



# Northern Public Affairs

Volume 6

Special Issue #1 2018

*Coming into wisdom*  
**LEANNE BETASAMOSAKE  
SIMPSON**

*Re-grounding Tłı̨ch̓  
knowledge on the land*  
**JOHN B. ŻOE**

*Indigenous Guardianship*  
**STEPHEN KAKFWI,  
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& GLORIA ENŻOE**

*Sacred people, sacred communities*  
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*Evaluating land-based programs*  
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IOANA RADU,  
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& STEPHEN RITCHIE**

*Empowering youth through  
land-based education*  
**LOIS PHILIPP**

*Promoting wellness through  
Indigenous culture*  
**CAROL HOPKINS**

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## *The Pan-Territorial* **ON-THE-LAND SUMMIT**

*Northwest Territories Minister of Health and Social Services  
GLEN ABERNETHY on land-based health  
and wellness programming*

*Photo essay by PAT KANE*

What if we treated our communities  
like they were a sacred place? What  
if we said we are sacred beings?

— *Phillip Gatensby*

# *Northern Public Affairs*

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July 2018

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Front image by Pat Kane: The image shows the landmark cross and tipi in the Yellowknives Dene community of Dettah cloaked by a snowstorm during the Pan-Territorial On-the-Land Summit, held at the community's Chief Drygeese building in March 2017. The two symbols mark an intersection in time, where the disruptions of colonization are now a piece of the shared history of the North that stretches back thousands of years before the arrival of the Church.

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# *FEATURES*

## Special Issue of Northern Public Affairs Magazine: The Pan-Territorial On-the-Land Summit

*Grounding culture, guardianship, education, and healing on the land*

*Meagan Wohlberg & Kyla Kakfwi Scott*

**T**he land is a source of life for all Northern people. It provides the basis for physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness – the four components of a healthy individual and, by extension, healthy communities.

Colonization, residential schools, and interference with people's ability to make decisions about their own lives have disconnected many Northern and Indigenous Peoples from the land. This disconnection has in turn led to breakdowns in connection to language, culture, and identity.

Leaders from the community to the national level are now recognizing the importance of the land in the areas of health and wellness, justice, arts and culture, and employment, and are increasingly placing programming directly onto the landscape in traditional settings.

Just over one year ago, a Pan-Territorial On-the-Land Summit was held in Dettah, Northwest Territories from March 14 to 16, 2017. Funded by Health Canada and hosted by the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Summit gave participants from across the North the opportunity to explore the themes of healing, culture, guardianship, collaboration, and evaluation as they relate to land-based programming. Throughout the Summit, participants were able to learn from and build networks with other programming experts to foster new ideas for improving wellness in their own communities and regions.

Hosted on Chief Drygeese Territory, the traditional territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, the Summit was planned with community input and included on-the-land activities such as checking nets and traps, dog sledding, and skiing. A steering committee with members from Nunavut, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories provided guidance in developing the agenda and participant list. All three territories were represented throughout the three-day program as presenters and cultural performers, alongside visiting experts from southern Canada and Alaska.

At the Summit, culture and language were named as essential aspects of land-based healing and stewardship. Phillip Gatensby spoke to the importance of revitalizing a “connection language” – one that understands and recognizes the sacred, inherent relationships of Indigenous Peoples to the land, and allows healing to happen naturally.

John B. Zoe emphasized the role of land as a teacher and the site of language, history, and culture. Traditional place names hold the critical information needed for survival on the land, and keep people connected to the trails of their ancestors so they can be “strong like two people”; that is, as deeply rooted in tradition as they are within the modern world.

Ensuring youth have opportunities to be on the land while in school was also raised as crucial to building resilience among younger generations. Both Lois Philipp and Lawrence Enosse spoke to the value of land-based education and adventure programming as beneficial for strengthening identity, family, and community.

While many Northern and Indigenous communities continue to be affected by disproportionate impacts on their wellbeing, Carol Hopkins of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation reminded us that it is key to focus on wellness not by looking at it from a deficit perspective, but by deciphering, through culturally appropriate means of assessment, what wellness actually looks like for Indigenous Peoples. We should focus on how individuals and communities derive their sense of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose.

Leaders in Indigenous Guardianship, Stephen Kakfwi, Valérie Courtois, and Gloria Enzoe, shared the ways in which Indigenous-led land stewardship programs are creating sustainable employment for Northern communities and protecting the lands for generations to come while improving quality of life for Northern and Indigenous communities on their own terms.

And stories shared by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson illustrated the necessity that a connection to land has for Indigenous nationhood, wellbeing, and all of life itself. The simple question – what if Kwezens, the little girl who discovered maple syrup, had not been able to access the land at all? – brings that critical juncture into focus as something that must be maintained into the future.

Much more was shared in the outdoor break-away sessions and panel showcases from each region across the North, some of which is captured in the photo essay from the Summit. The event

was webcast and videos of the presentations can be viewed online, along with the full event agenda.

The wisdom of our communities is backed by research confirming that a relationship with the land carries positive benefits for physical, mental, and communal wellbeing. The Summit was an important first step in providing leaders in on-the-land healing, collaboration, guardianship, education, and evaluation the opportunity to learn from one another, and to showcase and celebrate the innovation and successes of land-based programs across the North. ●



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Dene drummers open the Summit in Dettah with a prayer song during the feeding the fire ceremony.*





*Minister Glen Abernethy's Opening Address at the Pan-Territorial On-the-Land Summit Gala Dinner, March 15, 2017*

**Hon. Glen Abernethy, Minister of Health and Social Services for the Government of the Northwest Territories:**

Good evening.

It is a pleasure to welcome you here tonight.

This week, experts working in land-based programming from Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories have gathered in Dettah to build connections, learn from each other, and explore the themes of Healing, Culture, Guardianship, Evaluation, and Collaboration.

I hope that your gathering is going well, and that you are finding this opportunity to be together valuable and informative.

Tonight is an opportunity to celebrate the important work that you are doing. We have some special guests in the room who I'd like to acknowledge: Michael McLeod, Member of Parliament for Northwest Territories; my colleague from the Legislative Assembly Caroline Cochrane, minister responsible for many things, including Status of Women, and MLA for Range Lake.

I also want to recognize the team from Health Canada that is in the room, led by Associate Deputy Minister Christine Donoghue. Health Canada's support for this Summit made it possible for us to bring everyone together, so thank you for that.

I've been the Minister of Health and Social Services for just about three and a half years now. In that time, I've had the opportunity to travel to every region of the NWT, and to almost every community.

I've spent lots of time talking to people about their priorities for health and wellness — what makes sense for their communities, what feels

culturally appropriate, and what really makes a difference in their lives.

Everywhere I go, people tell me that they need more opportunities to get on the land. That the land is a teacher, and a healer.

I was born and raised in the North. I've technically spent my whole life in the NWT, but that's only because my birth certificate says I was born in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories.

So, I have actually seen a lot of the land, living in what is now Nunavut as a kid and then growing up in Yellowknife. And in this job, of course, I've had opportunities to travel in all three territories. I don't like to travel south too much but I take every opportunity to visit Northern communities.

Lots has changed over the years. Not just the border, or the names of the communities.

Not too long ago, it would have been unheard of for governments to be investing in land-based programming for health and wellness. In some respects, the North is leading the way on this front.

I have great respect for healthcare professionals. My wife and my mother are both nurses, and they've worked as community healthcare providers. Our healthcare system is essential to the wellbeing of our communities, and we need to continue to invest in it to provide the care and services that people deserve.

But true health and wellness extends far beyond the medical system. It begins with healthy people and communities, and for Northern people that begins with the land.

This is the wisdom of our communities. We hear it in every community meeting. Youth and Elders and elected leaders all tell us that connecting with culture on the land provides transformational experiences, and that government needs to prioritize finding ways to support that.

Evaluating land-based programs in a way that allows us to capture the true impacts is a challenge we are all facing, but we all have stories or personal experiences that tell us the land is transformational, the land is healing, and the land is our greatest teacher and resource.

We know this to be true. Our people have said it, and Elders have explained it. Now research and science are helping us to describe it, and prove it.

We are still learning how to do this. It's not a simple thing, and there is no one-size-fits-all

solution for all of the unique programs that you are offering. But, working together, I think the experts in this room will be able to move towards some really creative, innovative approaches.

Tomorrow that hard work continues. Tonight is a chance to celebrate the land in a different way, by hearing reflections from a storyteller who has been all over this country hearing stories from the land, and by showcasing some cultural performers

from the three territories.

I hope that you'll find the evening inspiring, and that it will bring renewed energy for the final day of the Summit.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for the important work that you are doing, and for sharing that work with us.

Have a great night. ●



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*NWT Health and Social Services Minister Glen Abernethy addresses attendees from across the North at the Pan-Territorial On-the-Land Summit Gala Dinner in Yellowknife on March 15, 2017.*

*ON THE LAND*

## Coming into Wisdom: Community, Family, Land, & Love

*Leanne Betasamosake Simpson*

I'm Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, or Ojibway, from Alderville First Nation. My territory is the north shore of Lake Ontario in Ontario, and I began today with one of our political practices that we carry when we're visiting another's territory. We start by telling our clan where we live, where we are from, our home, and then finally our name. The next words out of our mouths are an acknowledgement of the territory of the people we are visiting and they have deep meaning. They are a commitment to the Dene that I will not cause harm while I am here, that I will conduct myself in a way that is consistent with your laws and practices, that I will not ruin your lands or your waters or hurt your families, and that I am committed to maintaining reciprocal, peaceful relations with your community and your nation. For me these words are about an affirmation of your governance and your nationhood, and a commitment and a responsibility to reciprocity and peace.

Today I would like to share a few stories from my homeland about why the land is important to me and why I do the work that I do.

The first story is a Mississauga Nishnaabeg story that on one hand is about the origin of maple sugar, maple syrup, and on the other hand it's about something else altogether. And this story is really important to me at this particular time of year because this is the time we're in the sugar bush. We tapped our maple trees the earliest we've ever tapped them at the end of February. Yesterday it was minus 16 when I left. The weather is fluctuating up and down; we hardly have any sap this year because of global warming. I learned the story about 15 years ago from my Elder Doug Williams – I've been working with him for almost two decades now – who's from Curve Lake First Nation, and my version of the story is called "Kwezens makes a lovely discovery". Like everything, I thought making maple syrup was really hard work until I spent some time with the Dene and they showed me how to make birch syrup. And that's a lot of work.

*Kwezens is out walking in the bush one day.*

*It is Zügwan.*

*The lake is opening up.*

*The goon was finally melting*

*She's feeling that first warmth of spring on her cheeks.*

*"Ngitchi nendam," she is thinking, "I'm happy."*

*Then that Kwezens who is out walking*

*collecting firewood for her Doodoom*

*decides to sit under Ninaatigoog,*

*maybe just stretch out,*

*maybe just have a little rest,*

*maybe gather firewood a little later.*

*"Owah, Ngitchi nendam nongom.*

*I'm feeling happy today," says that Kwezens.*

*And while that Kwezens*

*is lying down, and looking up*

*she sees Ajidamoo up in the tree*

*"Bozhoo Ajidamoo! I hope you had a good winter,*

*I hope you had enough food cached."*

*But Ajidamoo doesn't look up because she's already busy.*

*She's not collecting nuts.*

*Gawiin.*

*She's not building her nest.*

*Gawiin, not yet.*

*She's not looking after any young.*

*Gawiin, too early.*

*She's just nibbling on the bark, and then doing some sucking.*

*Nibble, nibble suck.*

*Nibble, nibble suck.*

*Nibble, nibble, suck.*

*Nibble, nibble, suck.*

*Kwezens is feeling a little curious.*

*So she does it too, on one of the low branches.*

*Nibble, nibble suck.*

*Nibble, nibble suck.*

*Nibble, nibble, suck.*

*Nibble, nibble, suck.*

*Mmmmmmm.  
This stuff tastes good.  
It's real, sweet water.  
Mmmmmmm.*

*Then Kwezens gets thinking  
and she makes a hole in that tree  
and she makes a little slide for  
that sweet water to run down  
she makes a quick little container  
out of birch bark, and  
she collects that sweet water  
and she takes that sweet water home  
to show her mama.*

*That doodoom is excited and she has three hundred  
questions:  
"Ah Kwezens, what is this?"  
"Where did you find it?"  
"Which tree?"  
"Who taught you how to make it?"  
"Did you put semaa?"  
"Did you say miigwech?"  
"How fast is it dripping?"  
"Does it happen all day?"  
"Does it happen all night?"  
"Where's the fire wood?"*

*Kwezens tells her doodoom the story,  
She believes every word  
because she is her Kwezens  
and they love each other very much.  
"Let's cook the meat in it tonight,  
it will be lovely sweet."  
"Nahow."  
"Nahow."*

*So they cooked that meat in that sweet water.  
It was lovely sweet.  
It was extra lovely sweet.  
It was even sweeter than just that sweet water.  
The next day, Kwezens takes her mama  
to that tree and her mama brings Nokomis  
and Nokomis brings all the Aunties, and  
there is a very big crowd of Michi Saagiig  
Nishnaabekwewag  
and there is a very big lot of pressure.  
Kwezens tells about Ajidamoo.  
Kwezens does the nibble nibble suck part.*

*At first there are technical difficulties  
and none of it works.  
But Mama rubs Kwezens' back  
she tells Kwezens that she believes her anyway.*

*They talk about lots of variables like heat and temperature  
and time  
then Güzis comes out and warms everything up  
and soon it's drip, drip, drip, drip.*

*Those Aunties go crazy  
Saasaakwe!  
dancing around  
hugging a bit too tight  
high kicking  
and high fiving  
until they take it back home  
boil it up  
boil it down  
into sweet, sweet sugar.*

*Ever since, every Züigwan  
those Michi Saagiig Nishnaabekwewag  
collect that sweet water  
and boil it up  
and boil it down  
into that sweet, sweet sugar  
all thanks to Kwezens and her lovely discovery,  
and to Ajidamoo and her precious teaching  
and to Ninaatigoog and their boundless sharing*

Every spring, while tapping a stand of maple trees, I remember that this is one of my favorite stories. It's one of my favorites because nothing violent happens in it. At every turn, Kwezens is met with very basic, core Nishnaabeg values – love, compassion, and understanding. She centers her day around her own freedom and joy. I imagine myself at seven running through a stand of maples with the first warmth of spring marking my cheeks with warmth. I imagine everything good in the world. My heart, my mind and my spirit are open and engaged and I feel as if I could accomplish anything. I imagine myself grasping at feelings I haven't felt before – that maybe life is so good that it is too short; that there really isn't enough time to love everything.

In reality, I have to imagine myself in this situation because, as a child, I don't think I was ever in a similar situation. My experience of education, from kindergarten to graduate school, was one of coping with someone else's agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy, someone who was neither interested in my wellbeing as a kwezens, nor interested in my connection to my homeland, my language or history, nor my Nishnaabeg intelligence. No one ever asked me what I was interested in nor did they ask for my consent to participate in their system. My experience of

education was one of continually being measured against a set of principles that required surrender to an assimilative colonial agenda in order to fulfill those principles. I distinctly remember being in Grade 3, at a class trip to the sugar bush, and the teacher showing us two methods of making maple syrup – the pioneer method, which involved a black pot over an open fire and clean sap, and the “Indian method”, which involved a hollowed out log in an unlit fire, with large rocks in the log to heat the sap up – sap which had bark, insects, dirt and scum over it. The teacher asked us which method we would use – being the only native kid in the class, I was the only one who chose the “Indian method”.

Things are different for Kwezens. She has already spent seven years immersed in a nest of Nishnaabeg intelligence. She already understands the importance of observation and learning from our animal teachers, when she watches the squirrel so carefully and then mimics its actions. She understands embodiment and conceptual thought, when she then takes this observation and

with love and trust. Kwezens watches as her mama uses the sap to boil the deer meat for supper. When she tastes the deer, the sweetness, she learns about reduction, and when her mama and her go to clean the pot, she learns about how sap can be boiled into sugar. Kwezens then takes her Elders to the tree already trusting that she will be believed, that her knowledge and discovery will be cherished, and that she will be heard.

Kwezens learned a tremendous amount over a two-day period – self-led, driven by both her own curiosity and her own personal desire to learn. She learned to trust herself, her family, and her community. She learned the sheer joy of discovery. She learned how to interact with the spirit of the maple. She learned both from the land and with the land. She learned what it felt like to be recognized, seen, and appreciated by her community. She comes to know maple sugar with the support of her family and Elders. She comes to know maple sugar in the context of love.

To me, this is what coming into wisdom within a Nishnaabeg context looks like. It takes



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Leanne Betasamosake Simpson shares stories illustrating the Nishnaabeg concept of Kobade, the links in the web that connect all people in relationships to their ancestors, grandchildren, land, language, and way of life.*

applies it to her own situation – by making a cut in the maple tree and using a cedar shunt. She relies upon her own creativity to invent new technology. She patiently waits for the sap to collect. She takes that sap home and shares it with her family. Her mother, in turn, meets her daughter’s discovery

place in the context of family, community, and relations. The land, aki, in this story, is a teacher, is knowledge, is medicine. Aki holds everything that is meaningful for Indigenous nations, peoples, communities, and families. Stories hold the land, and they connect us to the land. Younger citizens

might first just understand the literal meaning. As they grow, they put together the conceptual meaning; with more experience in our knowledge system, the metaphor. Then they start to apply the processes and practices of the story in their own

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*This is how our old people teach. They are our geniuses because they know that wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we're all better when we're able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves.*

---

lives – when I have a problem, I'll go to my aunts or my grandparents. After they live each stage of life through the story, then they can communicate their lived wisdom, understood through six or seven decades of lived experience and shifting meaning.

This is how our old people teach. They are our geniuses because they know that wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we're all better when we're able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves.

Different versions of the story happen all over my territory every year in March when we return to the sugar bush. Kwezens is threatened by land theft, violence, pollution, global warming, school. But Kwezens is there anyway, making maple sugar as she has always done, in a loving compassionate reality, propelling us – propelling me – to re-create the circumstances within which this story and Nishnaabewin takes place. Kwezens challenges me to do the same and to not just dream alternative realities, but to create them, on the ground in the physical world, in spite of being occupied.

Kwezens brought maple sugar to the Nishnaabeg. The production of maple sugar has sustained our nation for generations. It is a cornerstone of our economy, a medicine. It holds stories and ceremony, and is a part of our system of governance. Kwezens, this little seven-year-old girl, changed her nation.

What if Kwezens had no access to the sugar bush because of land dispossession, environmental contamination, or climate change?

What if she was too depressed or anxiety-ridden from being erased from Canadian society, removed from her language and homeland,

targeted as a “squaw” or a “slut” or a “drunk Indian”?

What if the trauma and pain of ongoing colonial gendered violence had made it impossible for her mama to believe her or for her mama to reach out and so gently rub her lower back at that critical point?

What if that same trauma and pain prevented her aunts and Elders from gathering around and supporting her when there were technical difficulties?

What if colonial parenting strategies positioned a child as less believable than an adult?

What if Kwezens had been in a desk at a school that didn't honour at its core her potential within Nishnaabeg intelligence? Or if she had been in an educational context where having an open heart was a liability instead of a gift?

What if she had not been running around, exploring, experimenting, and observing the squirrel – completely engaged in a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg way of knowing? What if she hadn't been on the land at all?

What if Kwezens lived in a world where no one listened to girls? Or where she had been missing or murdered before she ever made it out to the sugar bush?



During Idle No More, which was a few years ago now, I kept getting asked the question, “What do you people want?” Sometimes it was asking nicely and sometimes not so nicely, and so I

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*I want my great grandchildren to be able to fall in love with every piece of our territory. I want their bodies to carry with them every story, every song, every piece of poetry hidden in our Nishnaabeg language.*

---

thought, “You know what, maybe it's a really good thing to articulate in a very clear way what I want.”

I want my great grandchildren to be able to fall in love with every piece of our territory. I want their bodies to carry with them every story, every song, every piece of poetry hidden in our Nishnaabeg language.

I want them to be able to dance through their

lives with joy. I want them to live without fear because they know respect, because they know in their bones what respect feels like. I want them to live without fear because they have a pristine environment with clean waterways that will provide them with the physical and emotional

networks. It is a long kobade, cycling through time. It is a web of connections to each other, to the plant nations, the animal nations, the rivers and lakes, the cosmos, and our neighbouring Indigenous nations.

Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogamig is an ecology of intimacy.



*Summit participants watch the short film, 'How to Steal a Canoe,' by Amanda Strong featuring spoken lyrics by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and music by Cree cellist Cris Derksen.*

sustenance to uphold their responsibilities to the land, their families, their communities, and their nations. I want them to be valued, heard, and cherished by our communities. I want my great, great grandchildren and their great, great grandchildren to be able to live as Mississauga Nishnaabeg, unharrassed and undeterred in our homeland.

The idea of my arms embracing my grandchildren and their arms embracing their grandchildren is communicated in the Nishnaabeg word, kobade. According to Elder Edna Manitowabi, kobade is a word we use to refer to our great grandparents and our great grandchildren. It means a link in a chain – a link in the chain between generations, between nations, between states of being, between individuals. I am a link in a chain. We are all links in a chain.

Doug Williams, a Mississauga Nishnaabeg Elder, calls our nation Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogamig – the place where we all live and work together. Our nation is a hub of Anishinaabe

It is an ecology of relationships in the absence of coercion, hierarchy, or authoritarian power.

Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogamig is connectivity based on the sanctity of the land, the love we have for our families, our language, our way of life. It is relationships based on deep reciprocity, respect, non-interference, self-determination, and freedom. Our nationhood is based on the idea

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*Our nationhood is based on the idea that the earth is our first mother, that 'natural resources' are not 'natural resources' at all, but gifts from our mother. Our nationhood is based on the foundational concept that we should give up what we can to support the integrity of our homelands for the coming generations. We should give more than we take.*

---



that the earth is our first mother, that “natural resources” are not “natural resources” at all, but gifts from our mother. Our nationhood is based on the foundational concept that we should give up what we can to support the integrity of our homelands for the coming generations. We should give more than we take.

It is nationhood based on a series of radiating responsibilities.

This is what I understand our diplomats were negotiating when settlers first arrived in our territory. This was the impetus for those very first treaties – Anishinaabe freedom, protection for the land and the environment, a space: an intellectual, political, spiritual, artistic, creative, and physical space where we could live as Anishinaabe, and where our kobade could do the same.

This is what my ancestors wanted for me, for us. They wanted for our generation to practice Anishinaabe governance over our homeland, to partner with other governments over shared lands, to have the ability to make decisions about how the gifts of our mother would be used for the benefit of our people and in a manner to promote her sanctity for coming generations. I believe my ancestors expected the settler state to recognize my nation, our lands, and the political and cultural norms in our territory.

My nationhood doesn't just radiate outwards, it also radiates inwards. It is my physical body, my mind, and my spirit. It is our families – not the nuclear family that has been normalized in settler society, but big, beautiful, diverse, extended multi-racial families of relatives and friends that care very deeply for each other.

This is the intense love of land, of family and of community that has always been the spine of Indigenous resistance. The fact that we're here today is a miracle because it means our families, like every Indigenous family, did whatever they could do to ensure that I survived the last 400 years of violence. In order for my kobade to survive and flourish the next 400 years, we need to join together in a rebellion of love, persistence, commitment, profound caring, and friendship. ●

*\*Editor's note: This piece has been edited for length and clarity.*

*Excerpts from As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Copyright 2017 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota. Used by permission of the University of Minnesota Press.*

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## Following the Trails of Our Ancestors: Re-Grounding Tłı̄chǫ Knowledge on the Land

*John B. Zoe*

Thank you very much, it's a pleasure to be here. It goes to show that there is a lot of interest in on-the-land activity. And I remember a long time ago, an Elder told me that if you've got nothing to talk about, at least talk about your experience. Those experiences are based on my activity through work and initiatives, and one of them is remembering my early childhood.

I remember people going out to the barrenlands by boat before they started using airplanes back in the seventies. You'd see people get in a boat and disappear out onto the lake, not to be heard from for more than a couple of weeks, and when they came back there was a lot of celebration. At that time, it was kind of initiated by the community, but before that people just lived on the landscape.

Our first real organized canoe trip happened in 1988 when we were meeting with Elders, talking about going on the land and maybe even having a gathering out somewhere in the bush. They said, "We're living in times of conflict and we need something to have peace within ourselves and among each other so that we're speaking the same language and we have the same goals. And one of the best ways to do that is to go back onto the land." So they determined that we should go back to Mesa Lake. It's a peacemaking place from the 1800s. I had heard the stories before, but to see it for the first time was kind of a dream for me at the time.

The funny thing is, the further back you go, the less you see material things, because all they did was take their tents and their rifles. The rest they just harvested from the land while they were there, and it's very difficult to do that now.

When the time came to talk about how we were going to go there, the message from the old people was simple: We'll fly; you guys go by boat. And so that's how we ended up with our first big on-the-land program in 1988 and we had over 500 people there.

We tried to do a second one the year after in 1989. We joined forces with our regional body that manages education. They were looking for a mission statement for the schools, so we had an

Elders' conference made up of strictly Elders and we said, "No translation, we're just going to talk in our language and we'll transcribe it later." So they talked for a good three days and that's where work on the document, *Strong Like Two People*<sup>1</sup>, began. During those three days, they reviewed the history to where we are today and the challenges of the day: that we need to ensure our language, culture, way of life is passed on, but at the same time respect the future generations that are getting involved in modern day things. Really, this is not about giving up who we are but strengthening what we have, so that we should be strong like we were before but take the modern tools so we can benefit from programs and things that can be developed through there.

So 1989 became about bringing the same people back into the bush in a different location. We went there by boat again but this one was on a different trail, and when we got there they again talked for three days about how we can integrate education and culture. So we produced another big booklet just from translation. Then in 1990, the Elders got together and produced from those proceedings the *Strong Like Two People* document.

It was around that time in the early 1990s that it was very difficult to find people to go out in the bush with – very, very difficult to find and motivate people to do anything. I'm not saying that people weren't going in the bush – they were – but more on an individual or family basis. For a big group, it wasn't happening.

Then I saw that the Prince of Wales (Northern Heritage Centre) was going to do an archaeological survey for the first time. So I kind of lobbied my way into it and we ended up working with an Elder named Harry Simpson doing a survey for three summers. At the end of the third summer, we went to the place where he spent his childhood, where his parents are buried, and where they used to live. The places where they lived were still intact as if he left it yesterday.

And he was saying, "What happened to all these people? We're here, we're doing documentation of

people who remember who was there, and I have to remember it so it can be put in a document. But where's our people? They're not here anymore. They're in our communities. The land seems to be empty." And that emptiness is something that goes back to the beginning of our own time, when the land was being threatened and devoid of people because there was conflict between animals and people.

In that way, the story of Yamozha<sup>2</sup> started to emerge. Even though I'd heard about it before,

of archaeological material where people in ancient times were breaking off stones and looking for the right ones to make tools from. It's just a big gravel pile that must have been going on for thousands of years. We can see where people knelt next to a crack in a rock to take one of these stones and drop it in there. There's supposed to be water on top of this hill so that if the rock falls into the water and it hits the side, it means that the earth is comfortable with you. And if you don't hear it, it doesn't mean that you give up right then and there; it's just a signal to



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Discussing the Tlicho Nation's 'Trails of our Ancestors' on-the-land programs, John B. Zoe reminds Summit attendees that the land is the original teacher, the site of language, history, and the keys to survival.*

going to the actual sites was doing things in ritual. One place is where Yamozha and one of his brothers were discovered by an old man, who started to raise them; at camp, people were moving on but he decided to stay where he was to raise those two boys. When time went by and they had gotten a little bit older, they'd like to play tricks on the old man, so when he was sleeping they carved a hole on top of his head and threw in some hot rocks. The old man had a seizure, and if you look at one of your booklets you'll find that rock is called Kweedoò.<sup>3</sup>

On one of our travels, we came up to this site and we climbed it. We could see the top of the old man's head, and a big crack in it, and then a big pile

say that maybe you should make adjustment to your life, because everything pre-contact was about being in spirit with the land, the environment, the animals.

The conflict between animals and people was taken care of by Yamozha in the story about his travels. Those sites he visited, there are very many along where he traveled, all the way to the North Arm and continuing on to the East Arm, for somebody else to pick it up. I get to hear all these stories, but at the same time I am kind of involved to some degree on the political side – not upfront but in the background – so I get to hear a lot of things, too, about the early days when the land and environment were being taken without consultation.

When our people rose to work together, somehow they had to pick a logo. And if you remember the old days of the Dene Nation they had a kind of bird – some people would say it's a raven and others would say maybe an eagle, but regardless it goes back to the beginning of time. They chose a bird that can speak many languages, because when the old people got together back in the early seventies they knew that speaking in one voice in a language that they can all understand among each other was important. So I think that carried for a long time until the organization became organized. When you get organized you have to transform – now you have an office, you have a constitution, you have a bank account. Now you can start measuring the linear time of the organization and choosing a leadership and all that kind of stuff.

They came up with the second logo. And the second logo that came up in the mid-seventies was the logo of Yamozha. Yamozha, for the regions – especially speaking for our region – is a time before contact, of how the world was at the time. People were in spirit with the environment, with the animals and everything within it, and our big law at the time, the law of Yamozha, was to co-exist with your surroundings, in a landscape that you're familiar with. The land shelters, holds, gives indicators of what it has. And it has very many fishing holes – lots of them. The early place names that follow the story of Yamozha chart out his travels and the places that he's been, and what happened pre-contact.

After Yamozha resolved the conflict between people and the animals, people started to put place names on the ground to mark out where the fishing holes are, where the caribou crossings are, where the caribou fencing is, all the quarry sites, where the moose live. Even getting a little more technical — in our area we have five substances of soil and we have maybe about seven trees at least. So, if you match the substance of soil with the tree and put in a place name, that kind of makes a determination of the type of fish in that area.

The early place names from pre-contact were not associated with the names of people themselves, because it was more important to know where the animals were. At that time, people's experiences were documented on the land so that the land starts to tell the story for us to pass on through the generations whenever we travel on it. The land provides all this activity. And the people get to know the land because the land speaks to them about what it has and how those things can be used. So, the language derives from the landscape, and the more connected we are to the landscape, the stronger the language is.

After contact, early explorers were shown the country. They were shown our resources, how we live, how we can survive, and the stories that we have. But really what they were doing was taking an inventory of what we have, the richness of the land and the map towards future exploration. So the first impact was that there were now other people that we had to share resources with. That was first contact. And when trade came in we continued to harvest, maybe even a little extra so that they could be given to trade.

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Eventually came contact with governments. They needed an agreement, because it was a requirement of them from the 1763 [Royal] Proclamation that they had to secure the rights from the Aboriginal people in order to make it public. The early written treaties were about, okay, now we have the land, we have the ability to give the interest to developers. So those developers – mining companies and anybody else – are part of the treaty partnership. And it's more recently through IBAs [impact benefit agreements] that we have to say, well, you were given the rights through the treaties – the written version. But our understanding of what we have is that the landscape is going to be altered forever. The richness from the land will be extracted. And whatever is left over from it, the waste, is what we would end up with. So it's very important to know that those things were given through the treaty, and so IBAs, impact benefit agreements, have to be done. Those monies belong to you and it comes from the exploration of those lands. It's very important to not sink it into more contemporary training but to use those monies to sprinkle people back onto the landscape. What else are you going to use it for? To set up another office program? No. It came from the exploration, so let's sprinkle people back onto the land.

What happened, interestingly enough, is that those early contacts with the newcomers were also documented onto the landscape. So we know where the early explorers came, where they travelled, and the hardships that they had, and the relationship – or not having a relationship – with you is also part of that narrative. Somehow, we've been following that story to where we are today. It doesn't take away from the original documentation – what the

landscape is about. We are part of that original landscape. It's never going to move. So, when you start talking about Aboriginal rights – treaty rights come later – it means that you use this land in a way that it renews itself; your relationship with it, your leadership with it, your way of life, it still continues to be there today.

When we talk about land claims and self-government, we know that we can't do anything to alter the landscape, because it's not possible; the stories that belong with it are still there, but we need to bring them forth. So when we talk about self-government, people have many minds about it. But we know that there is a system of leadership that's attached to pre-contact times. In our communities we know they exist; they're just not part of the local structure, but they exist.

Through the Indian Act after the treaties, a system was set up – a chief and band council – so that Canada could perform exchanges with people who were not recognizable as an entity in Canada. To transfer public monies, you have to give it to some accountable entity, so how do you give entity to people of treaty status? Very difficult. So one of the ways of them dealing with their management of people was to create the [Indian] Act so that decisions can go back and forth, and their communication pipeline is the Band Council Resolution. You pass a resolution and sign it and send it to Indian Affairs and then they'll bring back a cheque for core funding and then you have to go back and forth and do reports. That system has been with us at least since 1870. It's like living in a bubble, because remember that Aboriginal people didn't get to vote until the 1960s. And you're not registered anywhere. So the only way that some form of relief could happen was through that process.

But it didn't change where people were at. They still lived off the land, they still practiced their ways of living, and today's term "governance" is really about what kind of structure would work that takes into consideration the old system and some blended new ones. Because we're dealing with accountability and selection of leadership and transparency, so some structure has to be brought in. But it's not the structure that owns the land; it's the people. The structure is just to provide accountability to them. Some authority rests with those elected bodies, but it's limited to the point where they can't affect your way of life, so it's just a management of modern day resources but anchored into protecting what was there before.

So when we're going forward, we see that the influence from the outside sources is very, very strong.

We didn't forget who we were. But we have ridden the wave of what was made available and what is recognized by the authorities of Canada to the point where we kind of know where we're from, but we're kind of just a step away from where we were before. And the further you step away from the land, the further you get away from the original teacher of the language; that is, the land. It first spoke to us to say, here's where the fish are, here's where the moose lives, here's where the caribou cross, and this is where good berries are – all that kind of information was provided to us. It communicated with us. And in that communication, we need to bring people back onto the landscape so that we reconnect with that environment of teaching.

That's what we're really talking about, is grounding – somehow finding a way of grounding – ourselves back onto the land so that we are connected to the natural environment for teaching the languages and sharing our experiences as to what the land holds — all the stories from the beginning of our own time and all the impacted place names since the early explorers came in. Ironically, most of those impacted place names are negative. It's just to show that there were events that happened in these areas that allowed for some destruction to the landscape. And we have very many of those. There are levels of place names, so if you go on the landscape and travel the trails and you hear of a place name following the traditional methods, you know how old that place is and which category it comes from.

One of the early things that I was involved in back in the early eighties was I got an opportunity to work with Elders. I was working as a stationary engineer at the Chief Jimmy Bruneau School and you get to see a lot of officials go through the building, mostly from Yellowknife – superintendents of education and managers that come in. So when you're going from station to station to check on your equipment, I was on one of those rounds, and in the early days before the reconstruction of the school they had little seminar rooms with little small elementary seats. And I couldn't ignore but see one of those officials meeting with some Elders in a little seminar room sitting on these little chairs. The official kind of motioned for me to come over. So I came over and what he wanted to do was he wanted me to interpret some of these policy changes and the impacts that they were going to have. I didn't hear anything about language, I didn't hear anything about the way of life, and so these old guys had to kind of try to figure out what the benefit was of doing some of that policy around teaching the young people.

I guess they kind of liked the way that I interpreted, so they got me to start hanging around with them and that started the relationship towards getting more involved towards a land claim back in the eighties. After the demise of the Dene-Métis agreement, we went regional and we had to get a chief negotiator. So they asked me to be the chief

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*Any time you build a campfire it draws people to it and then people exchange information. So the more campfires you have, the more you know.*

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negotiator and I said, “I don’t know anything about land; you might be better off getting some administrator to do it, I don’t think I can do it.”

One of the things that roomful of Elders said was, “We’re not asking for your opinion, we’re saying we want you – take it. Because there’s over fifty of us here, if we add up all our years it adds up to over a thousand years of knowledge and it’s those things that we want protected. We can teach all that stuff but it means going back onto the land and having many camp fires, because any time you build a campfire it draws people to it and then people exchange information. So the more campfires you have, the more you know.”

So what we have is a system of governance that was transported into the area. And most of our disputes are always about what are we trying to implement, because some of the things that we’re implementing with modern governments is to weaken people more. Our view is that we should be strengthening ourselves, but do it in a way that we “reconcile” our issues towards a common understanding for delivery. That’s a term that’s starting to pop up on the national levels, but where does it touch the ground? It touches the ground at the local level.

Decolonization is what we had before – the first recording of pre-contact, before colonization. Since then we’ve been impacted by early explorers, trade, developers. Those kinds of things draw us away from our original source, the strength to fight and, not only fight, but to put it into terms of development to ensure that at least minimal damage is done.

So today when we talk about doing traditional activity, on-the-land activity, it’s super hard – very, very hard. You need to have a community of people – administrators, Elders – all these people to come together to organize. If you want to do anything in modern education and training, that’s the easy part.

It’s very, very easy to be drawn there. But we need to do a blend. And one of the original teachers of on-the-land activity is the stories that were there before, the dialogue that’s been honed for thousands of years. Human nature is very interesting; without all the modern benefits that we have, it allows you to reconnect in a hard way. The Elders still hold those stories. Our teachers closest to the land are the Elders. We need to look at their stories and map out our travels so that we touch base on everything that means everything to us. We have our traditional teachers, traditional counsellors, and spiritual leaders that we need to rely on a little bit more, because in the old way, they are naturally qualified to teach us things. In a modern context, it really means finding a way of moving through the architectural policies that exist to try to keep you away from the funds. We also need experts to deal with those kinds of things.

So in the end it’s about, how do we reconnect to on-the-land programming? The longer we’re a step away from it, the more drawn in we are to the modern context. To me, on-the-land programming is to put your feet back onto the original landscape through travel and to hear the original stories of how people survived, the stories that come from it, and the place names tell you stories along the way. In the end, the land speaks for itself and all we do is talk about our experiences.

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*To me, on-the-land programming is to put your feet back onto the original landscape through travel and to hear the original stories of how people survived.*

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Our experience is about coming to grips that we have the responsibility of ensuring that there is a continuation of the original story in a modern context, that that story has to be told, and those stories can only happen by reconnecting with the traditional teachers, counsellors, spiritual leaders as a basis for how we can manage the modern context of making sure those things happen. It means that we have to meet halfway somewhere. And I think a get-together like this is the beginning of those things.

These are just a sample of our own experiences, but we’ve been doing Trails of our Ancestors since 1995. Earlier I was saying I was travelling with Harry Simpson and in the last year we were in a tent, we were sharing a tent, and he says, “Look, we’ve been doing it for three summers and all this

stuff is going to end up in a museum and nobody's ever going to see it; it's not going to see the light of day. Where's our people anyways? We need to get them out back on the landscape; we should start something." So we say that in the booklet. If you go to the first page there's a picture of Harry as one of the founding members of Trails of our Ancestors. The idea was, let's get youth back onto the landscape so that they get to experience what we have. We need to tell them these stories because the old people, they inherited all this knowledge but they have nobody to pass it on to. And so they're full of it. And sometimes when Elders speak they say, "Well, I can't hang on to the stuff any more because it hurts to keep it in," so they let it out to anybody. It might not be reaching the right ears, but we need to create a forum for that.

So we've been doing the Trails of our Ancestors on an annual basis a little over 10 years, and the first group that we sent out was about 30. Since then it's been averaging between 30 and 150 people on a yearly basis. By a rough calculation, over 20 years a little over a thousand individuals have had the experience. Twenty years sounds like a long time but it's really short time if you add all the times that we were there out on the landscape with as much youth as possible. If we add up all the days, it adds up to less than a year.

The challenge is that the same youth are going to spend at least 12 years in the North in education. So we need to anchor them to the original strength,

which is the landscape. It's not easy today. It's hard, but if we have the same type of commitment that was there before I'm sure we'll get there.

The idea is to put our feet back to where they were before. All these things that have happened in more modern times is something that has to be dealt with, but it shouldn't be what drives us. We need to put those things aside over time as individuals and as a collective to say that that's not what drives us today. We're going to get back on the original vehicle and ride that, and strengthen ourselves in a modern context as to how these things flow to make those things work. ●

*Editor's note: This piece has been edited for length and clarity*

*John B. Zoe is a member of the Tłı̨chǫ First Nation who was born, raised, and continues to reside in Behchokòk in the Northwest Territories. He spoke about the Tłı̨chǫ First Nation Trails of our Ancestors Initiative.*

*Notes:*

- 1 *Strong Like Two People: The development of a mission statement for the Dogrib schools, Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, Rae-Edzo, N.W.T., 1991.*
- 2 Yamozha is a cultural hero and historic lawmaker of the Dene, known as the transformer for his work defeating enemies and making the world safe. His name means "traveler" or "wanderer." He is known by other names in Denendeh, including Yamoria, Yabatheyaya, Yamohdeyi, Yamba Deja, Zhambadezha, Yampa Deja, Yabatheyaya.
- 3 <https://www.tlicho.ca/sites/default/files/TrailsofOurAncestors.pdf>

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## Indigenous Guardians: Moccasins on the Ground & in the Boardroom

*Stephen Kakfwi, Valérie Courtois, & Gloria Enzo*

### **Stephen Kakfwi**

The Indigenous Leadership Initiative is a group that I am part of, along with members like Ovide Mercredi, the former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations; Miles Richardson, the high-profile leader from Haida Gwaii; Dave Porter, a Yukon Indigenous leader; Bev Sellars, a former chief from the interior of B.C. who has published a couple of books; and Elder Dave Courchene, our spiritual leader.

Together we are trying to position ourselves to provide leadership to the environmental organizations that operate in Canada. And our message to the environmental organizations in Canada is: As Indigenous People, we have been fighting government, industry, oil companies, mining companies for the last 150 years because they come and they tell us what plans they make for our land. And the last thing we need is to have another fight with another group of people that come from the south, from the cities, that say, “Hey we’re environmentalists, we’re conservationists and we have plans for your land.” We’re saying: Work with us and we will provide you the leadership and the vision that is needed so you can become an ally and a partner. It’s kind of like reconciliation in a specific area. We are now working through that the best we can, and that’s what we do. For the last year we’ve been working as a group to promote the idea of a national Guardians program with the federal government, with Ottawa. We’ve been meeting with ministers and federal officials –

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*It will give our Indigenous governments,  
our nations, the ability to have our people,  
not only reconnect with the land  
but to watch over it.*

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well over one hundred meetings in the last year. And Valérie Courtois is our executive director – she’s the one that does all the work under our group and our leadership.

The Guardians program is kind of an on-the-land program with more scope, more permanence. I always say that every government in the world, every nation in the world, has the resources and the capacity to take care and watch over their traditional territory. And that’s what the Guardians are going to do. It will give our Indigenous governments, our nations, the ability to have our people, our Elders, working with youth to not only reconnect with the land but to watch over it using the latest technologies as well as the traditional knowledge of our people. To know this land the way we should and have done for the last thousands of years.

I want to tell you a couple of things because some of you in the room here I’ve known since literally high school, since the seventies, and the sixties for that matter. One is that – and I’ve never quoted him before so I thought I’d do it – a young Dene leader in about 1975 said to the legislature and Commissioner Hodgson and people from the South who were coming up and talking about the last frontier in this beautiful wilderness. He said, “There is no word in our language for wilderness, for everywhere we go it is our home.” And that is my cousin George Barnaby from Fort Good Hope. At that time the people of Good Hope, K’asho Got’ine, were less than about a thousand. The Arctic gas pipeline was being proposed, and I was there, I was 24 years old and I think we truly felt like if this pipeline happens, we are not going to survive. The impact, the lack of being prepared to handle the kind of impact that it was going to have, in our hearts we thought we were not going to survive it. And so when the Berger Inquiry went to Good Hope, we talked about it, and in the end the chief went off on his own and he made the decision to say what he did. And what he said was, “It is for the unborn child that in order to stop the pipeline I am willing to lay down my life.”

Today you hear that, you think, “Whatever made him say that?” Was it theatrics, was he being dramatic? And I know, I was there, and I know the intensity, what was on the line for us. We’ve dealt with pipelines since then. At that time we had no



office, no telephone, we had no staff. We were just totally unprepared to deal with anything that was going to come up the valley. And so we felt, we're not going to survive this. Those of you that are born after 1975, that's what the chief said at that time. And so the land is still there. We need to take back control more and more.

### **Valérie Courtois**

Good morning everyone, it's truly an honour to have been invited to address you this morning. I'm Valérie, I'm from Mashteuiatsh, which is the westernmost Innu community in Quebec, but I now live and work with the Innu in Labrador. I also work with the Indigenous Leadership Initiative.

We've been working for the last two years on promoting this idea of a National Indigenous Guardians Network. Note that it isn't our idea; in fact, it is the idea of all the existing Guardians' programs across Canada. Back in 2014 we gathered everybody together in Squamish, all the programs that existed – and what I mean by “Guardians” is essentially our moccasins and mukluks on the land. They are the people who are there to watch and care for the land, in a formal way through an actual job; to fulfill the visions and goals and aspirations of the nations for whom they work.

Now those programs have existed in Canada for a number of years and I'll go through a couple

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of them. But all of them gathered in Squamish and they said, we need three things to make sure that our programs survive and thrive and we can use this as a model for all nations right across this country. They said, “Look, we often work by ourselves. We need a network; we need something where we can learn from each other and grow in and build off of our collective experiences,” so that's the national process. The second thing they said they needed is funding. All the programs, even those that have existed for a very long time, are all on unstable funding ground, so that's part of what we're hoping to address with



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*From right, Stephen Kakfwi moderates a panel on Indigenous Guardianship, featuring Gloria Enzoe and Valérie Courtois.*

this federal partnership. The third thing that they asked for was training.

So the idea is to create a national program where the Government of Canada and the Indigenous nations come up with a partnership to work together. We believe that this needs to happen on a nation-to-nation basis because, of course, our nationhood rests on our lands and so if we're going to be true partners in this country under reconciliation this has to be a nation-to-nation approach. The idea is that we would build off of the local programs through training and jobs into a system where there are regional networks which feed into the national network. Now with Dechinta<sup>1</sup>, we've built up a training program, a pilot program, that we helped fund that started two summers ago in Caribou Pass at Dechenla, and it is now continuing.

The Haida Gwaii program was started by a very interesting character called Captain Gold in 1973 when he bought a Sears Roebuck canoe that he ordered from a catalogue. He had a vision of returning back to his home village in Skung Gwaii, which is at the very southern tip of the Haida Gwaii Islands. He canoed there from Skidegate by himself and went back into the village and said he immediately felt the ancestors, so he started taking care of that village, bringing it back to life, cleaning it up and honouring the site. That became the basis upon which in the early eighties, the Haida Nation formalized the Guardian program.

The second oldest program is the Innu Guardian Program and, in fact, the word "Guardian" is a translation from an Innu word which is Minashkuat Kanakutuataku, which means to care for and to watch over. And so the Innu Nation's program started in 1992. And interestingly enough, back in 1992 was the collapse of the Atlantic salmon commercial fishery. Some of you may remember that. The nation at the time was approached by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans federally where they said, "You know, we want to have officers and we want to give you some tags and quotas for your harvest of the Atlantic salmon," and the Innu Nation's response was, "No, we can do that on our own. We don't need your officers, we've got our own people who can who can do that; we've got our own laws and our own rules and our own ways of managing our take of Atlantic salmon." That inspired, in part, the creation of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' Fisheries Guardians Program.

A little bit later there was a forestry crisis in Labrador where the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador wanted to harvest up to 400,000

cubic metres on Innu lands, put a pulp mill in Goose Bay, and really continue to develop the area around Goose Bay. Of course, the Innu Nation said, "No, the forestry is going to have too important an impact," and so the Innu Nation imposed its own forestry system. That actually became the basis for what is now law in Newfoundland and Labrador, and that is to have an ecosystem-based approach that is built from the communities up.

Then we had the largest nickel ore find in the world that would later become the Voisey's Bay nickel mine. That mine is still to this day the largest nickel mine in the world. It operates on shared lands between the Innu Nation and the Inuit of Labrador now under the government of Nunatsiavut, and they are the first mine to have permanent monitors on site that do not work for the mine – they work for the nations and they watch what happens at that mine. Now in the Innu Nation's case, that role of those people who were responsible for making sure that the mine happened in a way that the Innu agreed to, was a condition of acceptability of that project. So we think that kind of model can really translate right across this country, and now there are now 30 such programs. I'm really thrilled that Gloria is going to tell us a little bit more about the Ni Hat'ni Dene program here in the NWT.

The potential of these programs is great. I made a map of Indigenous-led protected areas across this country, looking at what are some of the examples where Indigenous Peoples had the ability to hold the pen, where they decided the boundaries of these areas and the measures within them, and if you add up all these areas there's actually more than one million square kilometers of protected

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*Believe it or not, Indigenous Peoples in Canada have protected more lands than anywhere else on the globe. All of these areas and the areas in between have potential to have Guardians associated with managing them.*

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areas that are done by Indigenous People in this country. It is the most of any country on the globe. It's more than Australia, more than the States – more than many other countries. Believe it or not, Indigenous Peoples in Canada have protected more lands than anywhere else on the globe. All of these areas and the areas in between have potential to

have Guardians associated with managing them.

Now in our federal efforts we were also inspired by experiences from our friends in Australia, and in fact some of us have been to Australia to go visit and watch how those programs work. They started an Indigenous Protected Areas program in 1997 that was funded under the federal government. There are more than 75 of them in which 67 million hectares are all conserved by Indigenous Peoples. That's more than half of the total that they have title over in Australia. In 2007 they discovered that while having Indigenous Protected Areas is a great idea, the way that you really have Indigenous Protected Areas fulfill and meet their full potential is by having people in them, and so they created a program called the Working on Country program where they have Rangers troops – both men and women Rangers troops – responsible for managing many of these lands. Now they have almost 900 full-time positions and because a lot of them work on a part-time basis, that actually provides employment for over 2,500 people in Australia.

Both programs run on a set of five-year contracts and, to date, just in the Working on Country program alone, the Australian Government has spent over \$680 million over the 10 years to pay for these programs and it's completely transformed the landscape in Australia. You may know that in Australia they have a feral animal problem. They have animals that have come from other parts of the world that are wreaking havoc on their ecosystems – the largest camel herds in the world are in Australia, the cane toad, the rabbit – so now the Australian Rangers are actually responsible for managing those feral animals and dealing with that problem and the impact on their ecosystems. That program started off in the Environment Department in Australia and is now managed through the Office of the Prime Minister, and so that's a demonstration of how this is really a program that spans not just environmental concerns but truly multiple spheres of concerns.

So what's the impact of the program? In Australia they've done a really good job of measuring the impacts of this program and they've not just measured the direct environmental management or feral animal management, but they measured the social impact of the programs. They've found that this program has markedly reduced the rates of incarceration of Indigenous Peoples – a problem that we also face here in Canada – and the rates of violence against women. Of course, when people are working, they're happier and they're less likely to be violent. It's improved, in the Australian case, the taxation system for the country. And what they

found is that with all of these impacts, that for every dollar that they invest in the program, they get an equivalent of 3.5 dollars back in value.

We've started doing some measurements on programs here in Canada; in fact, we had the same folks who did the evaluation in Australia come to the Northwest Territories and evaluate the Ni Hat'ni Dene program and the program out of the Dehcho. They found even with those very young programs – the Ni Hat'ni program I believe is just over five years old and the Dehcho program I believe is just over two years old – they found already a 2.5 to 1 return on investment, and their feeling is that with the federal program investment, that would jump to a 3.7 to 1 return on investment. Now to put that into perspective, there are currently no programs of funding with Indigenous Peoples that have that kind of return on investment and impact, and so when we met with the federal cabinet ministers, treasury board president and staff, we really found that they were clued into that reality. Another piece of perspective: We just met with Catherine McKenna, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and she stated that they did an evaluation of the Canadian parks system and they get a 3 to 1 value back, so they could even be investing more and getting more of their money back within the park system.

This is why it matters: Our youth, our communities, our Elders, and learning how to manage our lands and be who we are for our own future.

I'm really excited by the presence of all the types of on-the-land healing programs because I think those are really the seeds upon which Guardians programs can be built – and especially the way that some of your programs are being run, which is from a healing lens and one of a cultural revitalization and strengthening, which is exactly the right route for guardians programs which are formalized.

As governments who are coming into self governance and figuring out who we are as nations, we have some responsibilities. Some of those responsibilities cannot be fulfilled in other ways than through guardians programs, so it is really a way for us as nations to grow and fulfill who we are as nations and be a place where we can interact with the other nations in this country, including the Crown governments.

And finally, especially on the wildlife and lands, because I worked with folks right across Quebec and Labrador on the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table (UPCART) to come up with a way for us to decide what is going to happen

with caribou. What we see here in Délı̄ne is that they've gotten their own caribou plan accepted here – congratulations to Délı̄ne. This the first time in the country where a community plan has been accepted by a Crown government in its own strength and in its own power, so way to go Délı̄ne. That is a trend that is happening right across this country, and, in fact, with the UPCART, we are going to be developing our very own program to counter the impacts of development and the decisions of the Crown governments that have really led to what we feel is a collapse of our caribou. Our caribou have gone from over a million caribou to now, in the George River Herd case, less than one thousand caribou since the 1990s. And so this is us taking back the power and making it happen.

For the national program, we costed it out for every nation and we figured that it would be good for the federal government to come in for the core program upon which other things could be leveraged. We estimated that for a five-year program in Canada, that could cost up to \$500 million dollars. Now it sounds like a big number when you think about it. But the process for the Mackenzie Valley consultation cost about \$500 million dollars. And so it's actually not that much money. We estimate that every guardian costs about \$100,000 a year in equipment, salary, training, uniforms, and coordination with the rest of the programs in the community. When I was running the program, we had between 15 and 18 guardians and my budget was about \$1.5-1.6 million for the Environment Office. That's kind of what it costs to run these programs. It sounds like it's a lot but it's really not when you think about it from the value of the money that you get back or the return on investment.

### **Gloria Enzoe**

My name is Gloria Enzoe. I come from Lutsel K'e and am a Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation member. I want to thank the community of Dettah for gathering us here today. I give them much thanks and also give Valérie and the organization thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak to you guys today. I'm a mother of three boys, an avid land-user, and mentor to young adults that are growing in this world.

Right now, I work for the wildlife department within the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. I did run the Ni Hat'ni Dene program, which I founded with community Elders in 2008.

The one thing that my parents instilled in me is the fact that our land is important to us.

The Ni Hat'ni Dene program started as a

pilot project in 2008. The program was created to protect the pristine waters of McLeod Bay due to the increased activity of exploration and mining within our traditional territory of Akaitcho Dene, Lutsel K'e Dene, inspired by the Elders.

I was fortunate enough to be hired on to work with a great team. In 2008 we started up the pilot project, and the things that I remember from the beginning stages are keywords that the Elders passed on to me. They talked about our future and how we're going to live with the land, and how healthy the land is going to make us as people. My key observations at the time were: These Elders have so much knowledge. They knew the water flow, they knew migration routes, trapping areas. They held all this knowledge. While I was sitting with them learning from them, to know that they know where our water comes from, how it flows, where the caribou migrate, where it's good to hunt moose, where to pick berries, all those things – to know that they held so much knowledge – that's when I knew they passed on to me the importance to monitor our waters and lands, and to make sure visitors are respecting our territory.

So in 2008 we started working with others and finding money, developing a program and hiring a team. Ni Hat'ni Dene means "watchers of the land". This is where my work with Valérie and the organization comes from. I not only worked with Elders to develop on-the-land programs but we also developed partnerships with others. I was able to learn from the Haida, to understand what it was for them to protect their lands and the reasons why. Visiting their lands gave me an insight of how important not only my lands are, but how important other lands are to other First Nations, and how we're all trying to do the same thing.

So the Ni Hat'ni Dene program mandate is to maintain the integrity of the cultural sites and natural beauty within Thaidene Nene<sup>2</sup>, to host and provide interpretive tours for visitors in the area, monitor and document visitor activity, cultural futures and environmental and wildlife values, and to transmit cultural and scientific knowledge to younger generations.

Ni Hat'ni Dene runs through the summer. We hire monitors, and the monitors are usually two adults and four youth. [We] usually have two teams of those that go out on a rotational basis throughout the summer. The duties are fish samples, wildlife observations, angler surveys, visitors' surveys, and protecting our old cabin sites, amongst many other things. Learning from their teachers about travel routes and how to harvest and preserve food, the

youth get the skills necessary to live as one with the land and all that is living. Traditional knowledge is important for future generations and our way of life.

The community history of monitoring has developed some excellent internal capacity, and outside “expert” capacity has been relatively stable. There is still room for improvement for training and expansion of the Ni Hat’ni Dene. The community maintains a strong vision for its traditional territory and its role in it.

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*When we send our young adults out we’re actually sending them out to heal.*

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The reason why I bring up these programs is because I’m a community member; I live in a community. My moccasins are on the ground. We send our young people and adults onto their traditional territory and the things that I see, my own observations for my young people and my people at home, is the teachings are skills that people need to heal. So when we send our young adults out we’re actually sending them out to heal. They learn to harvest wood and make fire, to hunt and prepare food, they learn to collect water and clean, they learn to be with oneself and learn to practice spirituality.

Bringing these programs together ensures that young people are going to live a healthy life and that they’re going to go into adulthood [as] healthy people and that our communities [are] going to be healthy because we are raising healthy people. The reasons why I bring this up [is] because this is a pan-territorial health summit and community health is really important. In small communities, people don’t have many resources. Often, the people we care for very much. And that’s why we come to these meetings to help them, to help our people who are struggling. I think this is a time to heal and get back to them. Because so much was taken from us with all our history.

Through the on-the-land programs we began to observe individual change: more youth applying, confidence building, strengthening skills gained from being out on the land and on the waters. People are happier, healthier, and respectful. Individuals that take interest in on-the-land programs have the responsibility of protecting their home; they take pride in maintaining their homelands.

On-the-land programs are very important in regards to how we live in the community, with each other and how we live with the land. When I look at these pictures of young people amongst the fire, they give me pride. I care for all young people and I want them to live the good life.

People here in the North are strong. Very strong. Dene knowledge is very powerful. So, with that being said, I want to say marsi cho from the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation. I hope that this meeting gathers us together. ●

*This panel presentation has been edited for length and clarity.*

*Stephen Kakfwi is a former Northwest Territories Premier and Dene Nation President. He has been outspoken in his beliefs on the importance of NWT Aboriginal participation in the Northern political and economic mainstream, balancing Northern resource development with stewardship of the land, and protecting and preserving NWT languages, culture, and traditions. He is a senior advisor with the Indigenous Leadership Initiative.*

*Valérie Courtois is a registered professional forester who specializes in Indigenous issues, forest ecology, and ecosystem-based management and planning. She is a member of the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh, located on the shore of Peikuakami, or Lac-St-Jean. Courtois has been the Director of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative since 2013. In addition to her work in conservation and planning, Valérie is an avid photographer. She is also on the Board of Directors of the Corporation du Mushuau-nipi, a non-profit that encourages cultural and professional exchanges on the George River. She lives in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador.*

*Gloria Enzoe is a member of the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation. She comes from a very traditional family and has spent most of her life on the land, learning the traditional ways of her people. Gloria has dedicated her time to developing the Ni Hat’ni Dene guardians program in her community that honours the Elders and transfers knowledge to the younger generations.*

*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup> Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning is a Northern-led initiative delivering land-based, university-credited educational experiences led by Northern leaders, experts, Elders and professors to engage Northern and southern youth in a transformative curriculum based on the cutting-edge needs of Canada’s North.

<sup>2</sup> <http://landoftheancestors.ca/>

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PHOTO ESSAY

*Pat Kane*



*Photo Credit: Pat Kane*

*Northwest Territories' Health and Social Services Minister Glen Abernethy with members of the Indigenous Health and Community Wellness division, who championed the Pan-Territorial On-the-Land Summit, at the Summit Gala on March 15, 2017.*



*Photo Credit: Pat Kane*

*Participants were given the option of arriving at the Summit in style by dog team.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Husband and wife, Daniel and Denise Cockney, share their experience attending land-based counselling services as part of the Inuvialuit Regional Corp.'s Project Jewel.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*From left, Elisapi Aningmiuq and Nash Sagiatook of the Iqaluit Tukisigiavik Society, Bernadette Dean of the Kivalliq Inuit Association, Maxine Carroll of Nunavut Youth LEAP, and Moosa Akavak of Qajaqtuaq present on a variety of land-based healing and cultural programs during the Nunavut Showcase.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*One of the afternoon breakout sessions included being able to venture out by snowmobile onto Great Slave Lake to check fish nets.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Participants head out across Great Slave Lake by snowmobile on an afternoon land-based breakout session.*





Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Walter Bezha of Délı̄ne shares during one of the breakout sessions hosted in outdoor wall tents throughout the Summit.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Bertha Koweluk and Colleen Reynolds present on the Inupiaq Kawerak land-based wellness programs in Nome, Alaska, which include camps, gatherings, storytelling, community safety patrols, suicide prevention, and youth leadership workshops.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Dancers from Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Northern British Columbia join together for a multicultural drum dance during the Summit Gala.*



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Summit goes break up the afternoon with a spirited animal calling contest.*

## Sacred People, Sacred Communities: Relationships & the Language of Connection

*Phillip Gatensby*

I came to talk about land-based healing. We've been involved up in Whitehorse for probably the past seven years doing a land-based healing camp called Jackson Lake. But I've been involved in land-based healing my whole life. We've actually created a camp, an opportunity for people to come to it and to share and to heal, so I'll talk a little bit about that, but I want to first just say that this is the first time I've ever come to Yellowknife, and I immediately felt comfortable here. People were so kind and so nice.

I'm grateful to be able to come here and to speak and to be allowed to speak on your land. I'm grateful and I'm conscious of something. I believe in magic; no, I don't mean like the kind where the guy makes the elephant disappear off the stage, but I mean real magic – the magic that brought us all here together. I believe in that so much. I sat there last night and I saw people in the foyer of the hotel and people smiling and talking to each other. When I went to my room, I sat down [and] I thought, "Man, what created this?" Certainly, the organizers. It's incredible; everything is incredible so far.

But what really surprised me was, what moved people to do this? In my life right now, I'm feeling like this is it; this is what's going on. This is a time for us to become human again, to learn what it means to be who we are, and it's an incredibly powerful thing. We're blessed to somehow come here and to do this. And I don't know if we'll do it again; it doesn't really matter. The thing is we've come here together. We're family.

My grandmother at some point told me about power, and that everything was about power, she said. All things in creation are about power; not necessarily power over, but *power with*. In creation, it's power with. I remember one time I was in residential school and I was home for the summer and the Anglican minister came to our house and she offered him cookies and tea, and he came in and they spoke. At some point this Anglican minister turned to her and said, "Annie, I notice you haven't been coming to church lately," and my grandmother said, "Yeah, I've been thinking about it though... I'm wondering, is your god inside the church?" And the Anglican minister said, "Absolutely, he is inside that church," and she said, "See that's what

I was thinking about, because you guys must be mean to keep him in there like that." She said, "You should let him out sometime, you know. Mine is too big for that little building and I think now I'm not going to go to church no more; I think that the land will be my Bible now." I was sitting in the back room, and I was like, "Right on Grandma." My grandmother, she was born way out in the bush and she came into this world and she was forced to speak a different language; she was forced to change her way of life. She didn't really have a choice. I thought about where she had come from, like she grew up in this world and came out to this new world, and I said to her, "Grandma, do you hate those people?" And she looked at me and she said, "My goodness, grandchild, no." She said, "They don't understand; do you think that they'd be like that if they understood?" And you know, I thought at the time: What a naïve old woman she is. But I get it now – that's exactly what we're dealing with. It's not mean, it's not nefarious – people don't understand. *We do*. We have an understanding, we have a relationship.

What I want to talk about first is what we mean when we say "healing." My community, we call it Jackson Lake healing camp. People come out to the camp and do different workshops and things there, and people will say when they come to this camp, "Man, it is so peaceful here. As soon as I came on the land it just made me relax, it was so wonderful." And so I say, "What do you think, that we found a peaceful spot in the bush? Like we had a little peaceful divining rod and walked around until we found a spot and

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*We are connected to the land.  
The land knows us. We don't know  
the land much anymore, but it knows  
us, and it never gave up on us.*

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said, "Whoa, build a camp here quick!" Or did we do this; did we make this? Did we create this, the energy that you feel, because of how we are with the land? I know something and it's because of my grandmother and the life that I lived: We are connected to the land.

The land knows us. We don't know the land much anymore, but it knows us, and it never gave up on us.

So, I said to the people there who said it was so peaceful, "Is it possible that we created this energy? Is it possible that we made this?" We go out there and we smudge the land before the camps, we pray, I speak to the land and I tell it, "People are going to come, people are hurting, they're suffering and struggling; could you please help them? Could you just help them out a little bit to remember who they are?" And I know the land can hear me. So, is it possible that we create this, the stuff that you feel right now – is it possible that we do this?

When the eagles are flying, they call it the sacred. When the eagle's flying over and a tail feather falls out of his rear end, does the eagle go, "Oh man, there goes another sacred feather?" Or is it just the feather? Then the feather lands in the water and down into the river it goes and gets all roughed up and then one of us is walking along the shore is like, "Whoa, an eagle feather!" We grab it and we immediately start to smooth it out and take care of it, and then it becomes our feather; then it becomes our sacred feather. We can do that. We can make things sacred. Even when we did the feeding of the fire at the beginning here, we created the sacredness; we invited our ancestors to come here. We said, "Come on, help us, look at us, we're trying to do something good here, can you come and join us?" and they did – obviously, you can feel it.

So, I said to the people that were there, "What if we decided right now, in this moment, that we would treat our communities like they were a sacred place?" What if we went back to our community and said, "This is a sacred place" and we treated it like that – would it become that? Would it become the sacred? What if we looked at the people and instead of

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*Moose chew the willows off in the springtime. The willows don't flop over and say, 'Oh I'm no good now.' They seal that wound up and they keep growing. That's healing.*

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saying, "Well boy, people are screwed up" or "They are having trouble or struggling," what if we said, "We're sacred beings" – that we, the people in our community, our children, are sacred beings? What if we said that? Would it change them? Would they become that? I think they would.

"Healing" is a word we use so much. We have so many workshops about healing where we talk

about it so much, but I think that healing is the most natural thing in the world. Anything you do out on the land, if you go take a strip off a tree out there, it will immediately cover itself with sap and heal. It's hard-wired into it. It's natural. Moose chew the willows off in the springtime. The willows don't flop over and say, "Oh I'm no good now." They seal that wound up and they keep growing. That's healing.

It's magical and it's hard-wired. I'm a carver;

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*Instead of trying to heal, we need to probably look at what's stopping us from healing.*

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when I cut my hands, I don't have to sit there and go, "Heal, heal." All I have to do is keep it clean; if I keep it clean there's some kind of miracle that happens – it heals all by itself. It's inside me. The Creator made it that way.

So then why do we try so hard to heal? Why don't we just let the healing, the natural, do its work? Instead of trying to heal, we need to probably look at what's stopping us from healing.

If it's true – and I'm pretty sure it is – that healing is the most natural thing of all, then why don't we let it do what it does instead of trying to make it do what it does? Why don't we allow it to heal? Instead of looking at how do we do it, let's find out what's stopping it – what's in our way – and then remove that. It's like a big log jam. Pull out a log or two and the stuff will flow through by itself and clear it out.

One of the things that our people have always been about is relationship. We lived our life in relationship – how we are connected to one another. When I was little, I was taught to call people by my relationship to them; I would say "Hello Uncle," "Hello Auntie," "Hello Grandma." Somebody who was really old, you called them "Grandma" or "Grandpa." Even if I didn't have any relationship to you in blood, I would say, "Hello, my Grandma." The most important thing of all in our world is our relationships, how are we tied to each other.

One year a long time ago, I watched my grandmother when we were picking berries on the other side of the lake. We came back to the boat and the wind was blowing and the waves were big and I watched my grandmother walk down to the water. She kneeled down and she put something into the water and then she spoke to the water and she said, "My relation, can you just calm down a little bit? I need to get across to my camp." Then she spoke to the

wind and she said the same thing, “My relation, can you just calm down a little bit for us? Let me get across the lake.” And the lake calmed down. It didn’t get glass calm all of a sudden, but it calmed down. And my grandmother said, “Get in the boat, hurry up.” So, we jumped in and we went back across, and once we hit the other shore, the wind took off again. I thought, “Wow, my grandmother controls the weather – man that’s crazy! I can’t wait till I grow up and can blow some guy over!”

It hasn’t worked yet. But it’s about relationship. One time we were up in the bush and she said, “It’s going to rain.” It was a beautiful clear day. We said, “Grandma, there’s not a cloud in the sky. It’s not going to rain.” She said, “It will rain. Look at those willows; look how they turned their leaves upside down like that. When they do that they’re calling the rain. Watch and see.” Sure enough, in the afternoon, would you know it, these clouds come in and it rains. But I never thought that the willows control the rain; what I thought was: They have a relationship. All [the] willow’s got to do is that and the rain will come, because they’re connected to each other. My grandmother didn’t control the weather – she had a relationship with it. That’s the way of our people; that’s the way we are.

The other day I watched my little girls in a skating event, and I watched this little boy and his grandfather – he was probably about a year old. I watched him

play; he could walk but he was still falling down. He’d run a few steps and fall over. I watched that little boy – he was just cute. And I watched his grandpa act all goofy, making all kinds of faces, and when I looked at the boy he was just smiling. And I thought, “Does he think? Are there thoughts going through his head?” Because when I think, I think in a language; I think in English because that’s what language is predominant for me. But I thought, “He doesn’t even have a language, so how could he be thinking? Does he have his own language, a baby language?” I know his communication is perfectly clear. When that little guy is happy and he smiles at you, you just light up; even if you’re not his family, if he smiles at you, you just feel so good. But if he’s in trouble and let’s out a cry, bam – there’s this reaction that comes in, like I gotta stop it, figure it out. Crisis mode. I thought, “This little guy doesn’t think – not the way I do. He feels. It’s different and it’s pure. Once we teach him this language that I’m speaking right now, it’s going to step on top of that. Once we teach him English he’s not going to be able to do the same thing anymore.” I started thinking about how the language that we’ve been given to speak holds us down. I realized some time ago that I speak a separation language. I’m programmed to speak it. That’s why I can’t come next to creation, because creation has to be spoken to in a connection language. So, when I see an eagle flying



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Tlingit Peacemaker Phillip Gatensby shares his approach to land-based healing, grounded in what he calls a language of connection.*

over and I say, “Holy, look, there’s an eagle,” that’s separation talk, but when I see an eagle fly over me and I say, “Ah, my relation, the eagle,” I know that’s connection language.

If we’re going to change things, we have to change our language; we have to change it to a connection language again, not a separation language. We have to do it consciously, because it won’t come if we continue to live the way we are. If we look at the world, there’s nobody here that doesn’t know it’s in trouble, and it’s in trouble because of us. The world around us reflects who we are and how we are inside of ourselves. If we’re in love, the world’s going to be in love; if we’re in trouble, they will be in trouble. So, let’s change ourselves to help us through, to shift something.

My grandmother said something to me that was interesting about who I am. She said, “You are the Earth. You’re the Earth’s, my grandchild, and someday you’ll go back again – all of us will, everything goes back.” I thought, you know, “If I died right now and someone drug me off into the bush, within one year I would start to change back to dirt.” Right within one year the natural process would happen and I would decompose. So ultimately everything you see right here, it’s the Earth. All of us, we’re connected that way: We’re the Earth, all of us. She said that I have a fire inside me; it’s what I call my spirit. She said that fire will keep you warm, even though it’s cold outside. She said, “Your body is going to be warm because it burns inside of you. It’s your spirit, it’s a creative spark. Even when it’s 40 below, that spark will keep you warm.” We have this fire inside of us all. My fire is not different from your fire; it’s the Creator’s life force that was given to all of us. I have that, you have that – we’re connected that way.

That fresh water we drink is four billion years old. A human body is like 75 percent water, so we’re 4.5 billion years old. It’s the same water that was here originally so that means the water has a way of recycling itself. It goes up to the sky, it falls down, feeds, gives life to something and down into the ground, it gets purified, and back up it goes. It’s as old as the Earth. It’s done that circular loop from the beginning of time, so we’re the same water, same air, same spark of life, same Earth. So, then what’s the difference here between us? Why are we so different from each other? My grandmother said this to me:

“Look at that raven sitting out there,” she said. “That raven, he’s got a spark of life, same one as you. He has a physical body same as yours; he’s got the same water inside his body, too, same as yours; he breathes the same air as you do; what’s your relationship with the raven?” And it was interesting, because I never thought about that. She pointed at the tree and said,

“What about that tree? Because a physical body is called a spark of life come from the Earth. Trees are the same as you. What’s your relationship to the tree?”

And I realized what she was talking about was your original understanding. That’s why we had such a reverence for everything, is because we were related to what we were connected to in some huge way. Now

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*Land-based healing is about how we can get our relationship back. It’s about how we can remember who we are.*

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we have meetings and we talk about how we treat it good, but it’s about relationship. It’s about how we are connected to it, how we are connected to each other, how we’re connected to the land. Land-based healing is about how we can get our relationship back. It’s about how we can remember who we are.

So, my grandmother said when I asked her, “Do you hate those people?” she said, “No, they don’t understand. Do you think they’d be like this if they understood?” I get that now. I totally get that. We’re here, we’re brought together here by people that want to learn, want to try and understand. We’re the ones that have to help them understand. This is the only way the world is going to make it right; this is the only way our children are going to be able to become who they are, is that we help the people and support the changes to the language differences, the language of separation. ●

*\*Editor’s note: This piece has been edited for length and clarity.*

*Phillip Gatensby is a Tlingit Peacemaker. For over 25 years, Phillip has worked with human beings using a value-based transformational approach to human development. This approach is facilitative in nature, drawing on life experiences, Tlingit values, counselling techniques, and the unique perspective of having emerged victorious both from residential school and the correctional system. It is based on the idea of creating healing opportunities that people may draw on their own resources to make healthy choices for themselves, their families and their communities. Phillip has applied this approach across North America and Europe, in diverse settings with people of all ages, from all walks of life. Street people, Christian groups, gangs, and Supreme Court judges have equally found great value in this vision-driven combination of universal truths and modern principles. The approach is profound in its inherent simplicity and powerful in its unfailing ability to transform the lives of those who choose to participate.*

## Measuring Connection: Evaluating Land-Based Programs

*Debbie DeLancey, Ioana Radu, Lawrence Enosse, & Stephen Ritchie*

### **Debbie DeLancey**

Welcome to the panel discussion on evaluation. I'm Debbie DeLancey and I'm moderating this panel, not because I work for the department but because it brings together my two passions, which are being on the land and evaluation.

I've lived across the NWT, so I've worked and lived in what's known as Nunavut in Baker Lake and, like my minister, lived in Frobisher Bay, which doesn't exist anymore [Editor's note: Frobisher Bay is now called Iqaluit]. I spent several years living in Fort Good Hope, which is where my former partner was from, and had and raised my kids there. So, although I've been living back in Yellowknife for many years, I'm really tied to this land through my children's Dene heritage and think of Fort Good Hope as my other home. Before I worked for government I worked for the Dene Nation and I worked for the Inuit Tapirisat, which is the precursor organization to N.T.I. [Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated]. I spent a lot of time working with Good Hope and communities in the Sahtu doing traditional knowledge research, participatory action research, and trying to work on developing community-based Indigenous methodologies. But the most important thing, and the thing that I learned the most from, is that when I lived in Good Hope I was fortunate enough to spend many seasons on the land, fall trapping and spring hunting with my partner and my extended family, and I had first-hand experience of being on the land, of observing the healing power of the land on other people, and experiencing that healing power myself. And, so, in my time working for government I've always tried – not always successfully, I'm the first one to say – to bring a perspective of community knowledge, community wisdom, into policymaking.

So that's a passion of mine, but my other passion is evaluation. My academic credentials are in program evaluation and, as a public servant, because I've worked for government for almost 30 years, I really feel it's important. We're spending your money – we're spending the public's money.

We need to know if we're having an impact on people's lives and making a difference. When I saw the on-the-land conference evaluation stream, I just said to the guys, I really need to be part of this. So that's me, and I'm very excited about the panel we have here today.

I'm going to throw out three challenges to you that I would like people to think about as they listen to the evaluation presentations, and these are challenges that I've run into in my work trying to be an evaluator or work with evaluators in government, working in Indigenous communities. The first challenge is being really clear on who the evaluation is for – a lot of people don't trust evaluators and they don't trust evaluation, and historically governments have used evaluation as a tool of colonization. There's been a power imbalance and it's been: "We're going to evaluate your programs and then, based on how we think you're doing with our evaluation, will decide whether to give you some more money." There is a new kind of awareness developing among evaluators of what one of my colleagues called

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*One of the reasons people haven't trusted evaluation and evaluators is because, like in many areas of research, evaluators have tended to come out with academic methods that work in an urban context, that work in a university setting, and tried to impose them on communities.*

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"evaluation without dominion", which is this idea that government and Indigenous governments have to co-create evaluation if it's going to work. The second challenge I've run into is the perception that you can't evaluate land-based programs. Last week I was making a presentation to our Health and Social Services Leadership Council, and when I talked about this conference one of the regional leaders said, "You can't evaluate land-

based programs. That's ridiculous. We all know what it feels like when you get out of town and you get on the land. How do you measure that?" You hear, "Well this guy went on an on-the-land program and he's still drinking so the program failed. Why should we fund it?" But obviously there are dimensions that we can evaluate, and I'm really looking forward to hearing what these folks have done and then hearing from you where we, in the Northwest Territories, should move forward. And then the last question is just one of methodology. One of the reasons people haven't trusted evaluation and evaluators is because, like in many areas of research, evaluators have tended to come out with academic methods that work in an urban context, that work in a university setting, and tried to impose them on communities.

Why does government keep measuring the things that are important to government and not work with communities to measure what's important to them? I think that lack of respect for traditional knowledge and community values has been at the root of the failure of a lot of evaluations. So those are things that I'm curious to know more about.

## Ioana Radu

In a way, evaluation is not always about counting. We have to think of evaluation in terms of changing the mindset and translating the priorities of the community into the kind of language that can translate across governmental and funding contexts. A lot of the time when we think about evaluation, we think about passing a judgement. We think about judging the merit, worth, and significance of a program or a service. Often and a lot of the time, that judgement brings about this feeling that is punitive, that the standards set by others are imposed on communities, that we have to meet them, that there's always this gap that we have to catch up with. But in many ways these standards are not necessarily something that we want to catch up with because each community, each program, and each service have their own priorities, their own indicators of measuring success, and indeed their own understanding of what success is.

Usually evaluation is used, first of all, to help make decisions, but also to make new knowledge, to understand what it is that we're doing and understand it in a good way. So, I borrowed this phrase,



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Debbie DeLancey (far right), former Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services for the Northwest Territories, introduces (from left) panelists on the topic of evaluation, Ioana Radu, Lawrence Enosse, and Stephen Ritchie.*



“Coming to know,” to replace the word “evaluation.” By changing the language – John B. Zoe was talking about how we have to change the language, Phil Gatensby was talking about a language of connection – in thinking about evaluation, we can also think about this idea that we come to know something, that we try to learn and co-create something new from something that already exists, that is connected to each community’s history and cultural contexts and with the knowledge that exists and that was created from the interactions with the ancestral territories. If we apply this approach then, when I think about evaluation, I think about a group of people who come together. They all bring something that they need and that they want to see happen, and work together to make that happen. Evaluation should also be about that: a collective process that the community is asking for; that the community is leading; that the community has control over. In this way, Indigenous knowledge and knowledge keepers in our communities have a foundational part to play in any evaluation process because they can connect the language, the values, and the priorities of the community to the evaluation process.

### **Lawrence Enosse**

Good morning. I’d like to thank you, Creator, for a beautiful day and beautiful week up here. I’d like to thank the community Elder for starting the summit off in a good way – that was very, very awesome to be a part of the ceremony. I’d also like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Dene people and for welcoming us to network and share in their community and also the great hospitality. My name’s Lawrence. I’m a band member, an Ojibway of the Wikwemikong Unceded Territory. I’m a son, I’m a dad, I’m a brother, and grandson, and what I do is I manage youth programming. I’m also an elected member of my community; I’ve been there for four terms and I’ve held various portfolios. And I’m really excited to be here today to talk about our adventure leadership experience program with our co-presenter Stephen Ritchie.

What we’re going to do first before we talk about evaluation is we’re going to talk about the connection from a First Nation community to evaluation. As indicated in the introduction, there are some barriers to that. So Wikwemikong is located on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario. It’s the largest freshwater island in the world and we’re located about two hours from the greater city of Sudbury, which has Laurentian University, Collège Boréal, and Cambrian College, so those are the closest post-secondary

institutes to our community, and it’s also the largest urban area to our community. We are kind of rural, we are quite remote, but not like the Northwest Territories. We do have our barriers and challenges in Ontario. As indicated, I’m the Brighter Futures manager for the Waasa Naabin Community Services Centre and my team runs programs and services for children aged 6 to 24. I have a team of 14 youth workers and we service about 1,500 children and youth in our community. Some of our programming is similar to a lot of the programming that was talked about this week. We do recreation and leisure, health and wellbeing, tradition and culture, youth mental health. We also have an active living studio – it’s a 24/7 fitness facility and a dance studio in our community. We also partner with Right to Play, which is an international organization for participation with children. And we’re here today for our Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program.

Our collaboration started back in 2001 with a youth needs assessment in our community. We had lots of challenges, we had suicides in our community, so we worked really hard to find out what was needed in our community. While we were doing this, our friends at Laurentian – a doctor who was a boxing coach – were trying to find out why elite Aboriginal athletes only got so far and fell off from going professional. We worked on this project for six years with athletes and coaches right across Canada, connecting with different provinces, and a lot of coaches were wondering, “How can these athletes be so good but fall off?” So, we started working on research and coming up with interviews and evaluations, and a lot of it was culture shock. The loss of family support. They just kind of returned back to their communities or fell off due to other barriers and challenges. From that project we started going into outdoor adventure leadership. And in our community we are blessed with being on an island. We’re surrounded by water, we have a lot of natural resources in our community. So, we started from there and we’ve grown to what we are today. We’ve been running our program since 2008, when it started as a pilot project. And today we’re a big player, I think, in regards to outdoor programming. We also work with the [Aboriginal] Children’s Health and Wellbeing Measure<sup>1</sup> – it’s another form of evaluation designed by children for children. They came up with the questions themselves so that they could understand the questions and answer the questions.

So, for our outdoor adventure leadership

program, we have a curriculum that we follow, and inside the curriculum there's three goals. There's leadership training modules, where we talk about implementation phases; principles, which are our seven grandfather teachings; and in the summer, we run five and 10-day canoe trips. Our five-day trips are geared toward children that are 12 and under, and they actually attend with their families, with their parents – and if they don't have a parent, it could be a guardian, an uncle, an older brother. So, we gear it towards the families. And our 10-day expeditions are geared to 13 plus.

The goals that we have with our program are to prepare youth as leaders, to promote community and culture, and to protect youth through resiliency and wellbeing. Those are our three goals through the OALE program. Our program's been very successful. We do monitor all of our kids and all of our participants who participated in the program.

French River Provincial Park is our starting point. Our traditional territory goes all the way along [Highway] 69, the water boundaries of Georgian Bay. That's our travel route. There are significant

points in our traditional territory that our ancestors followed. It's a 10-day trip, a 10-day excursion, and then we finish right in our community, at the Wikwemikong Unceded Territory at our marina, with a homecoming ceremony.

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*Because we were able to monitor all of our participants through ID codes in years 2012, 2013, and 2014, one of the key things that we noticed is we had a 100% student success retention rate from every participant that participated in our program. They stayed in school.*

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So, the total distance is 137 kilometres that they take. A lot of the times the kids have never been in a canoe; it's their first time so there's lots of challenges, lots of barriers that they have. The kids, the participants, they pack their own food, they pack their own gear. One of the really unique



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Lawrence Enosse of the Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, located on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario, talks about the many ways in which the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience youth canoe tripping program is evaluated.*

things with our trip is we hire a lead guide for risk management, but, other than that, the youth are the lead guides on the trip. The youth lead the voyage, the expedition, and our participants follow suit, so it's youth helping youth, youth leading youth, and youth sharing with youth.

We started with a trial project back in 2008 with the 10-day trips. Stephen was our lead guide and we've grown from there. What we noticed after year two is we had a lot of parents asking, "What about our younger children? We're having these big homecoming celebrations where the community's welcoming all of the canoers as they come in and all the little brothers and sisters are wanting to be part of it." So, we said, "Okay, well, let's do it. There's nothing stopping us from doing this; let's take a moment to create it and let's do it." So, we've been pretty successful at offering canoe excursions all summer for all the children in our community, and not only that, we've expanded and opened it up and had participants from as far away as Saskatchewan coming to participate in our OALE program. We encourage parents and guardians, family members, to come on.

We've been pretty successful, and when we talk about evaluation, there's different forms of evaluation that we've done. Stephen and I participated at a youth justice conference last year and one of the things that we shared is, because we were able to monitor all of our participants through ID codes in years 2012, 2013, and 2014, one of the key things that we noticed is we had a 100% student success retention rate from every participant that participated in our program. They stayed in school.

Also, in 2013 we had a young man who had been in trouble with the law. He participated and changed his life. So, he participates in our program, he goes down to southern Ontario to participate in another outdoor program during the summer, and now he's going to graduate from school. He participates in extracurricular activities, he participates in a dance program, and this was what people would identify as a "thug" in our community. This program changed his life. He's moving on, he's successful. And when we have our regular programming not focused on OALE, we don't see him for other programs; but every time we offer an outdoor program, whether it's tea boiling, cutting wood for Elders – anything to do with the outdoors – he's there. So, when we're talking about therapeutic and connection evaluations, there's again different successes and ways of measuring it.

Into the future, when we talk about other

populations, we like to work with kids, with youth justice, because we see there's a way to do it – there's a way to help them change their lives. We've seen it with some of our participants. And also, with looking at the mental health, we noticed at school we have a lot of problems across Canada, with the high dropout rates. On-the-land programming has been successful in our community and, just listening to everybody here talk this week, it is successful in others. I think it's a very innovative and creative way to go. And if we can get into possibly helping students to get education credits, I think that's something that we could do to help our kids. Receive these credits and graduate [from] school.

So again, we're partnering with other communities in developing our programming and expanding it. As I indicated, we've had participants from Saskatchewan and we're just enhancing staffing and training, capacity building. We hired Stephen in 2008, we hired a lead guide for risk management, and we're at the point now where we don't have to hire lead guides. We've been able to retain our staff. They look forward to this program. We're trained in advanced wilderness first aid, our staff have all the training that we could almost be a business. But we don't want to be a business because we want to be in the business of helping our kids and our communities.

When we talk about evaluation there's so many different types of evaluating. I think the opportunity with our program is the uniqueness of it. When we go on our trips we have journals, so a lot of the kids write their experiences; a lot of the kids who can't write or can't express their words draw pictures. We're able to keep these or they take them home. We're also advanced with technology – kids relate to technology. So, we have tablets for evaluations. We also have digital recording so that when we have our talking circles on all of our trips, we're able to record all that information. Just recently on our last trip this past summer we hired a graphic artist to come in for our two 10-day trips; she came in and she was there for the homecoming, so she was able to create [a piece using] all of the feedback from the kids on this trip.

Some of the comments are pretty funny and there are some that are pretty emotional. But one of the things that the participants learned from the trip is life skills. They have the seven grandfather teachings, so they are able to learn those on the trips. Some of the comments are about ups and downs – you have to ride the waves; sometimes things don't go your way. They talk about resilience.

The direction of the wind is important. In one trip you can learn things you can apply to your whole life. Nature and spirit guide us. The route might be the same, but the journey was our own – because we go down the same trail as our ancestors. They want to see cliff jumping, cliff diving, as an Olympic sport because we have lots of cliffs when we go through our traditional territory and we have some very, very brave people who are supporting each other to overcome fears of jumping. They're amazed when they see the animals – bears, eagles, fish. They see rain as a gift; they see thunderstorms as peaceful when they're out on the land. They talk about building a family, showing up as individuals and then coming home on the last day as a family, coming into a bigger community of a family. And one of the things I like is, you don't look down; when you look up, you realize how beautiful it is.

### **Stephen Ritchie**

Likely the most interesting part of our study or aspect of the evaluation that took the most time, in probably three years of work in transcribing over 200,000 words, was trying to understand what it was about the OALE experience that actually promoted resilience and wellbeing. What we found would be what you already know: that connecting with the land is what promotes resilience and well being.

And as a researcher it took me probably the longest time to get to that point where I realized that this is what it was. We were expecting, or I was expecting, to probably have confirmation of some of our programming elements that were contributing to resilience and wellbeing, but it was connecting to the land.

We noticed that the connecting was actually

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*What we found would be what you already know: that connecting with the land is what promotes resilience and well being.*

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more external and experiential in the first few days of the trip. We collected data from journals and talking circles in the evening, and check-ins around the campfire, which we audio recorded. I also interviewed youth on the trip. We had focus groups after the trip to try to make sense of what occurred during the trip, so we collected data from numerous sources. And what seemed to occur is

that the youth were experientially just engaging with the land and with the Creator, so it was sort of an external experiential process for the first few days. And then we started noticing in the journals that the youth were recording more reflective thoughts. So, there is some kind of connection process internally or a change process that was occurring over time internally. We actually found a day three phenomenon. There is a change that occurred on day three for the youth. In fact, there were some journals where I'd be reading and a youth on day two would say, "I hate it here. I wish I could go home. I'm dirty, I don't like it." And then you flip over the page and on day three the entry was all positive: "I love it out here. We're canoeing. I like swimming. I have friends." So, there was a change that occurred and it wasn't just necessarily day three for each youth; it might have been day two, day three, day four, but there was definitely something impactful that happened early on in the trip. What that sort of led us to think about is that in planning programs, they should be long enough to allow the youth to adjust in the first few days and get to a point where they can have a change. And the other thing that sort of struck us is that maybe the change process is not linear; maybe there are real significant events that occur for each youth and they're different for each youth that may occur during the experience at different times. ●

*This piece was edited for length and clarity and features excerpts from the panel discussion on evaluation.*

*Debbie DeLancey, MAE University of Melbourne, is a long-term Northerner with many years of experience working for communities, Indigenous organizations, and governments in the Northwest Territories. Her early professional career included working on community development and participatory action research projects with Indigenous groups in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut; after which she worked for the Government of the Northwest Territories for more than 25 years, including 15 years as Deputy Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, Human Resources, and Health and Social Services. She recently retired from her career in the public service to pursue other interests, which include promoting the importance of land-based programming for Indigenous communities and advancing effective program delivery through performance measurement and evaluation. Debbie holds the designation of Credentialed Evaluator with the Canadian Evaluation Society and sits on the boards of the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement and the Canadian Frailty Network.*

*Ioana Radu, PhD Concordia University, is an interdisciplinary scholar, community-engaged researcher and educator based in Montreal. Her work focuses on Indigenous wellbeing, knowledge mobilization, and oral history. Ioana has been collaborating with the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee (Northern Quebec) for over a decade on community-led initiatives in various fields from education to public health. She is presently post-doctoral fellow at DIALOG (Aboriginal Peoples Research and Knowledge Network), Institut National de la recherche scientifique in Montreal. She continues to focus on community engagement in research, decolonization, and land-based healing.*

*Lawrence Enosse is an Ojibway from the Wikwemikong Unceded Territory located on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario. Lawrence is employed as the Brighter Futures Manager for the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre. Lawrence is responsible for the management and leadership of the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE) program that includes five and 10-day canoe excursions through their traditional territory during the summer and outdoor leadership boot camps during the winter months. Lawrence has been involved with research interests that are devoted to understanding outdoor adventure and experiential education programs in the context of achieving personal growth and*

*holistic health outcomes. Lawrence is an elected member of the Wikwemikong Unceded Territory Chief and Council, serving four terms, and holds the portfolio of Economic and Employment Development/Department of Lands and Natural Resources.*

*Stephen Ritchie, PhD, Laurentian University, is an Associate Professor in the School of Human Kinetics at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario. He has worked in the outdoor field on and off for over 30 years as a guide, teacher, facilitator, and more recently as professor and teacher. Over the past 15 years, he has taught a variety of senior level under-graduate courses at the university on topics such as outdoor facilitation and teambuilding; risk management; and adventure therapy. Stephen's research interests are devoted to understanding outdoor adventure and experiential education programs in the context of achieving personal growth and holistic health outcomes. He is also very interested in the importance and impact of land-based programming, and he is currently active in a diverse portfolio of research, including several community-based participatory research collaborations with Indigenous communities in rural and remote locations in Canada.*

*Notes*

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## Empowering Youth: Land-Based Education at Deh Gah School

*Lois Phillip*

**H**ello everybody. I am from the Dehcho. I grew up in Fort Providence and I am now the principal at the school there that I once went to.

I have been very fortunate to work in a community that has embraced everything that we do in the school. We approach every year with a planning calendar, saying, “Okay, what is really important for our youth? What do we want them to do?” We start off at the Kindergarten level. Every kid in K-3 will spend four to six weeks out on the land at the beginning of the school year. We start our school year at the beginning of August with the intent that August and September are really nice times of the year and our kids need to be outside. They will then spend a week out on the land in the winter at our winter camps. Those are just day trips for the little ones and then they’ll spend two weeks out on the land in May at our spring camps.

Our elementary students, those students in Grades 4-6, will spend one week out on a boat trip. If you know anything about many Northern communities, families came in from out on the land, so we take

our kids out on the river and show them where their families came from. There are eight or nine families that came in off the land into the community, and they are the families who make up Fort Providence. They do that once in Grade 4, once in Grade 5, and once in Grade 6. They will also spend a week out on the

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*By the time our kids graduate, they can spend up to 50 weeks in on-the-land programs. I believe it really grounds our kids in who they are and what’s really important.*

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land in the winter down at Horn River, which is about 20 miles downriver, learning how to set traps, how to set a net, winter survival skills, etc. Then they’ll spend two weeks out on the land in May. By the time our kids graduate, they can spend up to 50 weeks in on-



*Photo Credit: Pat Kane*

*Former Deh Gah School principal Lois Phillip provides an overview of her school’s extensive land-based educational programs, which run from Kindergarten to Grade 12.*

the-land programs. I believe it really grounds our kids in who they are and what's really important.

If I look at our kids right now, we have 23 that are enrolled in postsecondary outside of the community, of which I believe 21 of them are attending outside of the territory, so I think that speaks well to the connection that we try to give our kids, our young people, with knowing who they are and knowing where they come from and what's important.

What's really important to us is building partnerships. We've been able to build a relatively good partnership with schools from the Hay River Reserve, from Aklavik, and Fort McPherson. Right now we have kids from all four of those schools in Costa Rica on an experiential learning outdoor education trip taking part in a workshop called Agents of Change. It's just one of four camps that kids who join the Keepers program get to do.<sup>1</sup> They start off with the winter camp, so three weeks ago we had kids up in Fort McPherson doing a winter camp. The second trip for the two-year program is they will then do a two-week canoe trip in June, followed by a trip to Costa Rica the following March, and then follow that with a forest ecology camp.

All of these trips we do on a budget of less than \$40,000. It's been a process over many, many years of being able to build up our inventory so that when we want to do a land-based trip, really the only cost that we incur are those in terms of hiring the manpower.

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*We really work with our teachers  
to make sure that they have  
the skills necessary to take  
the kids out on the land.*

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We really work with our teachers to make sure that they have the skills necessary to take the kids out on the land, whether they become canoe instructors, whether we get them certified in advanced wilderness first aid – whatever is out there that will build their skill set. I think it's really important that we begin to support the educational institutions in our communities. I think schools are a natural venue to get our kids out on the land.

I know that our parents don't want our kids to leave at 17 or 18. I think it's young for our kids to transition from a small Northern community into a large postsecondary institution, so we look at it and say, "Okay, I think it's really important that we offer as many opportunities as we can." Every second or third year we work to bring kids up to Willow

## **Lessons Learned from 11 Years of Walking in the Mountains**

Each summer, the Canol Trail Youth Leadership Hike

takes a group of young hikers from the Sahtu Settlement Area for a week in the mountains on the remote and rugged historic Canol Trail. A challenge for



Photo Credit: Pau Kane

the mind and body, the youth are tasked with truly walking in the footsteps of their ancestors as they carry all their own gear while trekking the ancient trail. Long before WWII soldiers named it the Canol trail, Shita Got'ine (Dene people from the mountains) travelled this path through the mountains to the territory we now call the Yukon. Norman Yakeleya, the founder of the Canol Trail Leadership Hike, shared the lessons he learned from over a decade of walking in the mountains of the Sahtu.

Every journey starts with just one step.

Obstacles can be overcome.

Ask for help if you need it.

Listen to the Elders.

Have fun. Life is short.

Life is good in the bush.

Learn the old ways.

Rest when you can.

Take care of the land and it will take care of you.

When the going gets tough, keep on going.

Mother Nature is the boss.

*Norman Yakeleya served with the Tulita Dene Band as a band councilor from 1987 to 1990 before being elected Chief. He was also the Chair of the Sahtu Tribal Council, and served as MLA for the Sahtu region. He is the founder of the Canol Trail Leadership Hike.*

Lake, Edehzhéh, for between four to six weeks with families. When they're up there we don't send anything other than the basics and then they're required to hunt and fish for everything else. We find that after six weeks the kids and the families that come back into the community are much healthier. They have spent six weeks without sugar, they have spent six weeks without pop and chips. You can see the difference in terms of some of the health implications. The first time we did it we did a bunch of health testing. Adults on average lost in the six weeks about 20 pounds and the kids lost about 15 pounds. It was just because you're out in the bush, you're moving, you're busy, you're hauling your own water and you're chopping your own wood, and you're doing all of those things that are really, really necessary for survival up there. And we find that once they come back, they want to go back. They find communities extremely disruptive in terms of some of those social challenges we face. I think offering these kinds of opportunities in our schools begins to impact some of the social challenges in a positive way. Knock on wood, we've never had a suicide in the community. I know that we've had suicide attempts but we've never had a successful suicide, and I look at that and I say, "Okay, in many ways our kids are extremely grounded, but they face every challenge that I think every other Northern community faces." Just being able to ground them, I think, really empowers them in many ways, and then when they do graduate and go off to post-secondary they take those experiences with them, knowing that there are times that it is going to be very stressful, but they do have the skills to do well.

So what we do is we look at our planning calendar and we sit down in about May, end of April or beginning of May, and say, "Okay, what's really important? What are the days that we want to do things?" And we do it from K to 12 as well as for our staff. So this year coming up for our cultural orientation, we will boat from Fort Providence to Fort Simpson as staff for our regional orientation, and in that process it allows those staff members a way to really connect.

Our K-3 program is in our local language. It's a start. I think that we need to really encourage more people in the community to converse with our young ones in the language so that about time they get to Grade 4 they have a fairly good working knowledge of the language. We just haven't gotten over that one hurdle of saying, "Now you need to speak it continuously." We are right now in the process of wrapping up a two-year University of

Victoria language revitalization program diploma course.<sup>2</sup> So when I get back after spring holidays, we will do an intensive three-week Dene Zhatie Immersion program for all high school students.

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*I think that every school in the NWT should work towards developing intensive land-based programming because it really does pay off in the end.*

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For three weeks we will pull them out of English and math and sciences and they'll only be working in the language.

Being from the community, I think, has given me a lot of latitude and freedom to try things; and if they don't work we're just going to go, "Oh well, we'll try something different." And it has been a wonderful journey. You see the kids when they come back from an on-the-land program, you see the kids come into the school, and they are so much lighter and so much more engaged.

So in terms of school, the youth and institutions, if we can see a greater collaboration, if we could see a greater voice from parents saying that this is what we need, this is what we want, and a greater understanding within our communities that education needs to be owned by the communities rather than the institutions – I think that every school in the NWT should work towards developing intensive land-based programming because it really does pay off in the end.

I see our kids and our youth and the things that they're now pursuing, despite or in spite of all the challenges that face outside of the school. These are things that I think really empower communities. ●

*Lois Philipp was the Principal of Deh Gah School in Fort Providence, Northwest Territories. She developed an extensive land-based curriculum at the school, including students spending up to four weeks on the land.*

*Notes*

1 <https://keeperleadership.wordpress.com/>

2 <https://teaandbannock.com/2016/11/10/dehcho-dene-zhatie-indigenous-language-revitalization-program/>



## Honouring Our Strengths: Relying on Indigenous Culture to Promote Wellness

*Carol Hopkins*

**G**ood morning everyone. I want to say *chi miigwetch* for the prayer this morning. As well, thanks to the Dettah people and their great welcoming of us as we've been here on their land and sharing incredible food and laughter and good company and knowledge throughout the days that we've spent with each other.

I come from the Lenape people, otherwise known as the Delaware, and we're located in southwestern Ontario. There's only two Lenape communities in all of Canada and they're in southwestern Ontario along the Thames River just outside of London. My father was from the Munsee Delaware First Nation and my mother is from the Lenape community that's known as Moraviantown, named after the Moravian missionaries that settled there with us. Our people originated on the East Coast from the state of Delaware all the way to Manhattan, Staten Island, along that coast, and then we migrated inland as the coming of the light skinned race pushed us westward. My ancestors ended up in Ohio and there was a big battle there. Some went south around to Oklahoma and then continued west and others came up around the Great Lakes, and so that's where my ancestors come from, they live around the Great Lakes area, and specifically my parents come from southwestern Ontario. I'm a mother of four adult children, blessed with nine beautiful grandchildren. Very, very thankful for all of the life that they've given to me and help me, teach me about how to be a helper in life. I also want to acknowledge my teachers and Elders from the three fires Midewiwin lodge, a sacred medicine society, which is the source of my culture-based knowledge and that sanctions my right to teach and share this knowledge.

I am the executive director of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, and our mandate is to support Indigenous People in Canada to address mental health and substance use issues. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about why we talk about wellness rather than mental health and addictions. Typically, whenever we talk about the needs of Indigenous People specifically around our discussions of mental health and substance use issues, the stories are laden

with the deficits, what's wrong with us, and everything we do, then, starting from that point, is focused on what's wrong with us. And while it's necessary to understand the issues that we face, we impede our ability, we cut ourselves short, we make it difficult for ourselves when our conversations only focus on the deficits.

So, without a vision, then, beyond the deficits, we never know when we actually get to a state of wellness because we're just focused on addressing the mental health issue or just focusing on the substance use issue. Then we see people from that hurt and that pain only, and it narrows our vision and blinds us from seeing the strength of who we are as Indigenous People, no matter what issues we're facing in life.

We know that we have a story that's much greater than the 'what's wrong with us' story, and that story is based on our story of creation. Our creation stories, they differ across the land because they come from the people, our language, and our connection to the Earth and creation. And although they're different, each one of those stories is true. Those creation stories – a story of how life came to be before there was anything physical in this world – are all true stories and they're the foundation of our evidence. Oftentimes funders want to know what's the evidence for your approach, what's the evidence behind what you're doing, to demonstrate that it actually works, that it's achieving what you would intend. So, if we go back to our creation story, the creation story tells us that the Creator at the very beginning, before there was anything even such as time, ensured good life for us, and that what was placed in creation was placed forever and all time. So then for every stage of life, every stage of our life span for every generation of people on this Earth, there are answers. Even though what the Creator gave to us before there was anything physical in this world, it's still applicable no matter the generation of time; no matter the generation or the point in our own life span.

I love to think about our grandmother the moon as a teacher about change, because she shows us the pattern of change and she helps us as people to experience and to live through and to know how to



Photo Credit: Pat Kane

*Carol Hopkins, executive director of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, explains the key elements of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework, under which Indigenous wellness is found to hinge upon the key elements of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose.*

navigate through change. So what the Creator gave to us, the Creator gave us forever and all time, but how we practice it in our lifespan or in our time on this Earth as a people is different depending on the life that's around us. If we use our knowledge, then, as the foundation for supporting wellness then we cannot start the conversation from the what's wrong with us, because the beginning of our creation story does not start from what's wrong with us. Our story begins with: the Creator loved us and the Creator thought about everything that was going to be needed, and in all of those thoughts that were sent out from the very centre of the universe where it was just all dark, the darkness is talked about with great love and beauty because the Creator sat at the centre of that darkness, and so there could only be love because it was the Creator that was there. As Creator sent out all of those thoughts about how life would emerge forever and all time, they say that where those thoughts touched upon the darkness they left an imprint for us and we can still see those today, and that's the star realm.

So that's the foundation of our evidence, but as we've been talking about through the keynote addresses and our beautiful experience out there in the tents or sitting around the fire, we know that there have been blockages to the use of our knowledge. Many of you have shared about the disruption in your connection to your own knowledge because of residential schools, and yet beyond the experience of residential schools I've heard many of you talk about

your grandparents with such love and reverence for the memories of what they left and the knowledge that is still accessible. But we have to think about what is it that blocks our own thinking from appreciating the evidence and the science within Indigenous knowledge – all of the things that we need to live today. And then where do we access that?

We have our sacred lodges and our ceremonial structures and our memories and our stories from our communities and from being on the land that are still firmly planted in creation. They are still accessible, and you've talked about those; I've listened with great appreciation for the stories that were shared this week, for the beautiful knowledge and the incredible knowledge, the important knowledge for living on the land. But today our knowledge and our practices often live on the periphery of our communities. They're not the first conversation we have when we're talking about how are we going to govern our community towards wellness. How are we going to ensure something for our people as a program director, a decision maker? What are the policies that you need to have in place from your culture? What is it that you know from your grandparents that tells you about how people relate to each other to get something done? What is it that we know from our teachings about wellness that we want to ensure is in our programs and services? And so it's bringing what we know from the periphery forward to be central in designing programs and policies and delivering services, but more importantly, thinking

about wellness. Where is it going to take us? Because if we don't start there and we continue the same old way we've been doing things – we've got a problem in the community, create a new program for that problem, hire the experts from outside the community to come in and fix that problem for us, and then tell the stories about how everybody feels good at the end of the day – we are just wasting our resources. Because we never

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*If we are just focusing on our problems,  
how do we know things are actually  
getting better in our community?*

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know when we actually get to a state of wellness. If we are just focusing on our problems, how do we know things are actually getting better in our community?

We cut out the greatness and the strength of who we are as a people and we don't ever get to a state of equity that way. Sometimes it's our fear that blocks us from thinking about how we translate our Indigenous knowledge, the knowledge that you have from your grandparents and your ancestors, to make it usable in the structures that we have in our communities today. Because that knowledge, it belongs on the land, it belongs to the people. But we have to find a way to bring it forward to make it central in our life in the way that we support people to achieve the right outcomes.

So we as an organization got involved in a conversation called research, and we went across the country and we talked to different Indigenous knowledge keepers, holders, Elders, cultural practitioners from coast to coast, and we had an Elder as our primary researcher who was facilitating that conversation because we wanted to make sure that what we were hearing from Elders and cultural practitioners could be understood by the person listening. The story that I often tell about how important that is comes from Rupert Ross, who is a Crown attorney in northwestern Ontario, and he talks about how he flew into communities to hold court. His court staff knew that it was important to develop relationships with the people and that the grandmothers held a very important role. So one of his court staff was talking to a grandmother and trying to develop a relationship with her and he asked her, "How are the berries this year?" And her response to him was, "There's lots of bears at the dump." And from his non-native worldview he assumes that she doesn't understand the question, so he rephrases it and asks her again. And she responds

again about the bears being at the dump. On goes the conversation where he continually assumes that she doesn't understand him – maybe she doesn't speak English very well, I have to ask it another way – and his assumption is that the problem lies with her. Her feeling is, "Why does this white man keep badgering me, why doesn't he just stop? I already answered him." There's lots of bears at the dump because the berries are not so good in the bush. She answered him directly when he asked the question the first time, but he didn't understand the answer so he assumed that she didn't know and he kept asking her over and over again. So as we were conducting this conversation we wanted to make sure that when Elders were talking to us we could receive what they were sharing in a way that was understandable without badgering them over and over again.

These are the three primary questions that we asked: From your Indigenous knowledge, from what your ancestors tell you, the stories that you've handed down from generation to generation, from your sacred societies, from your ceremonial practices, what does all of that tell you about who is a whole and healthy person? What do you know about being a whole and healthy person? And so we got lots of stories and descriptions of a whole and healthy person, but consistently people said a whole and healthy person is somebody who has balance in their spirit, emotions, mind, and body. There's got to be some balance from that whole person perspective. That's a whole and healthy person. And then we said: How do you use culture? What are the things that you do to support the development of achieving some sense of balance of this whole and healthy person? What are the things that you do? Across the country people described their cultural practices – and we didn't write down any recipes – this is how you conduct a sweat lodge ceremony or this is how you conduct the pipe ceremony or this is how you pray for the water – but we recorded these different things that they do. And then we said again: From your Indigenous knowledge, from what your grandparents told you, from what your ceremonial teachers talk about, when you use culture to support the development of a whole and healthy person, what are the results that we should expect? The "so what" question: What difference is it going to make? How does it make a difference for people? So those were the questions that we asked.

And this is what people said: That if you pay attention to someone's spirit, to their emotions, to their mind, to their body, then the outcomes you are going to achieve are hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose. To achieve a sense of hope, what's required is that you invest in identity. You can have no hope if

you have no connection to identity and who you are. So identity is important. Your belief, your worldview is critically important for having hope. Go back to the story that I showed you in the beginning with the man with all of the lifelines on him. If you're relying on wellness for that man, you're relying on somebody else, and I've heard over and over again in the stories that have been shared, that the land is what heals us. That if we trust in who we are and we have relationship with the land, there can be healing. I heard somebody even say, you never cut open your body for surgery because the land can give us everything we need, but that requires belief. I heard somebody else say that we have to believe it first for it to happen. So values, belief, and identity are what create hope for people. Now think about residential school, what happened for us as a people as a result of residential school; we lost our identity, we lost our language, we lost our connection to land, and then what happened to our life? Think about that. To create a sense of belonging you have to have relationship with family and community, but you also have to have a relationship with creation, to know the land as our mother, to know the moon as our grandmother, the sun as our grandfather, to know the sky, to know all of the living beings on the

Earth. Human beings are always trying to sound like creation. We sound really funny. So relationship is critically important, not just with people, but with the land and the beings of creation. Critically important for our wellness is to have relationship with them, to be in relationship with them, to have that feeling of love like family. The last one is attitude – and it's not like attitude, you know, like “talk to the hand” or whatever that saying is. Not that kind of attitude. It's an attitude towards living life. So go back to the creation story that whenever something happens in life, we are sure the Creator created the possibility for the answer, for the solution, for the way forward. And if we have that attitude, that there's always an answer, then we have a sense of belonging. When we don't have connection to land, to people, and we don't know that there is an answer, then our vision narrows even further and that's when we are most at risk for suicide. Because we don't have our identity, our worldview, we don't have experience with our value system, we don't have connection to people, to land, and we don't know that there are solutions, the risk for suicide gets greater.

Every human being wants to know what's the meaning of life, and our ancestors ensured that we would know what is the meaning of life – why

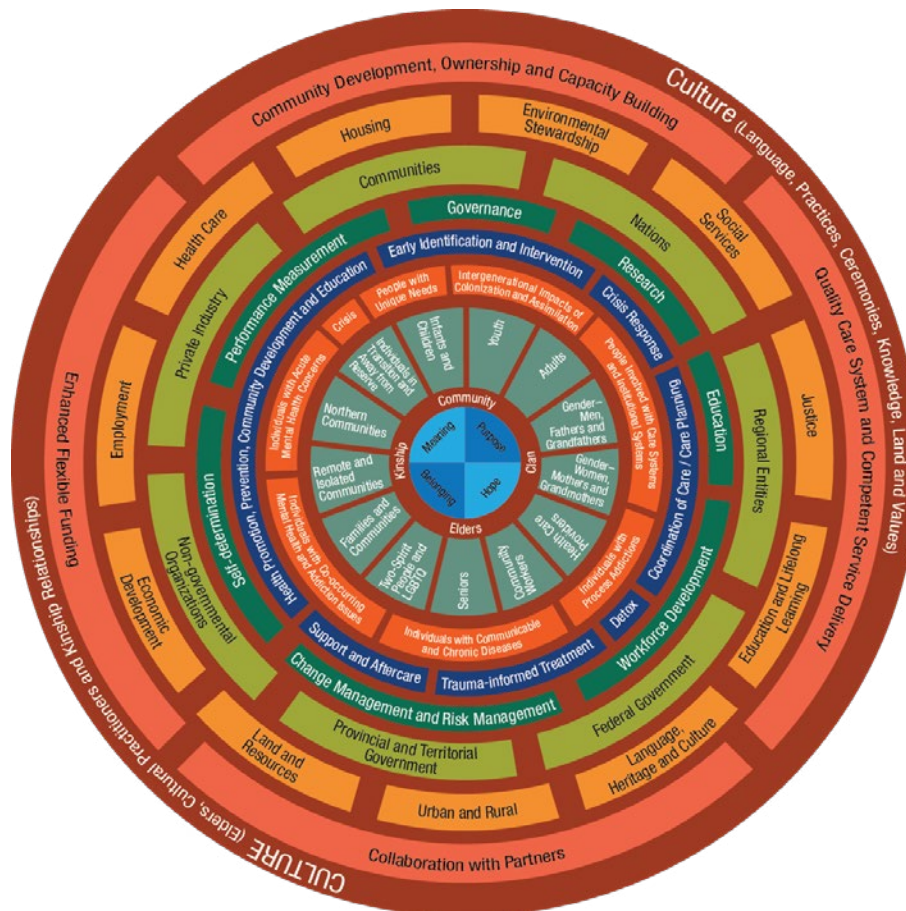


Image Credit: Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

*The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework centers hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose at the core of wellness.*

am I here and how should I understand life? The beautiful stories of what was taught about living on the land and what came from living on the land, being in relationship with the land, knowing who you are and how to believe about life – all of that informs the meaning of life. So our education, whether it's education on the land or education in a school system, is that rational knowledge. But our people also knew that it's critically important to learn from the spirit too, through our relationship on the land, through fasting, being in ceremony, listening to your own spirit. In Western society, intuition is discounted. It's not meaningful. It's not valued. For us as Indigenous People, our intuition is the voice of our spirit and it's critically important to pay attention to what your spirit is telling you. When we put the two together, what we learn from creation and the spirit with what we learn in this physical world, only then can we have an understanding about the meaning of life. I love the story about changing the way we think about risk management to thinking about how to be in relationship with the land as what ensures safety. When you are in relationship with the land, then you have a greater understanding about how to live in a safe way on the land. So rational knowledge and intuitive knowledge together create understanding and it's only when you put the two together that you understand the meaning of life or can have some sense about the meaning of your life. Finally, purpose is created through understanding that we as a people have a unique way of doing things and we don't have to be equal to or the same as the other. We can be who we are in all of our uniqueness and celebrate that for its value in our life. So we have a unique way of being and we have a unique way of doing things, and when we put all of that together only then do we have wholeness, and then we understand what our purpose is in life.

Yesterday there was lots of discussion about belonging and about purpose. So if you think about these four directions, they always balance each other – east and west, north and south – they always give balance to each other. And so if we have hope it's possible to have meaning in our life, because our worldview and our value system is what informs our understanding about the meaning of life. And when we are connected to the land and we know where we come from and we have relationship with creation, then we know how to live on the land in a safe way – our way of doing things, our way of being in the world.

We called this the Indigenous Wellness Framework and it's founded and based on Indigenous knowledge – common stories, the common threads of stories of

the people across the land. And the 13 things that I talked about [which include] values, belief, identity, family, community, relationship, attitude, those are indicators for those outcomes, and so if you want to achieve those outcomes you have to invest in those 13 things.

Next are the common cultural practices. We call them common interventions but they're common cultural practices across the land. People said the number one thing that's critically important to wellness in facilitating that whole and healthy person is language. Language is the foundation. Theoretical knowledge, for us, is held in our language. Our language teaches us everything we need to know. If we spend time learning the meaning that is held within our language – and not just word lists and vocabulary and spelling systems, but in the retention of the sound – we have wellness. Every being in creation has sound. You would never go to the wolf or to the frog or to the winds and say, "That sound is not right. You have to do it this way." Every being in creation has a sound that the Creator gave, and our sound is our language, and our sound is what helps us to connect to all of creation. Knowing your story of creation and where you come from, all of your traditional teachings, these are cultural practices that are critically important for facilitating the outcomes of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose.

With hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose there are cultural practices at every stage of life across the lifespan that were critically important for facilitating wellness. [Erik] Erikson talks about psychological developmental stages of life – the key milestones, the key things that you're learning about at every stage of life. Our people had the same kind of understanding – and this is just one model – but I've heard people say [that] by the time we were 13 these were the things that we needed to know: We had to read all of the different types of skies. By the time we were 13 this is how we knew how to live on the land. For us we knew that there were cultural practices that were absolutely, absolutely necessary to support pregnancy and the delivery of a healthy baby. And then at birth there were other activities that we did. And then as we were breastfeeding our children or taking care of them, dressing them up, and caring for them in moss bags. And then when they began to walk, there was something else that we did. And when they got to the adolescent stage of life we talked to them about instant and delayed gratification and how to achieve skills now for a long-term payoff, and that's when it was absolutely necessary for fasting, at the adolescent stage of life.

Throughout this life cycle it was understood that

there are spiritual openings that happen at every stage of life, and if we practiced our culture that aligned with those spiritual openings we would assure hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose. We would assure a healthy individual.

And if we were taking care of our children that way and raising them up as a community, as a family, in those ways then we would ensure a whole and healthy community.

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*Throughout this life cycle it was understood that there are spiritual openings that happen at every stage of life, and if we practiced our culture that aligned with those spiritual openings we would assure hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose. We would assure a healthy individual.*

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Without culture this is our story: Pre-birth we're dealing with addictions, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, opiate addiction from pregnant moms who are addicted to opiates. We have children who are born with intergenerational trauma. And by the adolescent stage of life our young people are starting to talk about their experiences of sexual abuse. And then instead of wandering and wondering about how am I going to exercise my gift and live out my purpose in life, people are taking their own life. At this true stage of life when I'm supposed to understand the meaning of my life and my purpose, instead my truth is replaced by some other education system that doesn't ground me in my own knowing of my people and my ancestors, and so the cycle goes on. We don't take care of our family when they're ready to go on to the spirit world. Our jobs get in our way. I can't go and take care of that. You know some of our funeral ceremonies, they take a week long. But our employment policy says, well if it's your cousin you can only have one day. That way of thinking doesn't match our cultural practices. Or when our relatives pass on, the coroner takes them away for an autopsy and we don't get our people back in time to bury them and take care of their spirit in a good way. That affects the community. I've heard grandmothers say that since we stopped giving birth in our communities, all we hear is the cry of death, and then the cry of death changes the fabric of the community in such a way that all we're focused on is death. And if we're going to balance the life cycle then we need to ensure that that cry of new life is also anchored in our community, and that when our aunties and our grandmothers helped to birth our children in our community, everybody was involved. The full span of life – there was a role for the children

for the cousins, the aunties, the brothers, the sisters, the men. Everybody was involved in bringing new life into this world. That ensured a whole and healthy community.

So we developed the Indigenous Wellness Framework into an assessment and we have questions in a self assessment and an observer rating form. Here are some examples of some of the questions: Do you feed your ancestors? That's the very first thing we did when we got here. We fed the fire. Why did we feed the fire? We were feeding our ancestors. And all week you've been talking about all of the ancestors gathered here in this room with us. These questions are not deficit-focused questions. They're based on our strengths as a people and they come from our knowledge as a people. So if we want to be well, then we have to focus on what is going to create wellness for us and how we know when we get there. ☉

*Carol Hopkins, Nozhem ("Mother Wolf"), of the Wolf Clan, is from the Delaware First Nation of Moraviantown, Ontario. She is the mother of four and grandmother of nine. Carol is the Executive Director of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, an organization whose mandate is drawn from the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework and the Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance Use Issues Among First Nations In Canada. Carol Hopkins has spent over 20 years in the field of First Nations addictions and mental health. She holds both a Masters of Social Work from the University of Toronto and a degree in sacred Indigenous Knowledge, equivalent to a PhD in Western based education systems. Carol also holds a sessional faculty position in the school of social work at Kings University College at Western University.*

Want to use the Native Wellness Assessment? You can register online, download it and administer it as a paper and pencil copy and then input the data online. The outcome will be a report that tells a story about your own wellness. Doing the assessment with a number of people in your community over time can generate a report that shows what wellness looks like for this group of people in your community, providing a story about your community's wellness in terms of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose.

Find the Assessment online here:

<http://thunderbirdpf.org/about-thpf/scope-of-work/native-wellness-assessment/>



Thank You

SUMMIT

There is no word in our language  
for wilderness, for everywhere  
we go it is our home.

— *K'asho Got'ine Elder George Barnaby*