

For the Love of Our Children: Re-centering Indigenous Relational Knowledge

2023 Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Conference

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Love is Stuff AS411-V
02/08/21

LOVE is when I help my little sister
LOVE is by help my mum clean up
LOVE is when my dog come up to school
LOVE is when I call my friend
LOVE is when my dad let me to ride with
LOVE is when I do math
LOVE is when I go play out

The image is a horizontal split. The left half shows a dark blue sky over a calm body of water with distant mountains. The right half shows a river with white water rapids flowing past large, dark boulders under a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

Land Acknowledgement

We work and live on the lands of the Dena'ina and Spokane People.



Who I Am, Where I Come From



Tavlugun Ceremony



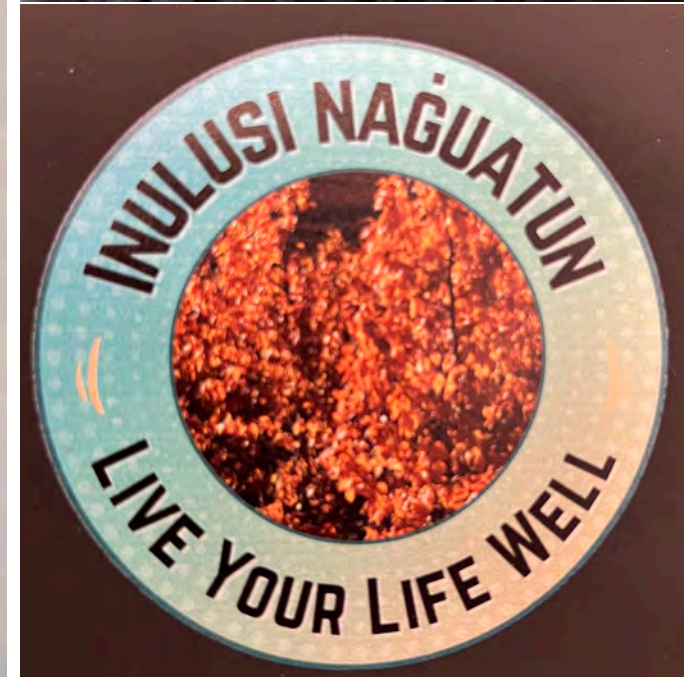
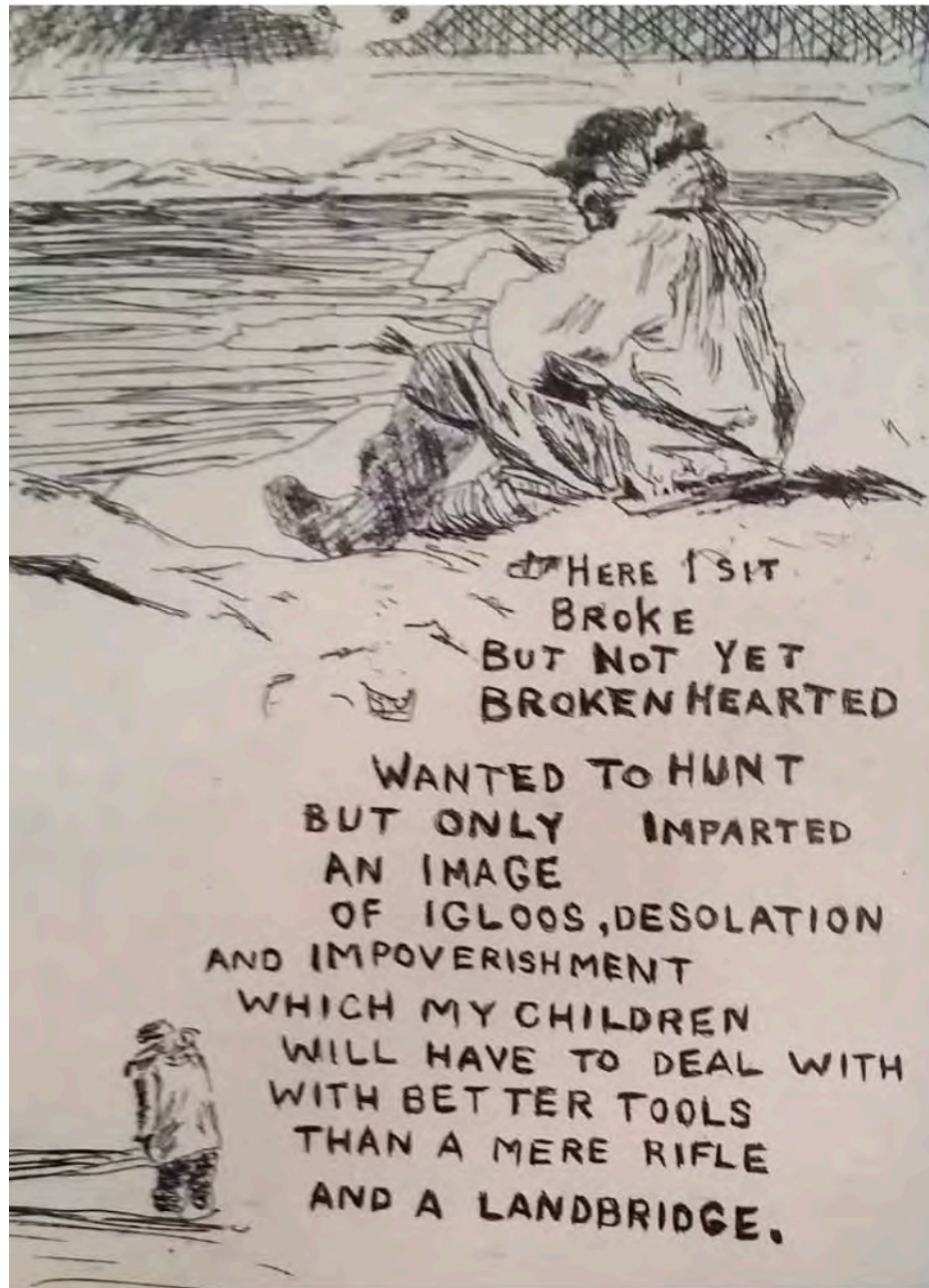
Today's Presentation

- The Why Behind the Work
- Results from a Literature Review and Qualitative Research
- The Indigenous Connectedness Framework
- How this way of thinking can shift the practice
- Using the IC Framework to develop a curriculum
- How we can apply our own community's connectedness frameworks and traditional values to reset systems towards liberation from oppression

7. does your culture change what you believe in?
8. How can you recover from trauma and heal the space where the trauma was before?
9. How can we prevent the child from having trauma?

Encourage Questions and Discussion

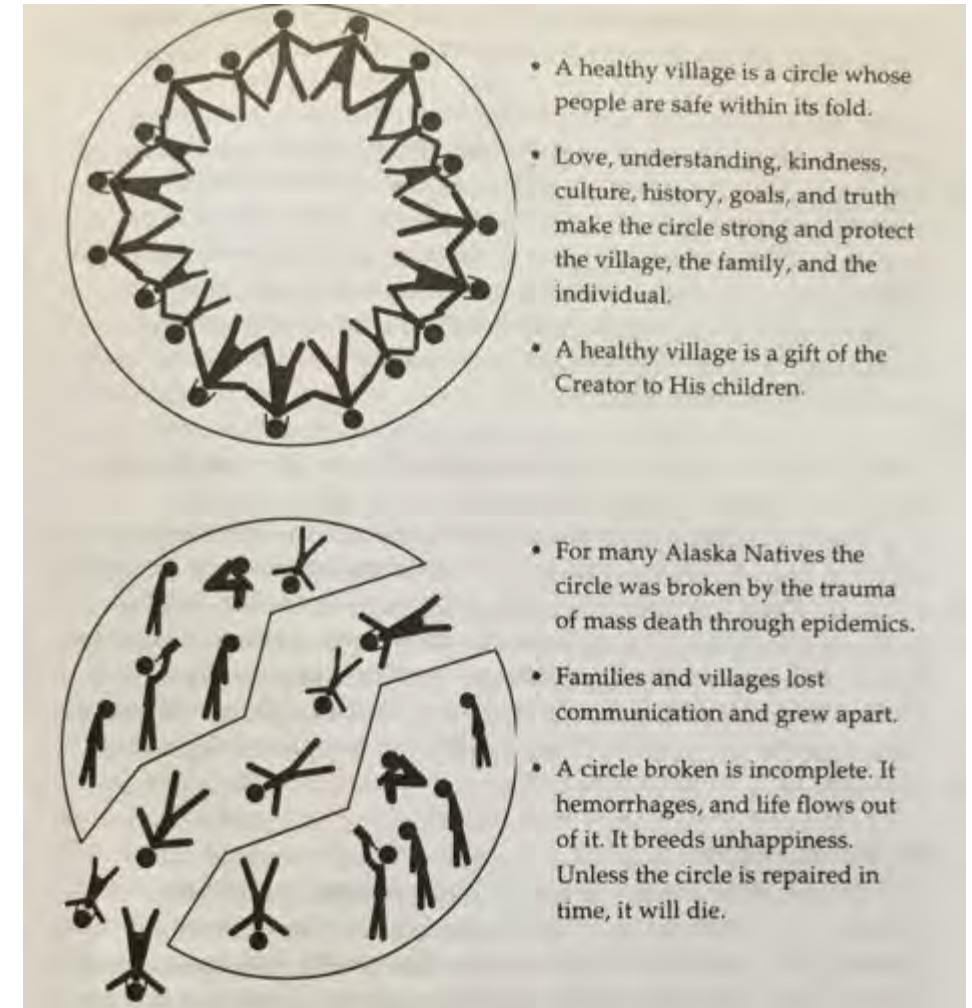
Why We Do this Work



The Start of My Social Work and Research Journey



Bernardi photo album, UW special collections, 1902

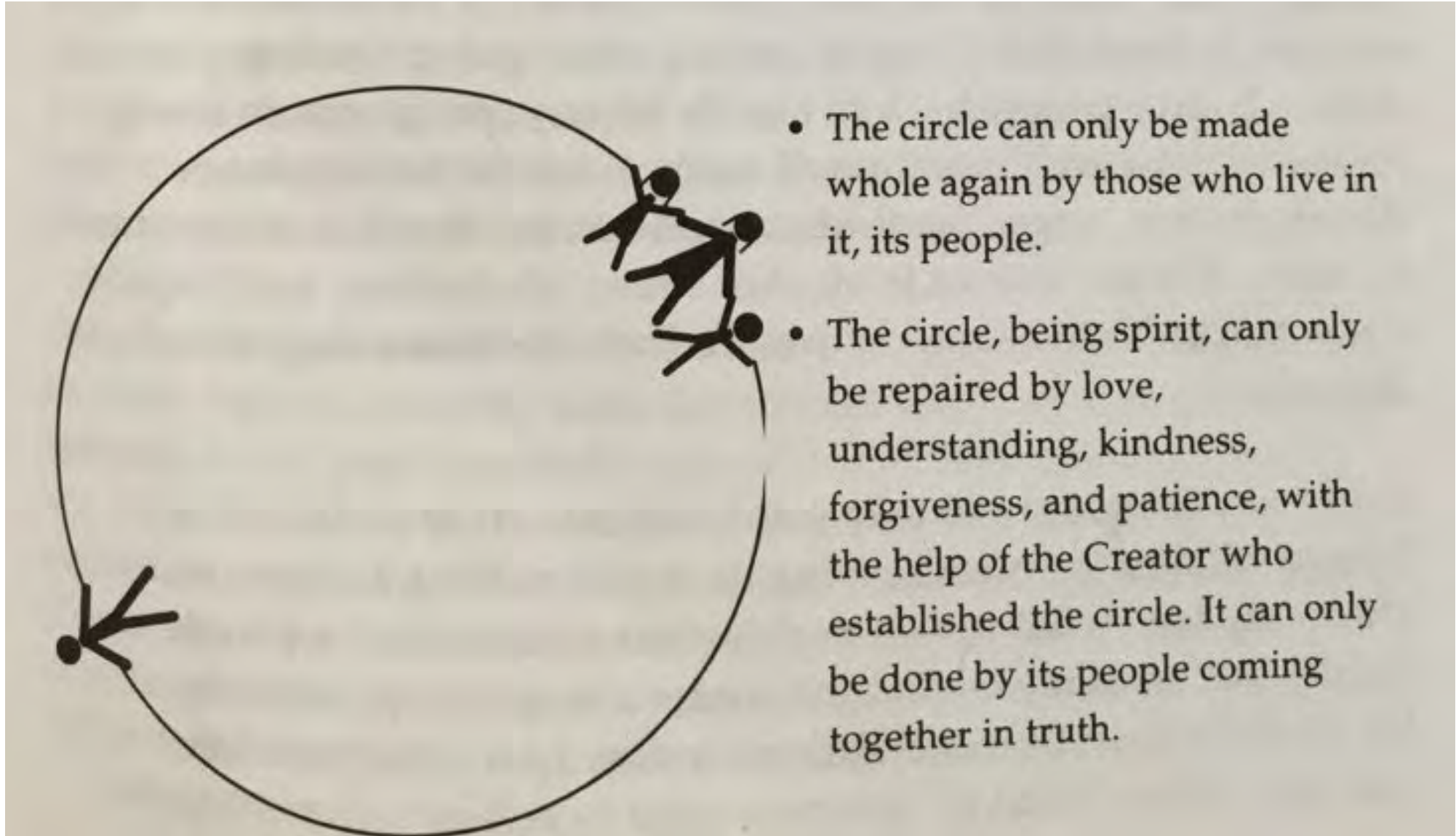


Harold Napoleon, 1996



Breaking the
Cycle of
Indigenous
Child
Removal

Focus on Indigenous Wellbeing





How Connectedness Has Been Defined

“The Inter-related welfare of an individual, family, community and the Earth.” – *The People’s Awakening Team of Southwest Alaska* (Mohatt et al., 2011).

Connectedness Mechanisms- Relational Actions that Support Connectedness

<u>Family</u>	<u>Community</u>	<u>Land/Place</u>	<u>Intergenerational</u>	<u>Spirit</u>
Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
Spending time together	Celebrations	Hunting	Part of a continuous history	Ceremonies
Relational Roles	Dancing/Singing	Gathering	Awareness of historical trauma	Cultural values
Responsibility	Ceremonies	Teaching children	Responsibility to future generations	Art
Namesakes & Nicknames	Service to others	Learning from Elders	Learning ancestral teachings to pass on to younger generations	Stories
Adoption	Mentoring	Exploration	Participation in cultural and community activities	Love, Humor, Truth
Togetherness	Rules, values, norms	Observation	Knowledge of family lineage	Beauty
Trust and safety	Safety nets	Travel		Dance
Sharing and support	Family relationships	Care for animals		Subsistence foods
Helping Elders	Social groups	Stories		Songs/Dance/Drum
Stories, family history	Collective belonging	Playing outside		Connection to ancestors and future generations
Recognition of personal talents	Cooperative Teams	Access to clean water		Collective mentality
	Subsistence sharing	Fish camp		Spiritual teachings
	Strong leadership	Survival skills		

INDIGENOUS CONNECTEDNESS FRAMEWORK

Initial
Conceptual
Framework



Elders,
My family,
Tribal Leaders,
Previous Co-Workers,
Indigenous Scholars,
Indigenous Wellness
Research Institute,
UW Professors



We Do This Work Together

Listening to Lived Experience

25 Knowledge Bearers

9 Lived Expertise

10 Relatives

6 Foster Parents





Results

Four Cycles of Analysis

1. Hypothesis and Descriptive Coding

2. Identification of Common Concepts

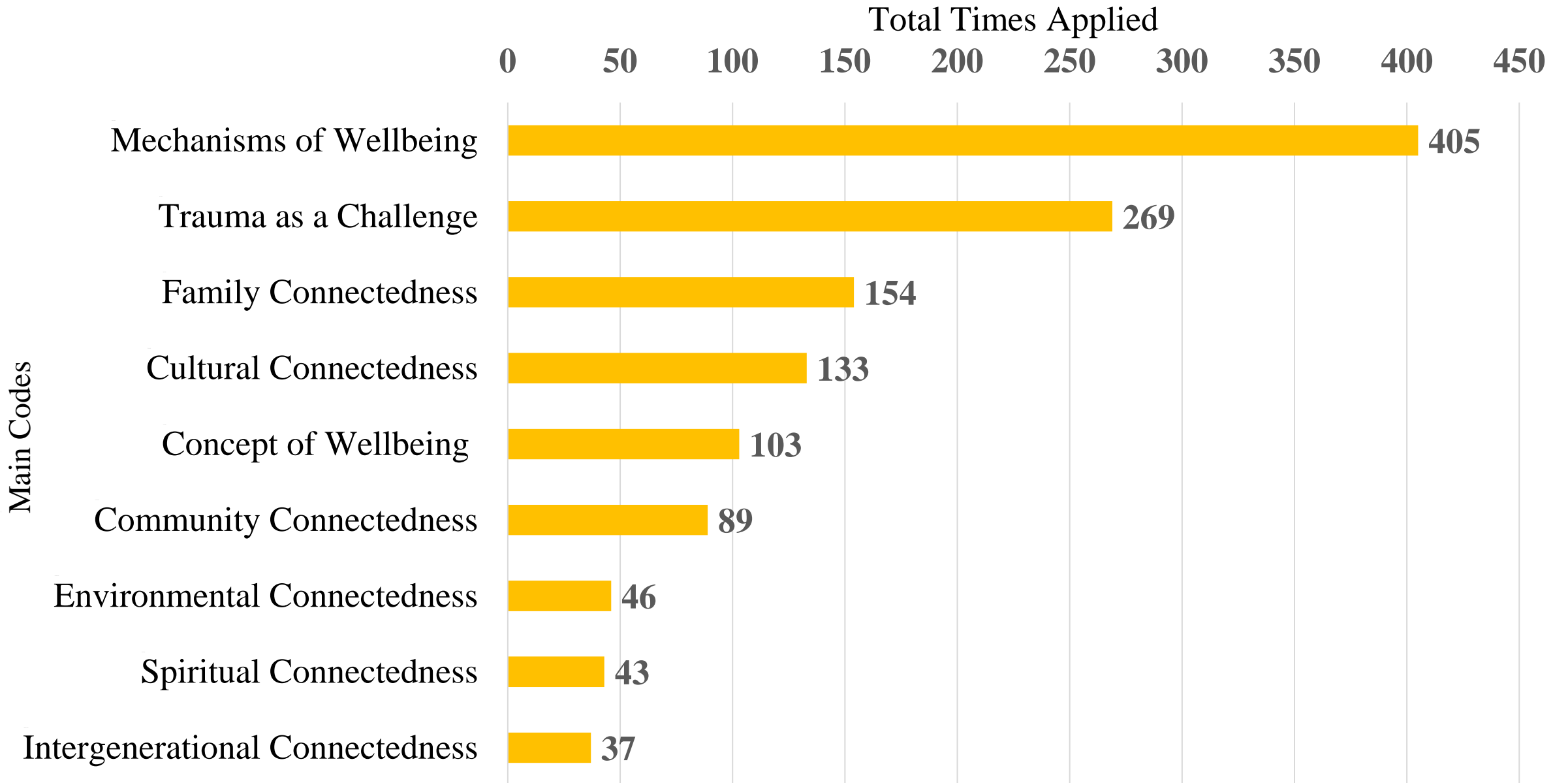
3. Indigenous Storying

4. Wholistic Story Excerpt

} Aim 1

} Aim 2

Table 11. Frequency of Main Codes



Indigenous Storying

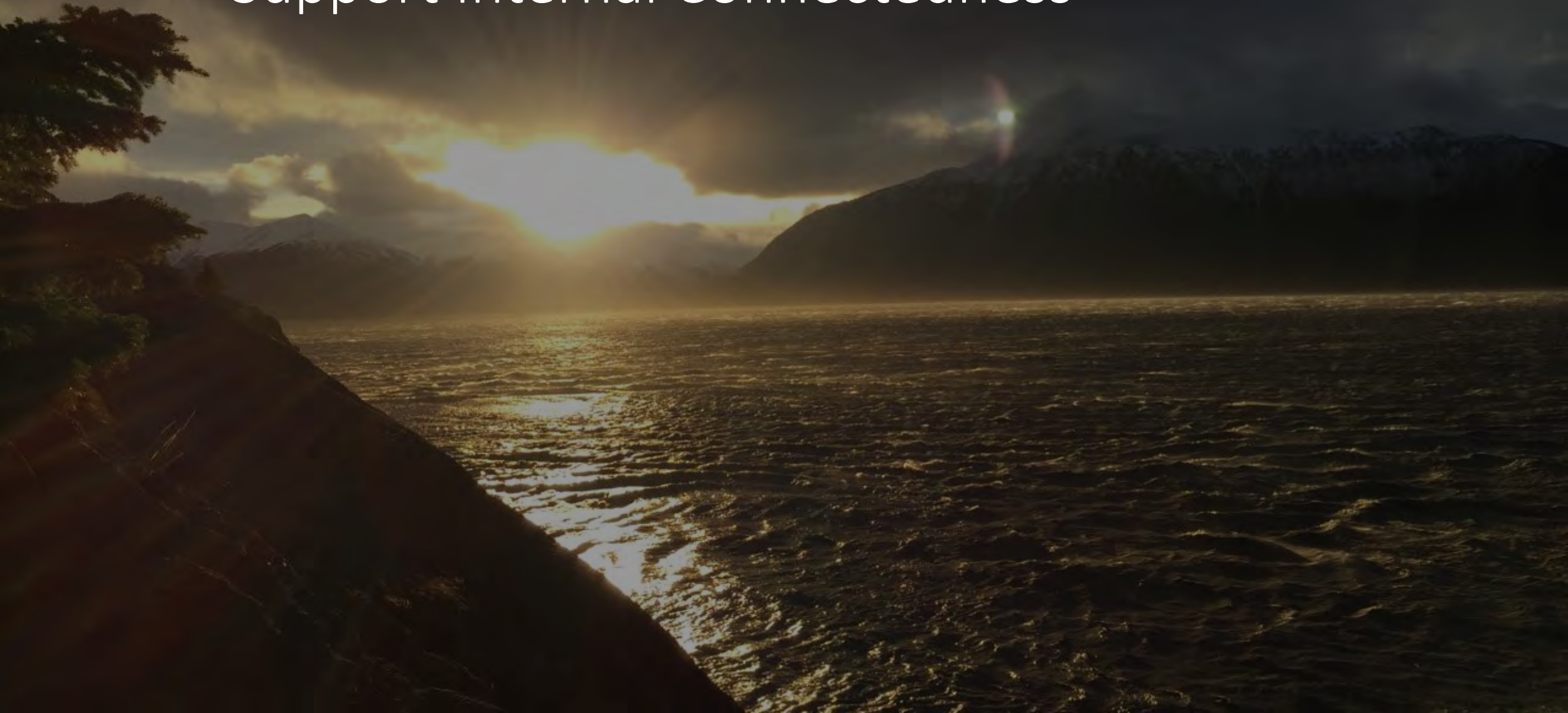
Lesson 1: Acknowledge Trauma, Disconnectedness and Relational Wounding



Lesson 2: Maintain Relational Continuity and Connectedness for Child Wellbeing



Lesson 3: Facilitate Relational Healing to Support Internal Connectedness

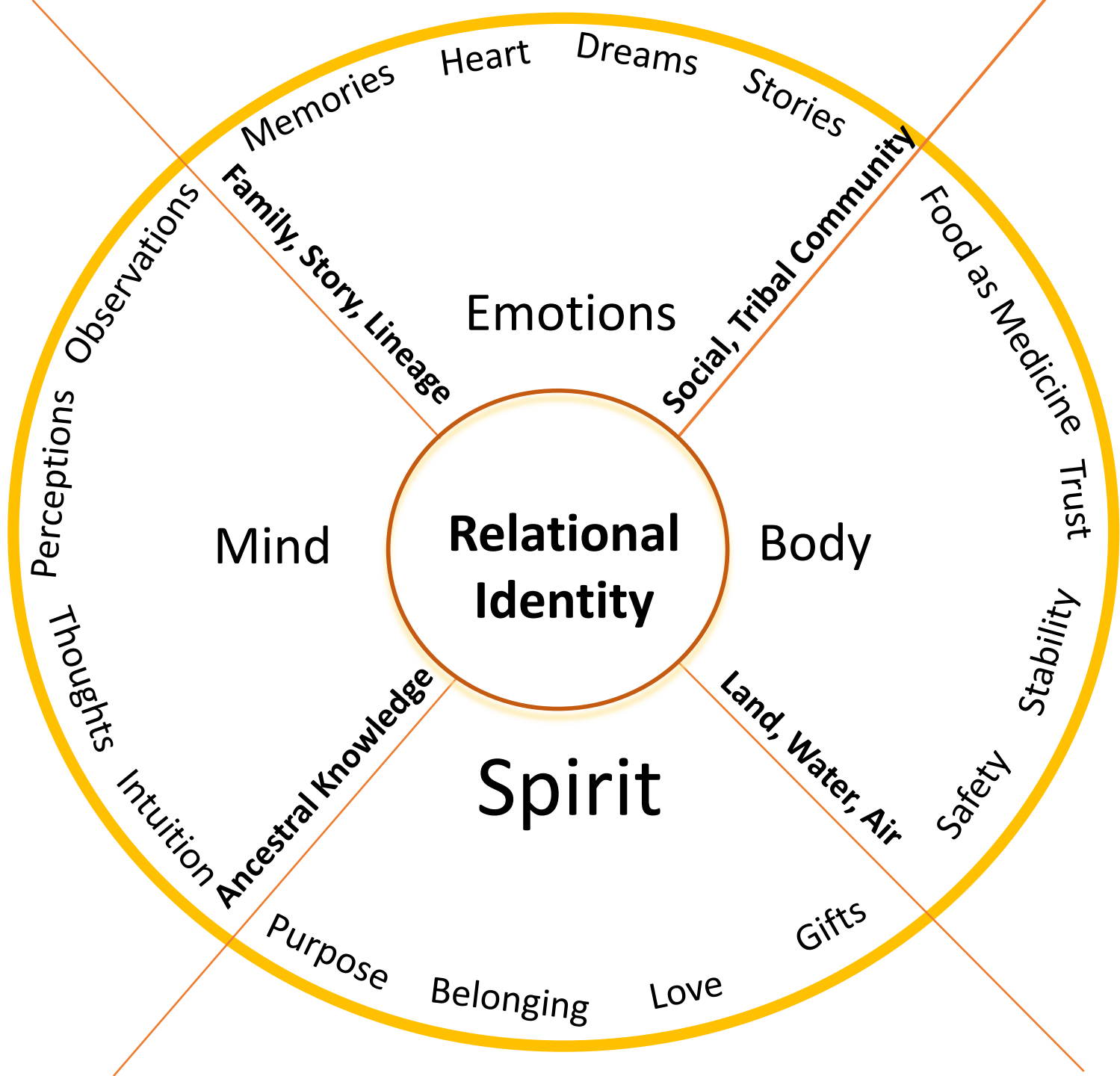


Relational Identity

Knowing Who You Are

An “Inner Ecology”

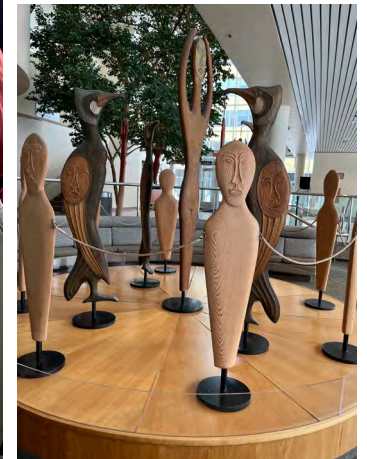
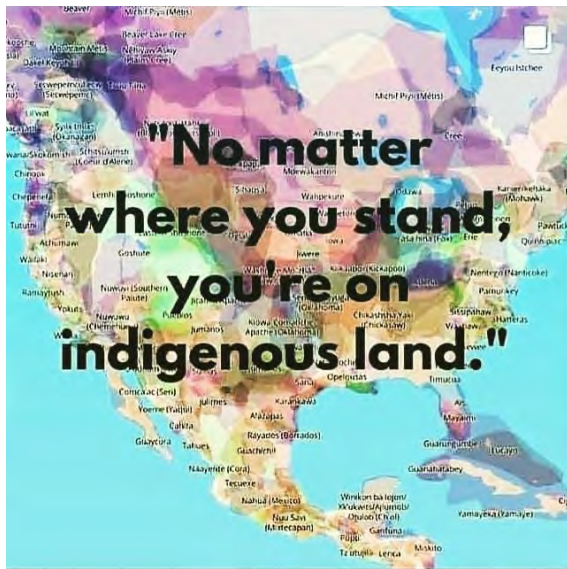
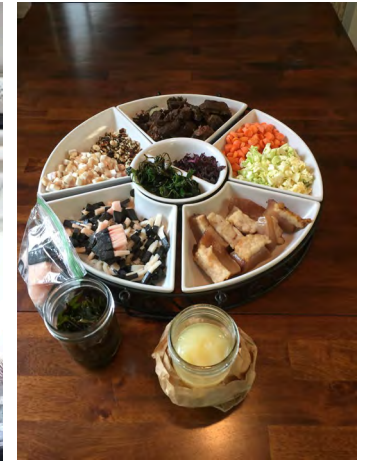
(Kawagley, 2006)



INDIGENOUS CONNECTEDNESS FRAMEWORK



Culture = Spirit = Medicine = Healthy Relationships = Knowing Who You Are





Possible internal *beliefs* based on trauma that sometimes keep us disconnected

I don't matter, Nobody cares, Less than, Don't trust, The past will be the future, Not enough, People abandon me, Change isn't possible, Run away from the pain, A closed heart doesn't hurt, Nobody loves me, don't like myself, not safe, have to be perfect, showing feelings is bad.



Beliefs that Can Heal, Protect, Re- center Us

Healing is possible, We Can have an easier life, Always protected and provided for, My Spirit is Limitless, There is abundance, Unconditional love always exists, I can Trust, We are all sacred and divine beings, Balance and peace is within, I matter, Never alone, I can walk towards the pain, I am lovable, I can love myself, I am safe, The present moment contains magic



One Size Does Not Fit All



So Many Practice Considerations

-
- Who You Serve
 - Safety, Permanency, Wellbeing
 - Child Maltreatment, Trauma
 - Social History
 - Family Engagement
 - Policies and Funding
 - Power, Authority and Responsibility

Art by Ron Senungetuk



Who We Serve



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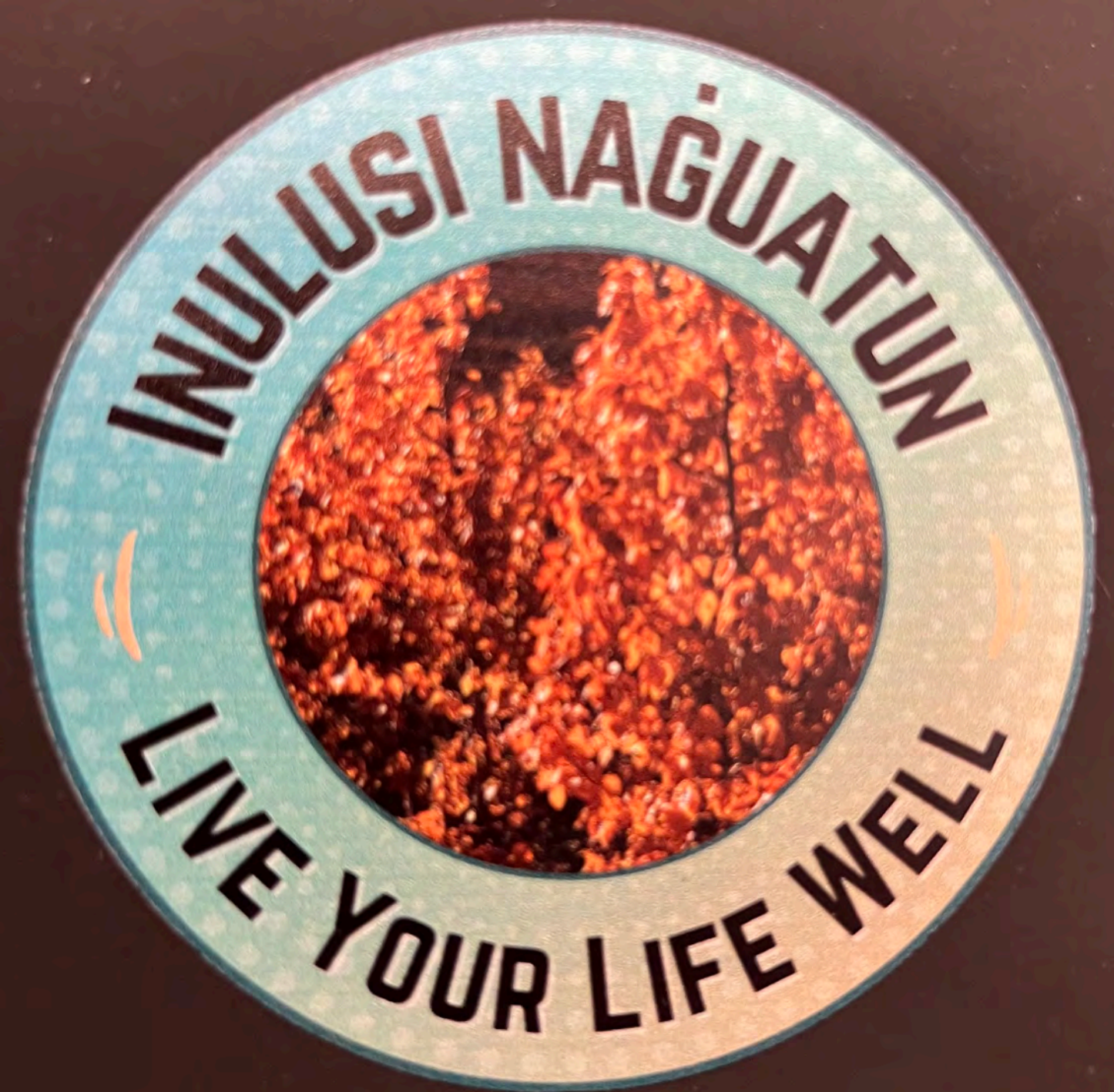
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Social History





Safety,
Permanency,
Wellbeing

- It's all about relational wellbeing
- When we are relationally well- we are safe, we have connectedness to culture, land, family, community, spirit, the ancestors, future generations, the collective

Trauma, Child Maltreatment



Family Engagement

Table. 1 Recommended Changes for Supporting Family Connectedness

Direct Practice	Agency Practice	Government Practice
<p>Knowledge bearers have autonomy and hold the power and choice to define who “family,” is, what relationships are important to them, where they will live, when they move, planning for reunification, and family contact.</p> <p>No meeting or decision is made about a family without them present.</p> <p>Child welfare agency response to families acknowledges the cultural and intergenerational family practices. This may include storytelling.</p>	<p>Knowledge Bearers define how they want to engage in decision making processes involving their family life, either through formal systems processes (hearings, meetings, visits) or in a way that they define to be authentic and most effective beyond the systems framework for managing “cases.”</p> <p>Child welfare agencies hold family connectedness at the center of all decisions through relentless family engagement, acknowledgement of knowledge bearers as holding the key to the solutions for their own family situation. Families are seen as the “experts,” in their own lives.</p>	<p>Knowledge bears have a seat at the table in government decisions being made about families at all levels.</p> <p>Knowledge bearers share lived expertise with policymakers and key decision makers that is acted on through with urgency through policy reform and implementation efforts.</p> <p>Government incentivizes policies that promote Family Connectedness. Agencies are held accountable to family engagement.</p>

Policies and Funding

ACF Proposes to Eliminate over 90% of Native Children's Data Elements in AFCARS— Seeking Public Comments

As part of the Trump Administration's goal to streamline and/or eliminate regulations across the federal government, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) proposed in a Notice of Public Rulemaking to eliminate over 90% of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data elements for American Indian and Alaska Native children from 2016 regulations.

NICWA strongly encourages tribes, Indian organizations, states, and ICWA supporters to submit comments.

The deadline for submitting public comments is June 18.

[READ MORE](#)

ANCESTORS

Your ancestors did not survive everything that nearly ended them for you to shrink yourself to make someone else comfortable.

This sacrifice is your warcry, be loud, be everything and make them proud.

Nikita Gill

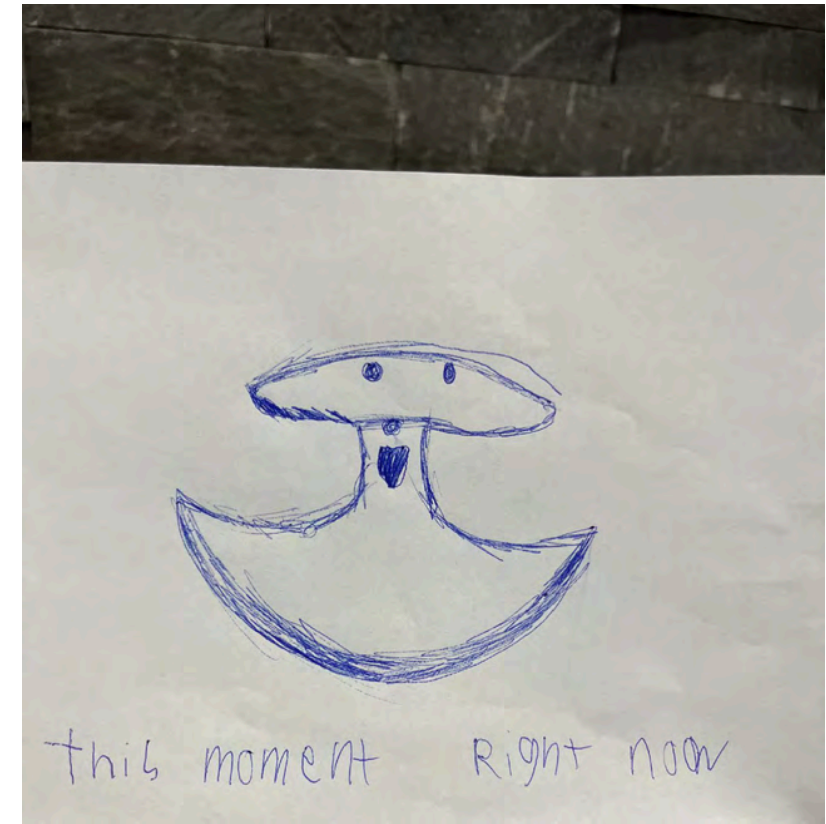
Role of Culture

- potlatches (How to ~~to~~ prepare, serve, give thanks, be thankful, teaches to be substance free [no one uses], how to hunt, and prepare food, teaches management) creates social group and fills void.
 - teaches love - intergen
- provides a sense of Identity
- creates connections and relations
- practices teaches life skills (management/hard work, etc) and values
 - practices help voids fill voids
- wearing regalia affects our mental/emotional health, helps connect us to our ancestors.
- helps create foundation/grounding, provides medicine
- fosters connections and purpose
- culture defines wellness, wellness is interwoven into our culture.
- helps us heal
- reclaiming our spirituality
 - balancing and appropriate

values practices



Writing prompt:
A teaching or lesson from childhood that has helped you to be grounded and strong



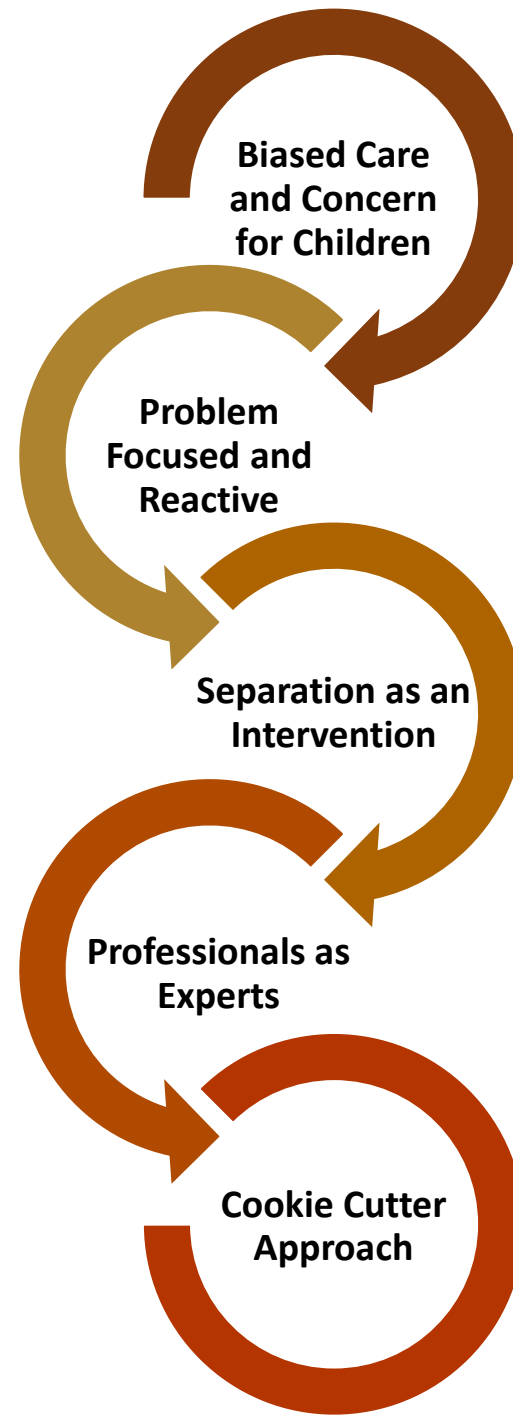
Power, Authority and Responsibility



Multiple Systems Change

- Education
- Health care
- Mental Health
- Substance Use Treatment
- Justice
- Child Welfare
- Government
- Economic

Disrupting This Theory of Change



Common Theory of Change in Oppressive Systems

Figure 2.
**Indigenous Theory of
Change
in Liberatory Systems**



Theory of Change

“Our approach includes a unique theory of change (Figure 1) that is grounded in Indigenous relational and connectedness worldviews. Change is based on a foundation of love for our sacred children, is wellbeing focused, incorporates relational knowledge exchange, and sees Elders, young people, and community members as experts that we are responsive to and co-create the best solutions with. Through this transformation, we want all children to be accepted for *who they are and where they come from* as interdependent relational human beings with gifts to share with our beloved community” (Ullrich, 2020)

LOVE
COMES
FROM
THE



LIGHT
INSIDE

~ RAINA
HAPPY B-DAY MOM

Shifting the Theory of Change

- **Community** as a unit of change WITH our precious children and families
- Focusing on the promotion of **wellbeing**, while acknowledging the trauma and oppressions
- Planning for system and collective change, **it's not just on an individual to do**
- It's not entirely about changing, it's about **dissolving the false beliefs** and lies about who we are
- Who we are is _____ and **interconnected to a collective**

Sample Community Activity

Small Break Out Discussions

Introduce yourselves- roles you might have had in child welfare

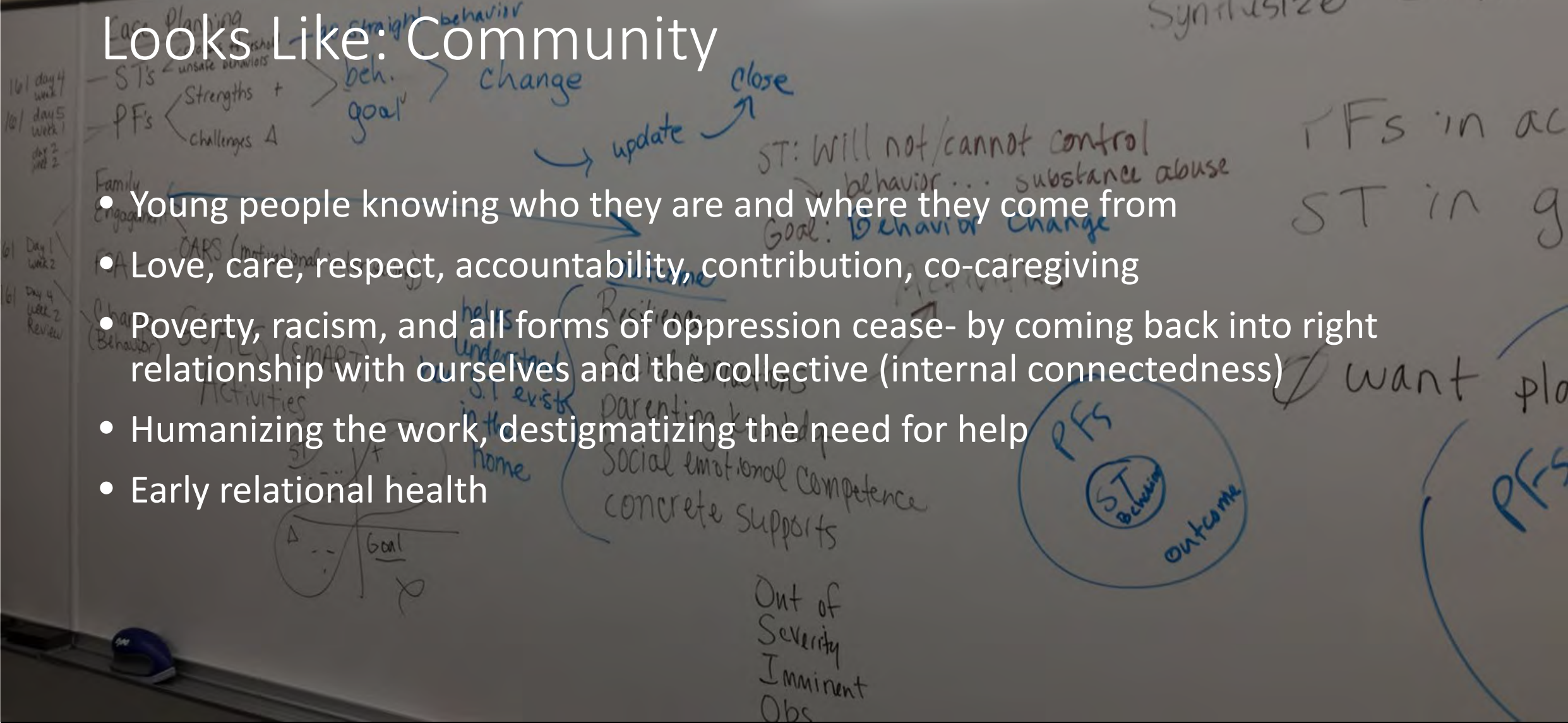
- Share your ideas with one another on the direct practice change, agency practice change and government practice change on at least one area of connectedness

Report out 1-2 things that your group feels is a really good recommendation



What A Connectedness Child Welfare System Looks Like: Community

- Young people knowing who they are and where they come from
- Love, care, respect, accountability, contribution, co-caregiving
- Poverty, racism, and all forms of oppression cease- by coming back into right relationship with ourselves and the collective (internal connectedness)
- Humanizing the work, destigmatizing the need for help
- Early relational health



Research Can
Help, We Are
All
Researchers

INDIGENOUS EPIDEMIOLOGY

*(In·di·ge·nous Ep·i·de·mi·ol·o·gy) /IndIʃənəs
epədɛmialəʒi/ n.*

1. applying traditional knowledge for a strengths-based analysis of indigenous data.
2. analyzing data with prayerful intent for the well-being of the people.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

(In·dig·e·nous Re·search) /IndIʃənəs risərʃ/ n.

1. a radical act of resistance against all that has oppressed us.
2. done for the love of the people.
3. recognizes we have always been scientists.



Urban Indian
Health Institute

A Division of the Seattle Indian Health Board

Natmun Piliuqpita? Where do we go from here?

Supporting transformative research projects designed to reimagine education systems for equity.

Scroll to discover more



The deep value of language in preserving our culture

Jessica Sanigaq Ullrich

We have so many good reasons to put in the effort to ilisatut Inupiaq namik (learn Inupiatun). Indigenous scholars have said our languages are uma (alive), just like this beautiful nuna (land/Earth) that we live upon. Angayuaq Oscar Kawagley, a Yup'ik scholar, said, "I have to draw on my language to fully experience the mountains, the moon, the sun, the river, the spruce tree, the taste of Hudson's Bay tea, the wolf, the eagle and the paramectum — it is a living language!" When we speak our language we exchange breath, sound, energy, thoughts, feelings, meaning and life with the living world around us. Indigenous languages have a spiritual, ecological and relational component that we don't want to miss out on.

Elders like Naungaq Richard Atuk, who leads the language group I attend every Saturday, showed us how our language is expressive. Expressions convey a deeper meaning to what is said

by how it is said. Mr. Atuk shared how he never heard our language spoken out loud in anger. Traditionally, we did not have profanity, because that wasn't our way of life. We did not say goodbye in our language. Instead, when our siulavut (first ones, ancestors) left someone's inni (house), they would say piiragumausi, which means: May you all go forward in life, do the best you can, be good, be well, and I leave you with good thoughts about your future. This deeper meaning in one expression conveys our Inupiaq values and relational understanding of the world.

The good energy exchanged through our language is like relational medicine. Learning our language can help us heal from colonial and intergenerational trauma. Many of our Elders, like Mr. John Tetpon from Shaktoolik, were harmed or punished for speaking Inupiatun in the school setting. Because of these experiences, it has been challenging for our Elders to teach us what they

can remember. One of our Elders, Egeelana Sophie Nothstine, has courageously spoken about her childhood experiences and still attends our language group and teaches us what she can. It's wonderful to see Egeelana's strength and hear Egeelana's encouragement as we attempt to retain what was taken by missionaries and schoolteachers who followed and implemented harmful educational policies. Our language group has learned how to hold space and process the grief we all have due to language loss so we can still engage in learning. Language learning involves so much more than learning a language — we are also learning our history, way of life, values, and how to be in right relationship again. We are learning who we are and where we come from.

It's difficult to see our fluent speakers pass away before we could learn from them. Time is of the essence right now. For five years, I have worked alongside other dedicated language

learners to learn and preserve our language. But we must have intergenerational commitment to continue these efforts. We need to engage in language reclamation with our Elders, Elders in training, relatives, community members, young people, and allies. Every new expression that we learn adds a beautiful piece of our language back to our collective spirit. Everyone has a role to play on this learning journey. We can all commit to language learning, and funders can sponsor language preservation efforts. Our living language allows our soul to learn, experience recognition and can help us co-create a flourishing future. As Tataluq Josie Bourdon taught us in language group yesterday, Ilipisi nanilaga Inupiatuqutunasiagutunauusi — all of you, no matter where you are living, keep speaking Inupiaq, keep persevering, keep learning, keep going.

To close, I'd like to share this poem that my 15-year-old panik (daughter) Uiganna wrote:

"My knees sink to the beat of the drum. I'm holding the weight of my culture on my back — the sung words are the only thing that give me the strength to keep bouncing my knees. If I stop then I'll die by the side of what my grandmother was forced to abandon — something she was so ashamed of, that she needed to hide. I dance because I might be a part of the last generation — the remaining words of my language are being lost in Western translation. I dance because the drums are the beating heart keeping my culture alive. Everything that once was thriving is now on life support and we're signing the papers, ready to pull the plug — ready to stop the only thing remaining that has helped us survive. Palyumagutunga — I carry hope."

Jessica Sanigaq Ullrich is a tribal citizen of Nome Eskimo Community, an assistant professor at Washington State University and a 2022 Aspen Institute Aconid Fellow.



Traditional Medicines
Cultural remedies to fight coronavirus (COVID-19)

Chaga
For heart diseases, diabetes, stomach and intestine cancer, liver disease, parasites, stomach pain and tuberculosis

Spruce cones (tea)
Relieves coughing, and sore throats and chests

Balsam
Helps increase blood flow, clears phlegm and aids coughing

Chuntsa
Remedy for colds, infections, flu, etc.

Devils club
Takes phlegm from body system

Labrador tea
Stop bleeding, to treat breathing problems, to strengthen, and for almost any general ache or pain

Juniper (oil)
Helps disinfect the area for airborne bacteria

Rat Root
Clears nasal and respiratory passages



Being Ourselves as Real Human Beings

To make a revolution, people must not only struggle against existing institutions. They must make a philosophical/spiritual leap and become more human human beings. In order to change/transform the world, they must change/transform themselves.

- Grace Lee Boggs



the.holistic.psychologist



To Love And Be Loved: love is the truth of who we are. We need to love others, ourselves, and we need to be loved. This is our natural state of mutual giving, sharing, and accepting.

@the.holistic.psychologist



melanin mvskoke
@MelaninMvskoke


Remember
by Joy Harjo (1983)

Remember the sky that you were born
under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that
is the
strongest point of time.



melanin mvskoke
@MelaninMvskoke

Remember sundown
and the giving away to night. Remember
your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are
evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life,
also.



Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white
earth

brown earth, we are earth.

Remember the plants, trees, animal life
who all have their

tribes, their families, their histories, too.

Talk to them,

listen to them. They are alive poems.

Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the origin of this universe.

Remember you are all people and all people are you.

Remember you are this universe and this universe is you.



melanin mvskoke
@MelaninMvskoke



Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.

Remember language comes from this.

Remember the dance language is, that life is.

Remember.

