

RECONCILIATION IN MENTAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP EXCHANGE

SEPTEMBER 2015 ~ MUSQUEAM TERRITORY

(VANCOUVER BC, CANADA)



WHARERĀTĀ
Group



First Nations Health Managers Association

BACKGROUND

The Wharerata Group, in support of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) hosted the Reconciliation in Mental Health, Leadership Exchange with co-hosts the First Nations Health Managers Association and the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. This two-day meeting brought together Indigenous leaders in mental health and addictions, as well as supporters to discuss mental health, reconciliation, and the need for acceptance and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, sharing and translation. The objectives of this leadership exchange were:

- Share knowledge on definitions and understandings of reconciliation
- Share knowledge and wise practices on systems change approaches to embed concepts of full Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation, in mental health and addictions systems
- Strengthen collaboration and partnership within Indigenous in IIMHL countries, and between Indigenous leaders and non-Indigenous allies
- Support and rejuvenate leaders on their journey to lead people and systems to a hopeful future

PRESENTATION SYNOPSIS

Indigenous leaders provided the foundation for discussions that would take place with participants later in the leadership exchange.

INDIGENOUS UNDERSTANDINGS OF RECONCILIATION

Justice Murray Sinclair,

Commissioner for Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Justice Sinclair used Indigenous law and knowledge to illustrate how we can together find ways to build respect for different ways of knowing. He shared that Indigenous people, pre-settler exposure, had a vibrant legal pluralism with legal traditions that contributed to conflict prevention and long periods of peace. They were less formalized

paths to peace - to understand how they worked, we need to understand and respect first nations concepts of law. Many Indigenous people have lost touch with these roots, and may not understand that Indigenous law exists or is relevant. We need to make efforts to re-educate, and revitalize Indigenous concepts of law.

Knowledge was kept in forums and everything was considered equal; Indigenous people sat in sacred circles in learning societies. We are taught to access this knowledge through stories, there are many sources, and many treasured resources for this knowledge.

Law needs to have healthy processes that are followed. The purpose of law is to prevent the hiding of truth. That is the reason protocols exist and need to be followed.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples shares that the right of self-determination for Indigenous peoples is a central right, from which all other rights flow.

Hundreds of years of oppression have immobilized transmission of teachings across generations. Although all communities have resources who have traditional knowledge, that must still be developed. Reconciling the place of Indigenous law, knowledge and rights within mental health is the foundation to reconciling wellness.

INDIGENOUS WELLNESS FRAMEWORK

Elder Jim Dumont

Elder Dumont discussed the utilization of an Indigenous Wellness Framework to capture culturally diverse approaches to promoting wellbeing. To understand the development of a framework that can support translation and application of Indigenous knowledge into both traditional and Eurocentric approaches, there must be a celebration of diversity in a global context.

We must also understand that reconciliation is foremost about healing.

Culture is what we know and believe, its related to creation and spirit and the belief that the entire universe unfolded in a way that supports the continuity of life. Life moves toward life. Everything must move through our

heart, before our mind has any chance to process. We are created from earth, and are related to everything in the sky realm. At its core, everything is spirit. Spirit has a nature of kindness, that activates through loving energy. We have a consciousness - our consciousness desires to be known, and to know.

Indigenous sacred knowledge provides a foundational four directional framework which encompasses our entire being and provides for an understanding of our existence and connectedness to Spirit` important when exploring healing for/of an individual/community. The four directional framework also provides for an understanding of connectedness, relationship development and a total way of life being.

We need our own way of doing things. Successful

programs are those based on First Nations culture. Continue to see success, gives those programs an evidence base.

We need our own way of doing things. Demonstrating the importance of culture and cultural practice through the Indigenous Wellness Framework is critical for establishing an evidence base. For reconciliation, we must work from both traditions while maintaining belief in our Indigenous world view as the foundation for any implementation or application of service.



INDIGENOUS INCLUSION AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

*Dr. Brenda Restoule, Chairperson,
First Peoples Circle of Wellness*

To determine what reconciliation would look like in mental health systems across the IIMHL countries, Dr. Restoule expanded on inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices to ensure cultural competency within existing compartmentalized health and social programs is understood.

Indigenous programs designed by Government were formed as a reactionary approach to resolution of residential school issues. Western medical model is structured in silos; keeping health and social agencies and institutions separate with little meaningful interaction. The compartmentalization of health and social programs do not align with Indigenous knowledge or cultural practices, therefore are not designed to be culturally safe. There is a lack of collaboration and knowledge exchange is too often about

receiving, with Indigenous Knowledge disregarded or rejected.

The development of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (FNMWC) has created a dialogue shift so that as we focus more on culture, we begin to recognize the work of people like Elder Agnes Mills who has been championing the role of culture in addressing substance use and mental health issues for the past 40 years. The voices of First Nations people convey a critical message about culture as the foundation of mental wellness and its this language that resonates with First Nations people.

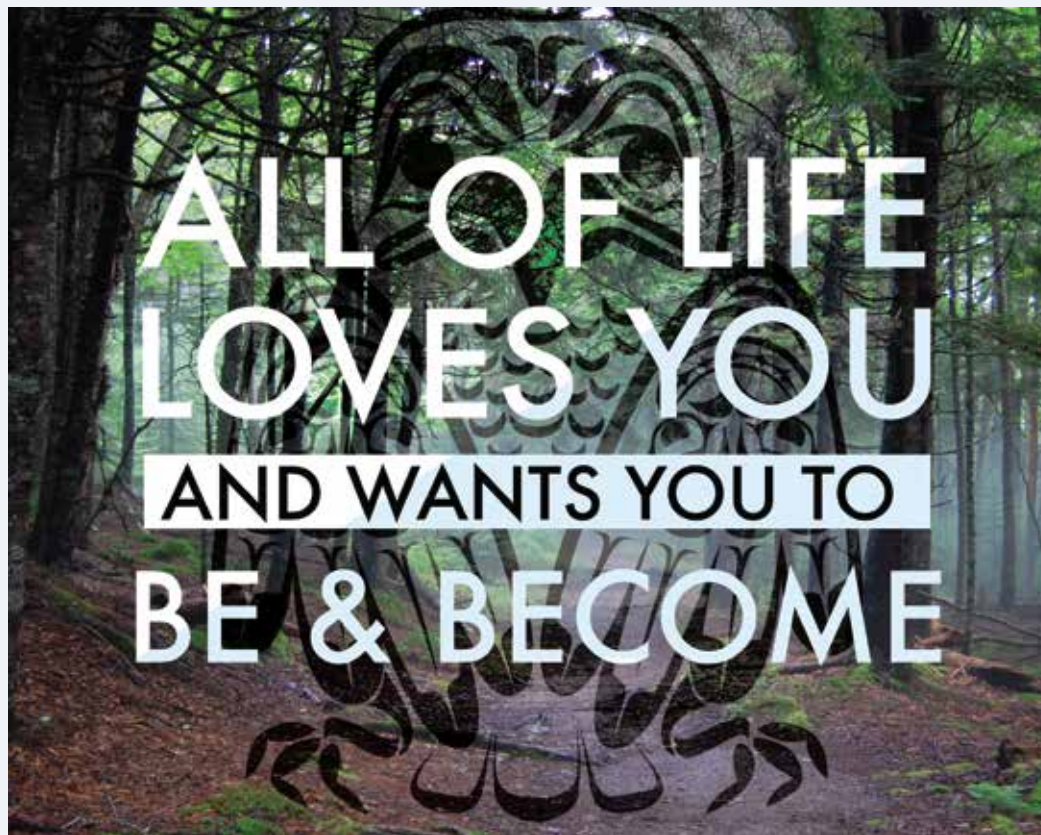
We are working toward better collaboration in Mental Wellness and advisory capacities to ensure recognition and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge. Communities want to see their own voice. For example, the Mental Health Commission of Canada is examining how to support mental health program design and delivery by Indigenous People for Indigenous People. Indigenous leadership has also begun to align health resources with the Honouring Our Strengths: A Renewed Framework to Address Substance

Use Issues Among First Nations in Canada which also speaks to the centrality of First Nations culture.

Indigenous people have a desire and need to be engaged, not just consulted, to ensure programs and services are designed and delivered to address First Nations needs and priorities. We also need to establish these foundational ideas, that allow for changes based on different cultural groups and celebrating diversity. We must be mindful to be more holistic as we integrate mental health and addictions with a focus on wellness and with a focus across to the indigenous specific determinants of health. We must consider the importance of youth and seven generations ahead throughout these discussions.

Reconciliation requires us to remember the important role of culture, tradition and language. We must self-discover, increase awareness of culture and passion

for life, reconnect and engage with Indigenous identity. We must own our work and role in addressing mental health and addictions rather than leave it to be done from the outside.



AUSTRALIA EXPERIENCE

*Commissioner Helen Milroy,
Australian Royal Commission into Institutional
Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*

Sharing the experiential learning from the Reconciliation through the Royal Commission on Child Sexual Abuse (RCCSA), Commissioner Milroy provided a working example of how to bring awareness to intergenerational trauma with safety for all involved.

In Australia there were Public Hearings focused on institutions and organizations. The forum provided a formal proceeding against the responsible organizations as the RCCSA has legislative power. Throughout the process the following surfaced as paramount to supporting reconciliation:

i. Impacts must be acknowledged, harm disrupts a person's past, present and future. So exploring alternative options for health/care needs provides support and safety validation to those involved.

- ii. Providing a safe environment to support disclosure to minimize the creation of fear, shame, guilt, stigma. Forgiveness cannot be an expectation placed within the environment.
- iii. Justice includes reporting, accountability, and redress and allowing for a personal response.
- iv. Culturally safe environments need to be consistent
- v. Language use is important in dialogue around reconciliation and healing. Being cognizant to use strength focused language when moving through a process of reconciliation, such as using warrior instead of victim.
- vi. Aboriginal people need to be seen in positions of power, to break the glass ceiling and work towards removing the power imbalance.
- vii. Need Wise Practice; focused on outcome, healing, wholeness and safety.
- viii. Include traditional knowledge: ways of knowing, doing, when creating cultural services within mainstream services
- ix. Need to move from psychological dissonance, to cultural resonance.



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE ~ GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focused on greatest need and priorities for movement towards and for reconciliation to occur, participants worked in groups to discuss and validate a definition of reconciliation, what is needed and what is the plan for reconciliation to occur.

To get to reconciliation the groups identified three main ideas:

- 1) Settler nations need to reconcile their selves with spirit, as they know spirit. In history, they have violated their own highest principles. This process lends itself toward a basis to understand the context of their actions, the history of their people and a basis for healing. Awakening original values, beliefs and identity supports hope and healthy vision for the future.
- 2) Use of indigenous knowledge, beliefs and culture requires that we honor what was given by the Creator. The Creator gave us everything needed to live a good life and is primarily centered within connections to land, language, lineage, families and communities. Foundational to one's cultural belief system is a path guided by healthy vision.

- 3) We have to collectively own our roles in Indigenous reconciliation. There must be healing for all and this requires processes within Indigenous culture to own reconciliation for self, family and community.

Reconciliation was captured as multidimensional from group discussions as it involves reparation of relationships at many levels: between different nations/beliefs systems; within self; between self and family and community. Once reconciliation is initiated within Indigenous communities there will be a foundation for a shared pathway to a vision, even if the vision is not shared – there is room to walk beside each other toward a new relationship.

Hope is created with awakening and use of one's own world view and value system. Belonging is facilitated by creating a safe environment, by and within, an individual, family, community. Meaning for Reconciliation comes when two separate world views or visions can work together to appreciate and accept the value of and application for Indigenous knowledge, and for Indigenous practice within systems, service design and delivery. Practicing the meaningful application of and translation of Indigenous knowledge in unique ways of doing and being, facilitates purpose.

CONCLUSION

Reconciliation is about a shift in thinking, doing, and being.

Reflected in participant responses was the need for recognition of diversity, and as Elder, Jim Dumont shared, we must celebrate that diversity. Its owning and implementing cultural practices as a way of honouring the strengths that comes from Indigenous knowledge. This process of decolonization ensures we make a difference for Indigenous people seeking wellness. Fitting each piece of the puzzle together, requires many perspectives as it cannot be whole without each piece. Celebrating each piece for the knowledge, wise practices, and connection that comes from within allows us to celebrate the contribution to the whole and create many pathways of collaboration.



RECONCILIATION
IS ABOUT
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