas” (Crooks et al, 2009, p. 10). All of the youth we met through the project live between “both worlds” as urban Aboriginal, Métis, status and non-status youth.



What we did

We learned quickly that the youth participants had many ideas about what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. Accordingly, we focussed on how to support them to meet their goals—read on to find out more about the importance of offering consistent support and opportunities.



What the U-ACT team did

We supported youth to hold WEEKLY YAC Council Meetings, always providing FOOD, FOOD and more FOOD (especially cultural foods!).

We fostered an environment where the youth determined the activities.

We supported youth to hold drop-ins EVERY Monday from 4:00 – 7:00 pm ensuring that they were never cancelled and that medicines, cultural supports and other teachers were there.

We involved youth in all levels of the project – e.g. hired youth staff, supported youth as mentors and participants in decision-making and planning.

We set cultural programming in motion by supporting the youth to meet and speak with Elders and Grandmothers.

We partnered with local artists, mentors and other resources to offer workshops in art, photography, storytelling, etc.

What the youth did

The youth ran the YAC Council Meetings (with a chair, vice chair, secretary), discussing and planning events such as powwows and other cultural activities to be held at the Friendship Centre, in their schools, and on their reserves. They focussed on the importance of their roles, using their voices, and nurturing youth participation.

The youth organized Idle No More Roadblocks for raising awareness and advocacy, went on spiritual walks, held powwows, went on a medicine walk, asked seniors, Elders and Grandmothers for a “gentle sweat for first-timers” and for full moon ceremonies for girls and women, etc., all geared to increasing cultural knowledge and practices, self-awareness and strength.

On average, 75-98 youth attended events each month.

Because the drop-in was always there for them, the youth felt comfortable and safe enough to use it for what they wanted and needed: help with homework, seeing the mental health worker, meeting with a Grandmother, drumming, art, talking together over dinner. Some youth brought friends and families who needed help. The youth knew that anyone could come—“no one was checking for a status card at the door.”

The youth staff and mentors served as bridges between older and younger participants, staff and youth. They offered support, guidance, skill development, and modelling around culture, identity and health. One youth represented the project at a conference; another went on to become a board member of the Friendship Centre.

The youth asked the Elders and Grandmothers to hold ceremonies such as birthing of the drum, women’s sharing circles, monthly community feasts.

The youth, mentors, seniors and Elders shared cultural knowledge and life skills across generations when they participated in the Shadow project. The project involved the youth recording Elders telling stories and sharing teachings based on photos. It also involved the youth learning how to make moose meat pie, paint and take photos; all while learning how to interact with Elders in respectful ways.



What our youth taught us

Urban Aboriginal youth live in “two worlds” and actively want to explore and learn more about their identity and heritage. Creating a variety of ways for youth to participate helps youth relate to and support each other. Being a mentor, chairing a meeting, offering ideas, listening, participating in decision-making, attending a youth drop-in, and cooking and eating together, are many of the ways youth participated. Connecting with peers also means that if you struggle with identity, you will meet others who may also struggle, and still others who have found they belong – everyone can help everyone. The youth knew they were always welcome and that no one would tell them they didn’t belong.

Successful youth engagement does not depend on a project or program. Instead, it comes down to “planting the seeds” for engagement through tradition and culture. Aboriginal worldviews and traditional teachings offer urban Aboriginal youth a bridge to identity, family and community. In the medicine wheel, the ‘self’ is in the centre. If you are not good with the self, you are not good with all of the other realms. Aboriginal teachings help youth to find that self while connecting to culture, peers, family and community. With an emphasis on learning and doing through relationships, our youth were supported to become involved, participate, share, teach, learn, lead and act. All of these experiences, in turn, improve the self. The improved self then shares with others, flowing back through the circles.

Youth cannot do it alone; Aboriginal teachings stress the importance of relationships and connectedness. Youth need adults to provide them with consistent support, resources or a resource base to connect with, space and time to build trust and to pursue their interests and goals and/or ask for help. Food and consistency are fundamental building blocks, especially when first establishing relationships. Many of our youth do not have any food or enough food in their homes.

Many factors contribute to successful youth engagement: youth being able to determine their own goals and organize themselves; cultural programming; relationships with the Friendship Centre and U-ACT staff, peers, mentors, seniors, Elders and Grandmothers; peer learning and peer mentoring; consistent availability of time, space, support, and resources within the Centre and in the broader community, etc. It would also be important to delve more into the inter-connection of these factors. We created a diagram showing our growing understanding of how these factors interconnect—see Figure 2.

What inspires you?



The young people. Because you see, the way young people are, young First Nations, I didn’t have that chance much, as a younger person.

Gabriel Tookate
Honoured at Shine-A Light Gala

When we looked back and compared our experiences with the broader literature on youth engagement and empowerment, we realized there are gaps: little information focuses specifically on urban Aboriginal youth. In addition, the information that is there focuses on programming, and not on other forms of engagement such as civic action and advocacy. By fostering an environment where the youth determined their goals and activities, we were supporting them to create their own forms of engagement.



We asked our youth about their use of drugs and alcohol

At a day-long event for youth held at the Friendship Centre, twenty-nine young people, between the ages of 11 and 25, agreed to complete our survey. These young people were from First Nations communities surrounding North Bay such as Dokis, Shawanaga and Gull Bay, and further away in Ontario such as Moose Factory. Almost half of the group was from Winneway First Nation in Quebec.

And we learned

Use of recreational drugs or alcohol...the majority (21 out of 29 or 72%) report they have never used drugs or alcohol; 3 have used only drugs; 2 have used only alcohol; 3 have used both.

Making the choice NOT to use drugs or alcohol...2/3 of the youth report “staying healthy and active” and “family and friends” influenced their choice not to use drugs and alcohol. 1/3 reported “tradition and culture” and the rest mentioned “drug and alcohol awareness education” and “other” as the reasons for their decisions.

Access to drugs and alcohol...of the 28% who use drugs and alcohol, 1/3 of the youth report they get alcohol and drugs from friends. The rest of the sources are: family, school, the street, by stealing and “other.”

Why do you think someone would use recreational drugs and alcohol? In response to this question, the youth thought that “peer pressure,” “feeling happy” and “fun” were the main reasons why someone would use recreational drugs and alcohol. As well, several youth chose “other.”

Do you have friends or family using drugs or alcohol? Over 79% said yes and about 17% said no. One youth didn’t respond.

Talking to someone about drug or alcohol use and getting help... of the youth who use drugs and alcohol, about half report they have talked to someone and half report they have not. When the youth have spoken to someone, it has been “friends,” “school counsellor” or “family.” As well, about half said they know of services where they can get help and half say they do not know.

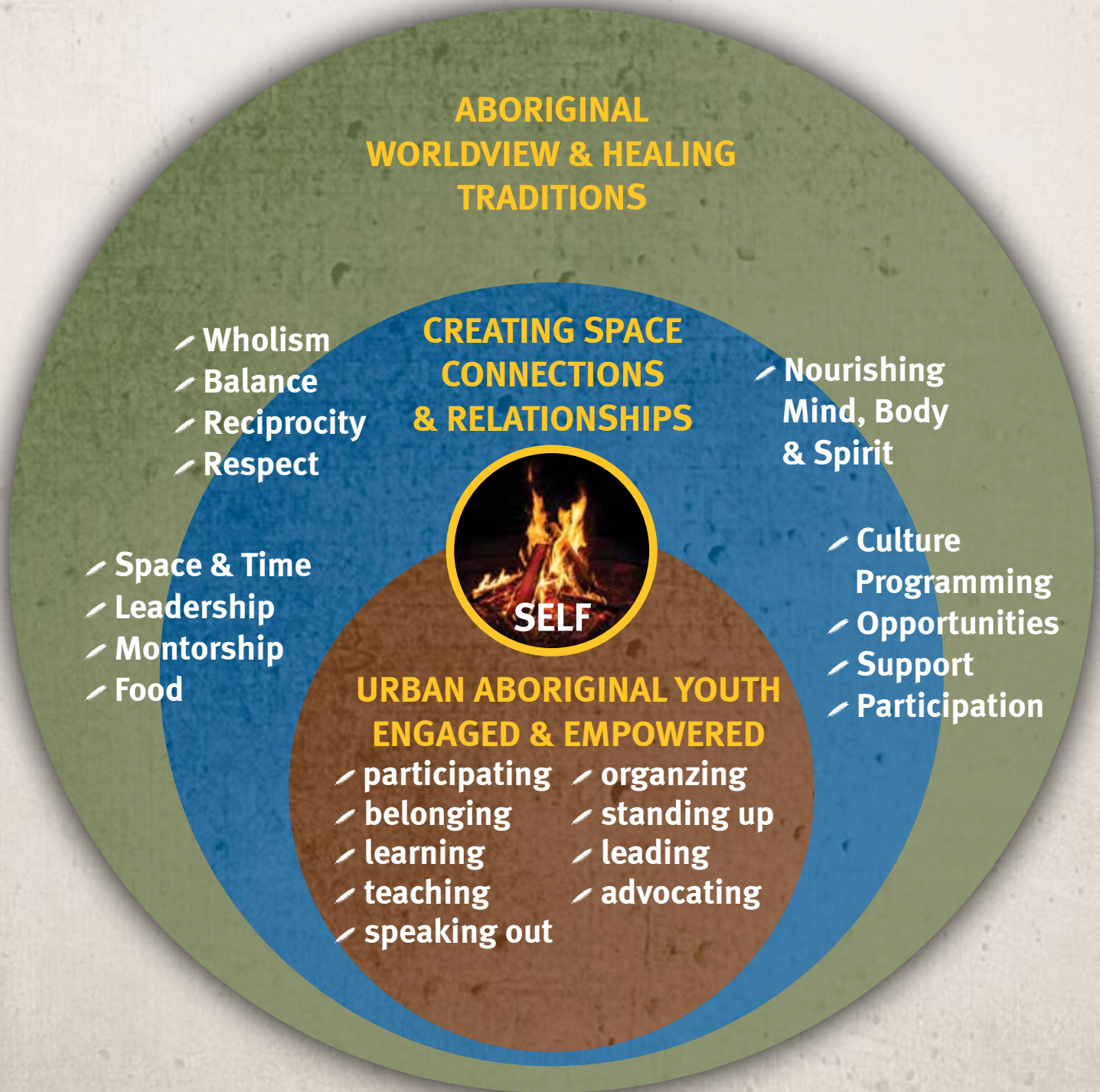
What this means for our community... Many of our youth are making healthy choices and with support, could become role models and mentors to others. School counsellors have a pivotal role in educating our youth about drug and alcohol treatment services and helping them connect to those services.

I feel as though some kids think it is impossible to be drug and alcohol free on the reserve or should just get low marks in school. And I like to prove that theory wrong, that stereotype.

Participant,
Youth Action Circle



Figure 2: Urban Aboriginal Youth Engaged & Empowered





The Arts Are Culture, Strengthening Community and Increasing Awareness

The arts are fundamental to urban Aboriginal communities. Creating jewellery, fur hats, leather pouches, fine art and graphic design, quilts, mukluks and moccasins are just some of the many ways our community members are engaged in the arts. Beyond these forms, music, dancing and drumming are the heartbeat and lifeblood of the community. Powwows, community feasts and events like the Shine-A-Light Gala bring the arts to life by drawing community members together, strengthening community bonds, showcasing artists, teaching and sharing traditions, and raising awareness.

In our discussions with community members, we learned how important the arts are to the individual artist and to the community. Elders often popped by the office to share about the meaning and value of art, as well offering suggestions about ways to support artists. From these many discussions and survey responses, our community shared that the arts:

- ✍ draw people together, build community, offer opportunities for socializing
- ✍ express teachings and knowledge
- ✍ preserve links to languages, traditions and between generations
- ✍ offer an avenue for overcoming addictions and life's challenges
- ✍ offer supplementary income or support a small business

For many, creating and sharing art is part of their journey towards the Red Road. Drawing inspiration, strength, social support and income, community members say that participating in the arts helps overcome adversity and celebrate culture, on individual and community levels.

While Aboriginal artists share and sell their work in both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities, surprisingly, Aboriginal artists told us they sold their work more often to non-aboriginal buyers. However, few people outside of Aboriginal communities understand the deeper meanings that participating in the arts hold for us. Furthermore, Aboriginal artists identified challenges in breaking into the prominent arts market in North Bay, such as being able to show their work at venues such as North Bay's Capitol

Centre. For Aboriginal community members, engaging in the arts is expressing teachings or living a life involving creating and sharing. It is a process that can be time-consuming and it is about much more than earning income. The person who paints, may offer tobacco and wait for guidance, teachings and inspiration to come. It is about the process and that process often takes time.

Another thing that really helped in the past few years was joining the drum group, Little Iron. For a long time I was just by myself, the lonely First Nation there with the long hair. And then I joined Little Iron... We've all just been supporting each other, helping each other, through this Red Road there. As soon as I joined up with Little Iron, we had our support system and that's been helping me out, and helping each other out as well.

Falcon McLeod
Honoured at Shine-A-Light Gala



There are few supports in place to assist Aboriginal artists through the whole process, from start to finish. Aboriginal and non-aboriginal artists and artisans compete for limited support, support that typically does not recognize the cultural process involved for an Aboriginal artist. Securing start-up loans and resources, creating business plans, obtaining licenses, paying vendor fees, purchasing materials, marketing, and limited access to gallery spaces were identified as barriers to starting up and running Aboriginal art businesses. So much so, that many Aboriginal artists end up doing their art “on the side.”



The arts promote community engagement in research but funding doesn't always recognize this

“The arts were also a key component of the U-ACT project” said Patty Chabbert, Lead Researcher. “Events like Shine-A-Light, our community mural, photography, and our Coffee Houses were all ideas that grew from our community’s interpretation of ‘research.’ These arts events and activities provided comfortable ways for the community to be involved and engaged. The youth were particularly active.”

“Sadly,” cautioned Chabbert, “these activities were the most challenging aspects of the project to fund because they didn’t fit neatly into funding categories. Funders need to recognize that creating a single community mural encompasses many parts: Elders sharing teachings with youth, mentorship, gathering and sharing knowledge with community members, increasing cultural knowledge, and contributing to positive community relations!”



Aboriginal Festivals Promote Culture and Tourism

The *Maamwi Kindaaswin Festival & Powwow* and *National Aboriginal Day* events are two of the festivals organized by the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre and partners. Each year, members of our community look forward to participating in many aspects, from planning and organizing, to performing and attending with family members.

The *Mamwai Kidaasawin Festival* is an annual, three-day, outdoor, family-friendly celebration of Aboriginal culture and traditions. With a powwow as its centrepiece, each year thousands of Aboriginal and non-aboriginal visitors watch and participate in activities featuring local Aboriginal cultures and traditions. As well, a popular annual two-day Children's Powwow involving an estimated 500 to 1000 individuals and families was recently merged with the larger festival.

National Aboriginal Day is also well attended. With cultural activities for Aboriginal, Métis, and Inuit members of our community, there are also activities organized for the general public and local schools join in the celebrations.

All of these events play an important role in meeting Aboriginal community member needs to participate in traditional ceremonies and celebrations. Many dancers and their families follow the Powwow trail or participate in cultural drumming across different regions in Ontario and in the United States. The festivals also bring Aboriginal families and communities from near and far together. Family and community reunions take place at every event. Throughout, Aboriginal culture, knowledge and traditions are promoted and shared among Aboriginal and non-aboriginal participants.

But the Festivals also achieve much more.

Regional, provincial, federal and Canadian tourism leaders identify *Aboriginal tourism* as a priority tourism area (Ministry of Tourism,

”
Aboriginal Tourism is one of Canada's unique strengths, in both the domestic and international markets... demand for Aboriginal Tourism is outpacing capacity... particularly near gateway cities and major Tourism routes.

Canadian Tourism Commission

”
North Bay is such a gateway city, actively contributing to the \$13 million dollars added to local economies across Ontario each year.

Aboriginal Tourism Ontario Strategy

Government of Canada). According to the Canadian Tourism Commission, “Aboriginal tourism [is] a key tourism focus with growth potential in international markets.” The Government of Canada reports, “Aboriginal tourism is one of Canada's unique strengths, in both the domestic and international markets... demand for Aboriginal Tourism is outpacing capacity... particularly near gateway cities and major tourism routes.”



North Bay is such a gateway city, actively contributing to the \$13 million dollars added to local economies across Ontario each year (Aboriginal Tourism Ontario Strategy).

Despite our success to date, there is more that we would like to accomplish with our festivals in North Bay.

Market research has identified growth opportunities in specific markets--“mature travellers” (Insignia). There are also opportunities to develop “theme routes,” encouraging longer visits and visits to multiple communities (Aboriginal Tourism Ontario Strategy). As well, in response to tourist opinion research, there is demand for expanding the availability of authentic and traditional cultural experiences (Aboriginal Research Results in Canada) and “discovery experiences” regarding Aboriginal food, way of life and beliefs (British Columbia Tourism). The Five Year Strategy of Aboriginal Tourism in British Columbia suggests travellers taking part in Aboriginal tourism tend to spend more money, take longer trips and travel in larger groups.

Here in North Bay, we would like to make enhancements to our Festivals and events to enrich participant experiences and capitalize on market demand.

We want to

- ✍ Position our *Mamwai Kidaasawin Festival* as a leading Aboriginal tourism destination, one of the region’s largest and most diverse Aboriginal gatherings.
- ✍ Diversify our Powwow Committee, including community stakeholders such as hotels and regional economic development representatives and other stakeholders.
- ✍ Make physical improvements to our venue (accessible, shelter, shuttles, professional sound quality and grounds) including adding a Main Stage, a more prominent performance space allowing us to increase the number and diversity of live performances.
- ✍ Showcase prominent international drummers in order to attract more traditional Aboriginal cross-border dancers, families, vendors and followers.
- ✍ Add an Aboriginal Village emphasizing discovery and experience of Aboriginal culture. Rather than watching Aboriginal life, visitors will be able to live it as they participate in ceremonies, listen to music, carve wood, make canoes and more.



Cross-Cultural Partnerships Build Relationships and Boost Economic Opportunities

During the project we created working groups focused on labour and employment, housing and homelessness, migration and poverty, and justice and education. We also have one emerging in mental health and Elders health.

Our Labour and Employment Working Group was formed by our CAC members, including YES Employment and the Labour Market Group. The Labour Market Group played a pivotal role in motivating the working group and drew on its network, including the Chamber of Commerce, the North Bay Business Centre and the Multicultural Centre. The Friendship Centre also actively participated through the Apatisiwin program, along with the U-ACT Research Team.

We were also fortunate to draw on the expertise of someone who had participated in the development of the Federal Urban Aboriginal Strategy and Cultural Awareness Training for employers, mainly in the areas of mining, forestry, business and education.

Considering Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Ontario, and many “Ring of Fire” activities, or large industry-related initiatives take place on or near neighbouring First Nations communities, our Working Group believed that it was imperative that partnerships and collaborative relationships between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal partners be supported and strengthened. Together, we created “The Employers’ Learning Lodge Information Series” which included three events designed to promote understanding of Aboriginal culture by North Bay employers.

The overall goal of the series was to foster collaboration between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal organizations by promoting Aboriginal-related funding opportunities that support partnership development or provide access to cross-cultural training resources.

”
I've been at this a long time.
Working on improving Aboriginal
and non-aboriginal relations in
the business community. There has
been so much progress since the
beginning of [U-ACT]. They are
doing really good work.

Member, Labour Market Working Group

”
We are sitting at the table and
working with organizations we have
been trying to work with for years.

Member, Labour Market Working Group



Ultimately, the purpose of the series was to promote respect for Aboriginal cultures and boost economic, social, and educational opportunities for Aboriginal community members.

One of the events was a funders' forum, with many Aboriginal-specific funding opportunities presented to support an increased Aboriginal workforce. There was also industry-specific information presented, including opportunities in energy, forestry and business as well as capacity building initiatives.

Another key event was a Cultural Safety workshop, where the continuum of cultural sensitivity, cultural relevance, cultural awareness and cultural safety was presented to employers. The purpose was to provide an overview of culturally safe practices they could use in their places of employment, including resources (individuals and organizations) and available training.

The Labour Market Group reports that employment trends point to the need to support access to growing labour opportunities. Other partners identified the need for additional cultural awareness training to combat racism in employment settings and the need for resources to carry out such training and/or tap into related Aboriginal training resources.

By the time the series was completed, many of the funding opportunities, initiatives presented, and the networking and conversations, were helping to address all of those goals.

Thank you to the funders who presented at our forum

Youth Employment Fund (delivered by Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities)

Royal Bank

United Way

Resources related to Ring of Fire, Forestry and Mining

From the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs:

Aboriginal Procurement Pilot

Ontario Aboriginal Business Directory

Aboriginal Business Development Toolkit

New Relationship Fund

Aboriginal Community Capital Grants Programming

ASET's Program



We asked our youth about their futures

On November 17 and 18, 2014, Aiming Higher, an interactive event sponsored by Nipissing University and Canadore College, brought together Aboriginal high school students and role models to help the students explore their future university, college and career options. The U-ACT research team was there, wanting to get a better understanding from the youth about their career interests and any concerns they might have about going to post-secondary school. The team thought that information gained through this process could help schools and future employers better prepare to support the unique interests and needs of urban Aboriginal youth. Fifty students agreed to complete our survey.

And we learned

The youth are from... 20% of the youth said they came from Nipissing First Nation with the majority coming from First Nations communities around North Bay such as Cache Bay, Dokis, Long Point, Magnetawan Peawanuck and Winneway among others. Some youth came from as far away as Kawawachikamach and Waswanipi First Nations communities in Quebec.

When they ultimately graduate, the youth want to work in... a wide range of areas and settings, in a variety of roles: architecture, art, culinary services, culture and recreation, dance, early childhood education, construction/heavy equipment, energy, fashion, forensics, graphic design, health care, information technology, journalism, media, military, mining, music, own business, photography, plumbing, police, public service, service industry, social services, and teaching.

When it comes to going to post-secondary school, the youth expect some challenges and shared a number of concerns...

Before they go... not sure what to do, where to go, organization/getting prepared, being so young

Arriving... where I will live, being on my own, not knowing people, being far away from family and home, making friends

Going to school... getting used to the big change, big classes, shy--don't like big classes, getting lost, not knowing people or my way around, not having enough time to finish work/time management

Financial... concerns about funding, living expenses, financial support

Emotional and social support... concerns about not having peer support, family support, mental and emotional support

And... concerns about "no hockey."





Before we moved to North Bay, I lost my uncle. He was such a huge influence in my life. He inspired me to chase my dream and that was to play professional football. I remember one day, a week before he died, we were sitting out on the porch right around the time when the sun would set. He taught me how life is going to be like and how hard it's going to be when we get older. I was at that age where I would start thinking, "What the hell is this guy talking about?"

His death really affected me because I lost that one true person who was like an older brother to me and it changed me into a person I didn't want to be. When I moved to North Bay, I began to fall into the wrong crowd. As soon as that happened, I began experimenting with alcohol and drugs. During my grade 8 year I was abusing my addiction every day. I was going to class drunk, high or even hung over. I spent that whole time thinking of my life like it was nothing but a huge party. But life has its consequences. It took quite a while to find out what it means to know when someone loves and cares about you. All I ever did was run away and hurt the people who did.

Moving To Action

Through the U-ACT Project, with support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, our Community Action Circle was established to mobilize the community.

Almost two years later, through sharing, learning and acting, we have been working together, gathering knowledge on problems facing the community and finding solutions.

Our community is ready to build on its success. We want to implement our model, act on community priorities, increase capacity and become an Urban Aboriginal Strategy site. Compared to other sites, we are administratively small, housed in a Friendship Centre, and have no current funding to keep the momentum going.

However, being small, means we are nimble and responsive. Being housed in the Friendship Centre, means we are deeply connected to our Aboriginal community. Having established our Community Action Circle, where all major services, industries, local and provincial governments, and community organizations work together, means we now reach all corners of North Bay and the surrounding communities. Having created the North Bay Model for Urban Aboriginal Community Development, and having identified our priorities, we have completed our groundwork. We are ready to move forward, following the path that we have uniquely fashioned based on our community's ways.

We also hope that the stories and the model shared can be of help to other urban Aboriginal communities working to support their community members to live a good life.

¹¹Government of Canada, Urban Aboriginal Strategy – See Appendix A

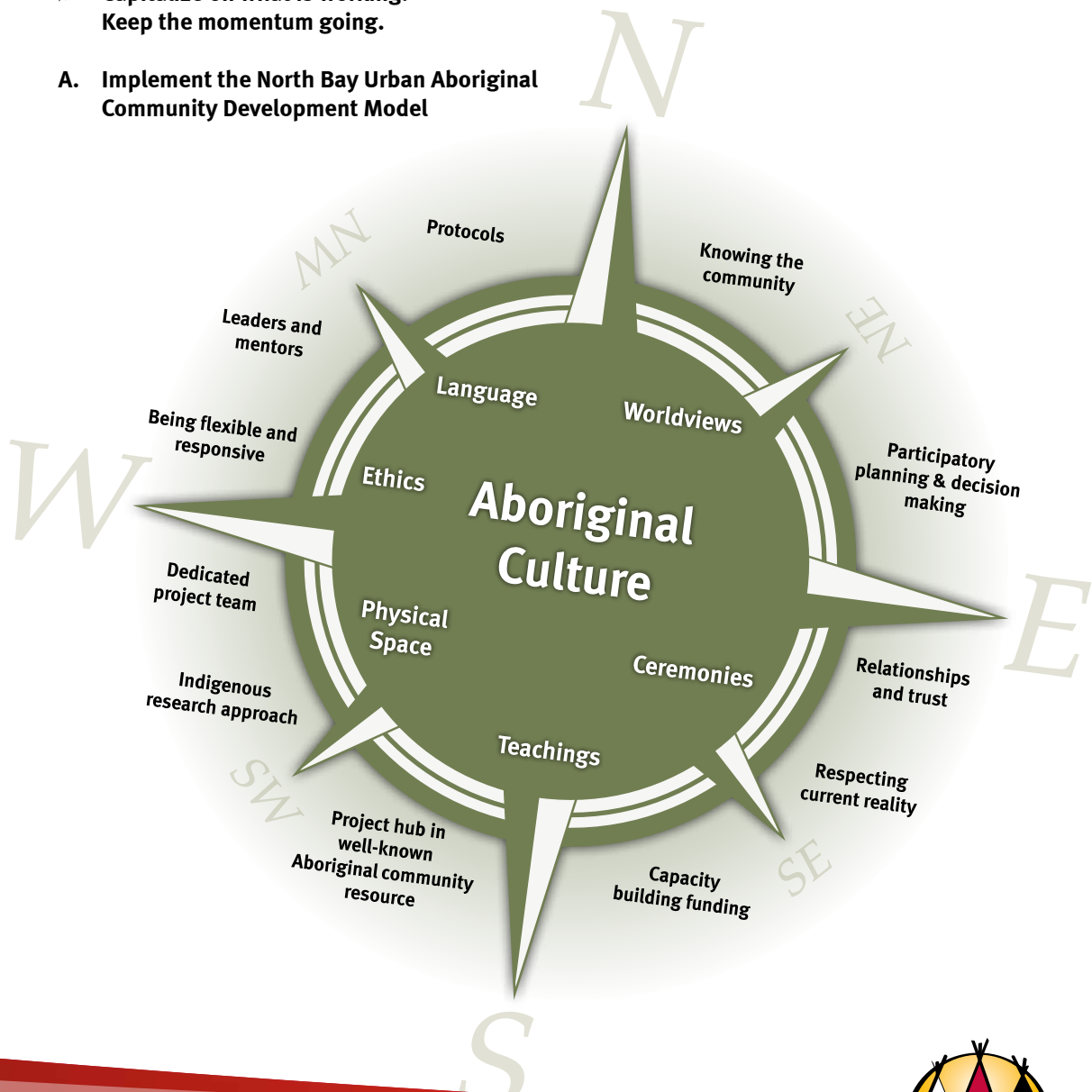


North Bay Urban Aboriginal Community Action Plan

On behalf of the Community Action Circle and the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre, we are seeking partners and funders to help implement our model for Urban Aboriginal Community Development, act on our community's priorities, increase our capacity and take the next steps to becoming an Urban Aboriginal Strategy site. We have three main goals:

1. STAY ON THE PATH

- ✍ Capitalize on what is working.
Keep the momentum going.
- A. Implement the North Bay Urban Aboriginal Community Development Model



2. ACT ON COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

- ✍ **Demonstrate that community collaboration works.**
Use community-wide and targeted approaches to address community priorities.

A. Promote culturally safe and integrated services and supports across the community for women, men, families and children by

- developing and providing community-wide training and support to adopt and implement standards, protocols, policies and practices in services and settings (e.g. housing, employment, mental health, education, social services, counselling, etc.).
- supporting the Friendship Centre to become the “go-to” for cultural safety training will help build its capacity to continue providing training as new or specific needs are identified.
- strengthening the availability of cultural resources to offer community services access to traditional healers, Elders, etc. providing advice, workshops to help increase knowledge, skills.
- improving services and procedures including First Point of Contact (intake procedures), better linkages and smoother transitions between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal services, and addressing gaps and issues.

B. Support specific service sector/industry initiatives primed for action

- leaders and partnerships are already in place (e.g. labour, housing, mental health), priorities and next steps are already determined, potential funding sources identified, etc. For example, U-ACT’s research findings are directly contributing to the provincial 10 Year Housing Strategy and CURA (Community-University Research Alliance) may recommend that they be used to help set housing standards for northeastern Ontario.
- each initiative will have its own tailored work plan including objectives, budget, timeframe and evaluation.

3. INCREASE CAPACITY

- ✍ **Secure longer term funding to establish a more sustainable infrastructure and become an Urban Aboriginal Strategy site.**

A. Use consulting, writing and training supports to increase internal capacity of project team and the Friendship Centre to seek, secure and manage funding

B. Provide consultation and training support to the CAC and other partnerships and networks to strengthen community-wide capacity to seek, secure and manage funding and become an Urban Aboriginal Strategy site.



My Journey To a Good Life

By Steven Rickard

Along with being an athlete and part of the men's drumming group, Steven was an active member of the YAC, offering leadership and speaking out about the importance of culture. For Steven, reconnecting with culture helped him get sober and contributed to his well-being. This is the story of his journey.

Waachay, Aanii, Welcome. My name is Steven Rickard. I'm from a small community in the James Bay area, called Moosonee. I moved to Cochrane when I was six and we lived there for seven years where my mother was deputy chief of our band: Taykwa Tagamou Nation, which means "water on high ground."

My journey revolves around my late uncle, George Linklater Jr.

My uncle George was born in Moosonee in his home on June 12, 1966. He was the third of six children to my grandparents Dorothy and George Sr.

Growing up with five other siblings was rough for him because my grandparents didn't really have money but they did their best. My grandfather worked 24/7 and my granny was a stay-at-home mom who would always find a way to feed all of them with one can of Klik.

When my uncle was growing up, he got involved with the local hockey team. In hockey, even though he was a small guy, he could hit hard. As he got older, he would get in trouble a lot. As a teenager he was my mom and my aunt's protector because that was his job as an older brother, like he would fight if it was necessary. He was also a prankster too. He got addicted to drinking and drugs at an early age but he managed to sober up at 35 years old.



When I was four or five years old, he taught me how to skate and play hockey. Growing up he taught me a lot. As a kid, I never knew my dad that well, because he wasn't around that much. But my uncle was always around for my sister and me. He taught me how to hunt, skin a moose, pluck a goose, etc. The last time I went hunting with him I remember that we shot five ducks, 11 geese and three partridges and I got to tell you I had the most fun being with him out in the field about six or seven in the morning. Before we moved to North Bay, I lost my uncle. He was such a huge influence in my life. He inspired me to chase my dream and that was to play professional football. I remember one day, a week before he died, we were sitting out on the porch right around the time when the sun would set. He taught me how life is going to be like and how hard it's going to be when we get older. I was at that age where I would start thinking, "What the hell is this guy talking about?"

His death really affected me because I lost that one true person who was like an older brother to me and it changed me into a person I didn't want to be. When I moved to North Bay, I began to fall into the wrong crowd. As soon as that happened, I began experimenting with alcohol and drugs. During my grade 8 year I was abusing my addiction every day. I was going to class drunk, high or even hung over. I spent that whole time thinking of my life like it was nothing but a huge party. But life has its consequences. It took quite a while to find out what it means to know when someone loves and cares about you. All I ever did was run away and hurt the people who did.

Then one day I nearly died. It dawned on me that it wasn't the right thing to do because it hurt me emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. I didn't only hurt myself though, I also hurt my family. The way I saw it was like I was down on the ground and I couldn't get up. I mean, I was trying, but I couldn't. One morning, I was sitting in my hospital bed and I looked out the window and I got a flashback of me and my uncle talking that week before he died. I finally understood what he meant.

What he meant was to be able to become a real person is when someone loves you, and as far

as I can tell, to take care of each other. To take care of our family and friends, first we must take care of ourselves. We live in a big world out there with enough pain and misery behind it that will take away everything from us. When I was sitting in that hospital bed it got me thinking that this wasn't the life I wanted. So that's when I decided enough is enough. June 21st of 2009 was the day I started taking care of myself better and whipped my life back into shape.

When I first started high school at Chippewa Secondary, that's where I decided to start my football career. When I finished playing my second year with the Nipissing Wild football team, I was named one of the top three offensive linemen in Ontario. By the end of the season, I was invited to the Jr. CIS football combine in Hamilton. Out of 27 offensive linemen from



other teams across Canada, I managed to finish the combine as the 2nd place MVP. Last year, I also won an award for Top Offensive lineman of the year. When I won that award I felt extremely proud and honoured on earning what I have been fighting for these past five years. But it made me think of the one person who wasn't there to celebrate with me: my uncle, because he was my inspiration. And now that it's five years later, I love waking up every morning to see smiles on my family's faces, letting me know that they're happy I'm still around. So in closing, I would like to say Chi-Meegwetch to all of you who took the time to listen to my uncle's history and also mine. Thank you.



Appendices

Appendix A: Government Of Canada - Urban Aboriginal Strategy

Excerpted from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

From the Name of lead department(s): Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)

Lead department program: Under AANDC's program alignment architecture, Urban Aboriginal Strategy is categorized under the Strategic Outcome entitled "The Land and Economy." The Program for the Initiative is entitled Urban Aboriginal Participation.

Start date of the Horizontal Initiative: April 1, 2007

End date of the Horizontal Initiative: Ongoing

Total federal funding allocation (start to end date):

- From 2007–2012: \$68.5 million
- As of 2012: \$13.5 million annually

Description of the Horizontal Initiative (including funding agreement):

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) was developed in 1997 to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people living in key urban centres. Through the UAS, the Government of Canada provides flexible seed funding and seeks to partner with other levels of government, Aboriginal and community organizations, and the private sector to support initiatives that increase the economic participation of Aboriginal people living in urban centres.

In 2012, the Government of Canada extended the UAS and transferred three urban Aboriginal programs from Canadian Heritage to AANDC:

- Aboriginal Friendship Centres Program
- Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth
- Young Canada Works for Aboriginal Urban Youth

The transfer of these programs allows for greater focus and coordination of federal efforts to help urban and off-reserve Aboriginal people increase their participation in the Canadian economy.

Shared outcome(s):

The primary goal of the UAS is to better address issues facing Aboriginal people living in cities across Canada. The strategy seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- Urban Aboriginal socio-economic needs are targeted within new and renewed federal initiatives, where appropriate.
- Access to and coordination of programs and services is improved.
- Partners coordinate development and communication of research, policies and knowledge.
- Horizontal linkages and policy integration within the federal government are improved, leading to better opportunities for partnership (e.g., the federal government, provincial and municipal governments, Aboriginal groups, and private sector).



To accomplish these outcomes, UAS projects will focus investments in three priority areas:

- improving life skills;
- promoting job training, skills and entrepreneurship; and
- supporting Aboriginal women, children and families.

Governance structure(s):

Steering committees are the catalysts for planning, making funding decisions and coordinating work through the UAS — along with other community activities — to respond to urban Aboriginal issues. Each UAS steering committee comprises a cross-section of the Aboriginal community to ensure the steering committee's decisions reflect broad community concerns and priorities. While the steering committee structure is meant to reflect local circumstances, each steering committee includes representation from the local Aboriginal community, the federal government, other levels of government and the private sector. The inclusive nature of the steering committees is indicative of the principle of partnership that underlies the UAS, particularly in keeping with the objective to establish strong and active partnerships between government and community.

Regardless of whether funding is delivered by a community organization, federal officials or a combination of the two, funding through the UAS is designed to promote co-operation with other key partners (including other federal departments) and stakeholders in support of community interests.

Planning Highlights:

The UAS works in partnership with other federal departments, provincial and municipal governments, Aboriginal communities and the private sector to make strategic investments designed to enhance the economic and social participation of Aboriginal people in Canada's urban centres. Community projects funded through the UAS focus on three priority areas:

- improving life skills;
- promoting job training, skills and entrepreneurship; and
- supporting Aboriginal women, children and families.

The UAS also invests in building capacity within the urban Aboriginal community through investments that help form effective partnerships and develop and implement strategic plans that address the unique needs of each community.

The UAS will work on achieving greater horizontality across federal departments to maximize investments. It will explore and implement new and innovative approaches to increase horizontality.

The UAS will also work toward its core objectives, including closing the socio-economic gaps between urban Aboriginal people and other city residents and helping urban Aboriginal people increase their participation in the economy. It will realize these goals by leveraging funding from other levels of government and the private sector and by better aligning federal initiatives with provincial-municipal initiatives and other activities to better support.

The UAS is an opportunity-driven strategy designed to leverage other federal, provincial, municipal and private funding for community-based projects rather than funding pre-planned projects. For these reasons, variances will exist between the planned spending and partnering, and actual spending and partnering when the UAS reports on its results at the end of 2014-2015.

Federal Partners: Canadian Heritage, Public Safety Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Department of Justice

Federal Partner: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada



Appendix B: U-ACT Project Timeline

This timeline shows the key phases and activities of the *U-ACT Project*, launched in North Bay in 2012.

Although some activities took place at particular points in the project, often the phases overlapped: engaging the community, learning, doing, planning, applying for funding, forming partnerships, etc. went on throughout the project.

PRE-PLANNING

July 2012 – November 2012

- **OFIFC asks NBIFC to participate in Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive (U-ACT) initiative.**
- **NBIFC secures seed funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation.**
- **Research team is hired and trained;** Friendship Centre becomes the hub. Team interviews Friendship Centre staff to gain insight into research perceptions, key needs and goals, and to encourage staff support.
- **Drafting key materials begins:** work plan, description, pamphlet and web design, terms of reference, power point, research materials including consent forms are developed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND PLANNING

August 2012 – February 2014

- **Letters of support** are requested from North Bay agencies, Aboriginal and non-aboriginal organizations, and governing bodies including local First Nations; 28 letters are received.
- **Invitations** are sent to agencies and organizations to join a community advisory committee.
- **Community Action Circle (CAC)** is formed; Elders Action Circle and Youth Action Circle concepts are developed to support their involvement. Each CAC meeting involves reviewing what has been done since the last meeting, discussing new opportunities, sharing information and breaking into focus groups to examine specific issues and work on our strategy. By our third meeting, 50 people are attending.
- **Youth Action Circle (YAC)** holds its first meeting (Sept 2012), establishes a formal meeting structure and meets every two weeks.
- **Elders Action Circle (EAC)** takes the form of individual Elders offering advice and other supports.

LEARNING AND DOING

July 2012 – February 2014

- **Elders and community members want space and opportunities** to drop in and talk. In response, **we create weekly teas and social drop-ins.** We use these opportunities to visit and obtain feedback on research questions and ideas.





Bowling Fun Day



Cultural Night



Child Poverty Day



Coffee House

- **Building the Youth Action Circle through relationships.** The project's first associate researcher was young and grew up in the community. She connected first with family and friends, and participation grew from there. Facebook and social media, along with food and activities, drew young people in.
- **Attending every event possible is the way to connect with the Aboriginal community** and overcome many barriers associated with research in Aboriginal communities. We shared information, handed out materials, requested participation and built and secured partnerships. This also helped us connect with particular industries and populations; the team attended a youth labour event and handed out labour-related surveys.
- **Creating and supporting opportunities for community participation:** community members worked with a graphic designer to create the project logo; youth organized a Flash mob at a Round Dance, we held an Idle No More Feast and Information session, set up Coffee Houses and Youth Drop-ins, attended a Full Moon Ceremony, organized a Medicine Walk, went raspberry picking, etc.
- **Applying for specific funding** to address particular aspects of the project. For example, we **secured funding to look at mental health programs and services** for urban Aboriginal clients in North Bay from OFIC and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Focus groups, sharing circles, interviews, and surveys were used to gather views, experiences, and recommendations.
- **Welcoming invitations to partner.** Partnership opportunities began emerging because of the CAC relationships and growing awareness of the project. Nipissing University, the local DNSAAB and the Labour Market Group partnered on initiatives.
- **Creative problem-solving helps address lack of resources.** The community was keen to participate in various ways and yet our resources could not support all of their ideas. When we couldn't afford to hire a photographer, a volunteer taught the youth to take photos.
- **Additional funding (beyond OTF funding) was not secured for the later stages of the project** and this had significant repercussions: many activities or aspects of activities had to be cancelled and we received negative feedback from the Aboriginal community. Transportation could no longer be provided to attend our drop-ins, cutting participation in half; we were no longer able to provide food in the youth groups. We worked even harder to partner with others in the community and at the Friendship Centre to carry out initiatives that would be mutually beneficial.

**DEVELOPING STRATEGY and
CREATING REPORT**
Spring 2014

- **Consulting, seeking advice, meeting with advisors,** to create report, develop strategy, and action plan for next steps.



Appendix C: *USAI Research Framework Highlights*

USAI research stresses that it is entirely up to communities to choose methods of inquiry most appropriate in any given research context. We call it an “orientation to research” instead of a “methodology”.

We note that, at times, this approach may challenge mainstream research methodologies where the research agenda, methods and instruments, types of analysis and ways of evaluation are imposed by academic conventions. It does not mean, however, that *USAI* categorically excludes the use of “academically conventional” methods, if a community deems them as appropriate for the research context.

USAI recognizes all manifestations of community life as both appropriate spheres of research and valid methods to address research questions.

We understand that the realities of urban Aboriginal communities are rooted in various interactions, constantly moving through various circles of life, where everything is interrelated, interconnected and open-ended so that transformation and change are expected and welcome.

Our orientation to research calls for the use of practices that are effective in generating concrete knowledge in such interrelated and vibrant social environments; not just those that are efficient in data gathering.

Research into spiritual meanings held by a community calls for practices respectful of those meanings (shared analysis of symbols, cultural imagery, indirect mode of communication, story-telling, visualization, etc.).

Research into effects of assimilation on youth needs to speak to youth’s emotions and feelings (learning by doing, community art and media, photo-voice, concept mapping).

Whatever practices are chosen as appropriate for community driven projects, the most important feature is “their ‘hands-on’ nature. . . to enable people to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms using their own symbols, language or art form” (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby, 2007:17).

Practices that *USAI* research supports as appropriate in community-driven Indigenous research are contextual, not necessarily standardized, never static, always making sense to community members involved in a research project, intuitively “right”, and reflecting the richness of relationships.

All practices recognize that in Aboriginal communities people are “sophisticated in the stories”, or as Gardner (1995:11-14) says, “to put it simply, one is communicating with experts . . . (who) come equipped with many stories that have already been told and retold”.

USAI research does not “collect” stories or facts. Instead, its practitioners respectfully listen and learn using research practices that are most effective in grasping how the stories, experiences, voices, symbols, facts and actions embody community’s priorities, identities, strengths, and aspirations.

USAI Framework...From pages 9, 10



References

- Ball, J. (2007a). *Creating cultural safety in speech-language and audiology services*. PowerPoint Presentation: Presented at the Annual Conference of the BC Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, Whistler, BC, October 25, 2007.
- Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D., Hughes, R. (2009). Strengths-based programming for First Nations youth in schools: Building engagement through healthy relationships and leadership skills *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. Retrieved from: <http://www.youthrelationships.org/documents/Findings/The%20Fourth%20R%20programs%20for%20Aboriginal%20youth%20increase%20youth%20engagement.pdf>
- EnviroNics Institute. (2010). *Urban Aboriginal peoples study. Main report*. Toronto. Retrieved from: <http://142.132.1.159/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/UAPS-Main-Report.pdf>
- Government of Ontario. *About Ontario*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ontario.ca/government/about-ontario>
- Government of Canada. *Urban Aboriginal strategy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1389724611277/1389724670841>
- North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. <http://www.myhealthunit.ca/>
- North Bay's Labour Market Group. <http://www.thelabourmarketgroup.ca/>
- Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. (2012). *USAI research framework*. Retrieved from: http://www.ofifc.org/pdf/USAI_Research_Framework_Booklet.pdf
- Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Retrieved from: http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html
- Statistics Canada. 2011 Census. Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Pages/FOG.cfm?lang=E&level=3&GeoCode=575>
- Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page





Walking the Red Road



U-ACT | URBAN ABORIGINAL
COMMUNITIES THRIVE