

kawiyahîtamik kesi wîcehtâsôk: **(To Examine in Order to Support/Redirect)**

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Abstract: *Recently, human-service providers across Canada have made conscious efforts toward reconciliation through Indigenizing programming. However, while the delivery of programs has shifted, how they are evaluated remains rooted in Western ideologies and methodologies. In response to the tension created by using Western evaluation methods for assessing Indigenous-designed programs, we have developed an Indigenous program evaluation framework based in nêhiyaw (Cree) teachings and co-created by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. We use an illustrative example to demonstrate how an appropriately developed Indigenous program evaluation framework leads to more comprehensive, accurate, and meaningful data collection, evaluation, and recommendations.*

Keywords: *ceremony, Indigenous indicators, Indigenous program evaluation, language, miyo pimâtisiwin*

Résumé : *Récemment, les agences de santé et de services sociaux à travers le Canada ont fait des efforts conscients de réconciliation grâce à l'adaptation de leurs programmes aux besoins des communautés autochtones. Cependant, alors que la prestation des programmes a changé, la façon dont ils sont évalués reste enracinée dans les idéologies et méthodologies occidentales. En réponse à la tension créée par l'utilisation des méthodes d'évaluation occidentales pour évaluer les programmes conçus par les communautés autochtones, nous avons élaboré un cadre d'évaluation des programmes autochtones fondé sur les enseignements nêhiyaw (cris) et co-créé par les aînés et les gardiens du savoir. Nous utilisons un exemple illustratif pour démontrer comment un cadre d'évaluation de programme autochtone bien développé mène à une collecte de données, une évaluation et des recommandations plus complètes, précises et significatives.*

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Mots clés : cérémonie, indicateurs autochtones, évaluation de programme autochtone, langage, *miyo pimâtisiwin*

masinahikanihkis: *astam ispih moyeyihtamohiwew ki osiyitawak oki ayisiyiniw acimostakewak misaweskamihk kitaskinaw (kanata) kahkwe nehiyawiyitacik kiskinohamakewin oma ototemiwewin. maka ka mamahwinew iyiniwa acimostakew pitosipayan tanisi esi ahtastat wiyasiwewin kiyapic ahci akohikakew moniyaw mamitoneyicikan maka pohko nehiyaw tapokeyitamowin ekwa isihcikewin ka ki apacihtacik. tahki ayiwak ka miyopayan mina ka ki mamawohkamatok.*

This article is based on an evaluative process that was developed over seven years by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, service providers, and the authors to enable Indigenous human-service programs and programs providing services to Indigenous peoples to explore their ability to provide these services in a teaching-based and culturally appropriate manner. We also provide an exploration of this Indigenous evaluative process at the end of the article. The Indigenous worldviews and teachings shared here are based on *nêhiyaw* (Cree) teachings from northern Alberta that were shared by the Elders and knowledge holders who have been part of the developmental process. The authors emphasize that the process described here may not apply to all Indigenous communities. Every Indigenous community has its own distinct languages, teachings, and ceremonies that can form the foundation of culturally based program evaluation.

The writers often refer to “Western” frameworks or beliefs, values, and worldviews to describe European and/or Settler paradigms that have been driving the colonization of Indigenous people since first contact. Legislation, policies, and practices are rooted in worldviews, beliefs, and values regarding what is deemed to be right and true from a Western perspective. Western frameworks are not Indigenous frameworks.

The authors also employ the English-language term “Indigenous Program Evaluation” throughout the article, as English will be the dominant language of most readers. However, this term does not truly reflect the concepts and teachings of *kawayihitamik kesi wicehtâsôk*, as the *nêhiyaw* language is verb-based and English is noun-based, and direct translation from a verb to a noun creates a loss of original meaning.

The article concludes with a description of an Indigenous-capacity evaluation of a large human-service agency as an example of the holistic approach that is possible using this process.

BACKGROUND: MOVING FROM WESTERN TO INDIGENOUS

As social services grapple with Indigenousizing as a result of the larger conversation influenced by the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(2015\)](#), Indigenous concepts of research and evaluation are increasingly being explored. Often Indigenous research, or “wisdom seeking” as the preferred term, is categorized as

a type of qualitative research within the methodological spectrum of Western social work research. Situating it in this context helps academics and practitioners of Western social work understand some of the characteristics of the work; however, using Western research paradigms to describe Indigenous research effectively negates the ontologies and epistemologies of wisdom seeking (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). While the academy may differentiate between “research” and “program evaluation,” the lived experience of Indigenous communities suggests that the encounter and outcomes of both are essentially a similar process of further colonization and assimilation.

It is also important to note that the knowledge informing social policy and social service funding (evaluation) and delivery most often comes from institutions that value scientific, quantitative, measurable data. Though this is beginning to shift, the tools used to gather the data and inform these practices have traditionally come from data-collection methods that centre around experts studying subjects. These Western models of research retain the structural power to dictate what research is being done, how it is conducted, and which voices are being heard, thereby authorizing the researchers while othering the subjects and ensuring that those performing the research receive the financial and career benefits (Tew, 2006). Despite recent calls for researchers to challenge the research-participant power differentials, Hart et al. (2017) noted, “Indigenous scholars continue to experience the academy as a site of struggle, which does not always consider Indigenous research using Indigenous methodologies to be ‘legitimate’” (p. 334).

Indigenous research and evaluation understand that knowledge is not owned individually but rather is something that is held sacred by the collective community; therefore, the outcomes of research done by and with Indigenous communities should also not be owned but shared (Ermine, 2007; Hart et al., 2017; Kovach, 2009). This has implications in Western social work’s understanding of intellectual property, monetary compensation, and academic accolades.

The process shared here is the culmination of many years of practice and learning. From the very beginning, over 20 years ago, our repeated early experiences of frustration with the colonizing impact of Western evaluative frameworks on Indigenous service providers and subsequent projects tasked with developing a version of a culturally relevant model for funded Indigenous agencies have led us to this point in our journey. Our team of Indigenous Elders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers, students, service providers, and academics have arrived at a place of wishing to share our process and our learnings, with the hope of assisting others on a similar journey.

INDIGENOUS PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluation is commonly understood as a process of identifying program goals and outcomes and then collecting quantitative and/or qualitative data to

determine how effectively the targeted outcomes were achieved. The use of empirical methodologies are, for the most part, commonly accepted approaches to program evaluation and are believed to provide methods and conclusions that are deemed rigorous, reliable, and credible (Naquin et al., 2008; Saini, 2012). When considering an Indigenous approach to evaluation, it is important to acknowledge that the concepts of goals, outcomes, standards, evaluation, and measurement are Western worldview-based concepts that carry implied meanings, actions, and consequences (Turner & Bodor, 2020). These concepts evolved with the development of evidence-based practice and reinforce the belief that Western methods of research and program evaluation are the only pathways to “true” or “real” knowledge (Turner & Bodor, 2020). While Western forms of program evaluation may be assumed to determine best practices, we have found that these practices may not be applicable within an Indigenous context and, in some instances, may cause harm.

Unfortunately, Western evaluation frameworks are often employed for the evaluation of Indigenous programs or programs serving Indigenous people with minimal consideration for the framework’s ability to accurately assess and incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Naquin et al., 2008; Weaver, 2002). Johnston-Goodstar (2012) affirmed that this practice replicates colonization and is “designed to measure how accustomed or assimilated Indigenous tribes or programs are to Western practices” (p. 12). Since most funders require documentation that describes the achievement of outcomes (Turner & Bodor, 2020), Indigenous programs and services are forced to adhere to Western program evaluation standards that are often inappropriate or inadequate for understanding the impact of Indigenous culturally based programs and services.

Western worldviews conceptualize health and wellness very differently than Indigenous worldviews (Turner & Bodor, 2020). Western concepts of health and wellness are understood in terms of individual well-being and self-sufficiency—and these are the outcomes that are measured and evaluated in the more common forms of program evaluation (Makokis et al., 2016; Turner & Bodor, 2020). To counter this, Indigenous indicators of spirituality, balance, relationality, and collective well-being must inform Indigenous program evaluation in order to engage culturally based processes of outcome measurement (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007). Indigenous teachings on health and wellness are grounded in spirituality, ceremony, language, collective well-being, reciprocity, balance, and good relations (Makokis et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). In the *nêhiyaw* (Cree) worldview, health and wellness are experienced as *miyo pimâtisiwin*, or “living a good life” through achieving and maintaining a balance between the four realms. The self-identifying term *nêhiyaw* can be loosely translated as “four-bodied people” or “four-dimensional people” (*newo* means “four”), wherein a lived balance in each of the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual realms defines healthy living. If the purpose of program evaluation is to improve services based on the needs of participants,

evaluations of culturally based programs in Indigenous communities must be completed within an Indigenous worldview (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; NCCAH, 2013).

Johnston-Goodstar (2012) identified that frameworks for Indigenous evaluation must centralize Indigenous worldviews, include participatory inquiry and evaluation, and be of relevance and service to the community. Additionally, evaluation indicators “must consider Indigenous identity, epistemology, values, and spirituality” (Johnston-Goodstar, 2012, p. 112) and should acknowledge historical factors, follow cultural protocols, privilege relationships, reflect cultural values, and be based in ceremony (NCCAH, 2013). Lafrance et al. (2012) also affirmed that Indigenous knowledge, including how knowledge is gained through experience and ceremony, is foundational to an Indigenous evaluation framework. Finally, this framework must consider both the content of the framework and the process of the evaluation.

The Western emphasis on “evidence-based” practice is contrasted to Indigenous evaluation frameworks that are “practice-based”—and that “practice-based” evidence is found within the extensive cultural teachings, ceremonies, and languages that guide the process of Indigenous program evaluation (Abe et al., 2018; Lafrance et al., 2012; Naquin et al., 2008). Thus, understanding the efficacy of a program is captured through “contexts of meaning” as opposed to “contents of measurement” (Turner & Bodor, 2020), and relationships are achieved by creating connection within which meaning is experienced. To live in balance—*miyo pimâtisiwin*—is more than an outcome; it is a way of being and a commitment to live and practice in accordance with *nêhiyaw* ceremony, teachings, and values.

The processes that guide *nêhiyaw* Indigenous program evaluation and meaning are grounded in the teachings and values embedded in the following sections exploring ceremony, language, Circle process, and relational accountability—all of which form the heart of *nêhiyaw* program evaluation. We re-emphasize here that the evaluative approach being shared is based in *nêhiyaw* teachings and that other Indigenous communities may have similar or different teachings. Still, most Indigenous communities have similar structural commonalities such as language, ceremony, and teachings that are specific to that community and should form the foundation of Indigenous program evaluation.

NÊHIYAW INDIGENOUS CEREMONY AND PROCESS

Ceremony

Indigenous program evaluation is a ceremonial process and begins with ceremony—in our case, with a smudge, prayer, song, and/or Pipe Ceremony. For us, the importance of ceremony to the process of Indigenous program evaluation is held within the *nêhiyaw* teachings on *ospwâkan* (the Pipe). The accountability

elicited through ceremonial program evaluation is understood through the teachings on the four Natural Laws embodied in the *ospwâkan*:

The bowl of the pipe is the rock and represents *strength and determination*, the stem comes from the tree and represents *honesty*, the sweet grass, representing *kindness*, is used to light the pipe and the land and animals, representing *sharing*, are found within the pipe teaching itself. (Makokis, 2005, p. 46)

Through ceremony, participants are bound in the presence of creation to speak and listen from the heart (Kovach, 2009; Makokis, 2005). The Pipe Ceremony intentionally evokes the Natural Laws of *sakîhitowin* (love), *sohkeyitamowin* (determination), *wîchtowin* (sharing), and *kweyeskâtison* (honesty) into the program evaluation process, creating a profound sense of accountability to act in accordance with these laws. The process of *nêhiyaw* Indigenous program evaluation depends on participants' ability to viscerally understand this accountability and embrace spiritual knowing (Johnson et al., 2016). By surrendering the mind to the heart and releasing all pre-conceptions, the participants can honestly express their understanding of and connection to an Indigenous universe.

Circle process

There is a commitment to spiritual knowing that is carried in the transmission of knowledge through relationships embedded in the Circle. The Circle process is ceremony. Indigenous knowledge systems are not objectively separate from life—they are embedded in living interconnections that inform being and knowing. As such, the Circle process is a way of “being” (as opposed to “doing”) program evaluation that strives to make the unknown known through ceremony. The Circle is not a metaphor for understanding—it is an experience of shared understanding. It is only when all perspectives around the Circle are brought together through open dialogue that we can truly see and understand what lies in the center of the Circle, which, in this case, would be all aspects of the program itself.

The Circle process incorporates ways of knowing and being through the experience and teachings of ceremonial protocols; the balance and connection of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical—*miyo pimâtiswin*; and the principles of relational accountability. Involvement in the Circle process is a conscious commitment to the transformative potential of the program evaluation process. After an opening smudge ceremony, song, and prayer by an Elder, Circle participants are invited to share their stories around a guided topic or focus, which is figuratively placed within the center of the Circle. The Circle process creates a collective understanding of the shared and gathered perspectives allowing meaning to be uncovered and connection to be created. Collective understanding is arrived at through communication, interaction, interpretation, ceremony, relationship, and negotiation—all of which define ceremonial Circle process. The act of placing the focus of the evaluation in the centre of the Circle, in ceremony, allows the program participants to share their personal beliefs, thoughts, and feelings from a safe and non-judgemental place.

Relational accountability

Relationships are central and, accordingly, are key to the living process of Indigenous program evaluation. The creation and sharing of wisdom/understanding is a sacred trust, and the meaning of this understanding is determined and carried by all who have created, contributed to, and participated in its creation (Johnson, 2016). The relational aspect of the Circle process is vitally important, because, without the relationships embedded in the Circle, the knowledge cannot and does not exist. Attention to the sacredness of all relationships within the Circle is imperative. Ethical accountability in an Indigenous worldview takes on a broader and deeper meaning to include accountability to the Ancestors who share the knowledge, to the participants in the Circle process, to the broader community, to the land, and to future generations.

Relational accountability, therefore, lies at the core of the evaluation process. First, we create, form, and commit to relationships—which define who we are and to which we are held accountable—and everything we do must incorporate the principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, otherwise defined as good relations and relational accountability (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). In our work, we must be accountable to all our relationships, including our relationship to the Creator, to all our relations (those who have come before us and those who will come after us), to the land and all living things, and to ourselves (Wilson, 2008).

Two teachings in the *nêhiyaw* language—*pastahowin* and *ohcinewin*—are foundational to the concept of relational accountability (Makokis, 2009; Wilson, 2008). *pastahowin* is the breaking of both sacred law and/or natural law (Kuefler Josey & McRee, 2020). *ohcinewin* is the consequence of committing *pastahowin*—if you break a law or cross natural boundaries, your children and/or your grandchildren will experience whatever you did by breaking natural or sacred law (Kuefler Josey & McRee, 2020). Simply put, “if a person deliberately mistreats other creatures, that action will invoke natural justice . . . humans, who are capable of knowing the difference, are accountable for all of their actions to all of their relations” (Wilson, 2008, p. 107).

The goal of Indigenous culturally designed programs is to guide service providers to practice relational accountability. Instead of being outcome-orientated, Indigenous service provision is relationship-based and encourages service providers to view relationships as the outcomes to be modelled and pursued. The goal is for service providers to practice from a place of restoring personal balance, modelling this for families, and having the relational skills to help families find balance and connection. When our relationships are strong, and we are well enough ourselves, then we can continue to grow our understanding of Indigenous knowledge and eventually invite families on this journey with us.

NĒHIYAW INDIGENOUS PROGRAM INDICATORS

Through the use of specifically developed *nêhiyaw* Indigenous Program Indicators, we counter the void in culturally relevant indicators and processes to

accurately assess the impact and value of culturally designed services provided by and for Indigenous communities. The development of these indicators was necessary as Indigenous teachings and practices are often excluded from evaluation processes (Turner & Bodor, 2020). In addition, the colonized history of Indigenous communities must be acknowledged as the primary source of the negative circumstances that Indigenous families now find themselves in, and it is necessary to create ways of understanding that have meaning and are value-based within an Indigenous worldview.

In this regard, meaning is found through evaluating one's relationship to *iyiniw* (First People—People of the Land) knowledge. The Indigenous Program Indicators are a multipurpose tool used to assess balance or *miyo pimâtisiwin* in an individual's life through the Circle Teachings and the four interrelated realms—mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical—that form the life framework for the *nêhiyaw* people. As mentioned, the term *nêhiyaw* can be roughly translated to “four-bodied or four-dimensional people”—hence the need to incorporate the four realms. Ideally, we could all work toward living *miyo pimâtisiwin* with equilibrium occurring between the four human states of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. If disruption occurs, the resulting imbalance can be attributed to a loss of connection to community, family, oneself, and *iyiniw* practices (Turner & Bodor, 2020).

In using the Indigenous Program Indicators to assess their own mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, human-service providers identify how they can work toward achieving balance within themselves. *iyiniw* knowledge is transmitted by knowing and doing. There are opportunities to learn experientially from the intentional sharing of *iyiniw* teachings—when staff live the teachings in their everyday interactions, they can move toward modelling *miyo pimâtisiwin* (Makokis et al., 2016). During this reflection, many service providers have the opportunity to become aware of a potential lack of Indigenous knowledge and identify teachings that can further their learning. Additionally, this relational process assesses the balance and harmony staff can strive to create within themselves and exemplify in practice. This allows modified versions of the Indigenous Program Indicators to be used not just for service delivery evaluations but also for agency-based and service provider-based assessments of Indigenous knowledge and understanding. The results can then be focussed on areas of needed education or intervention. Other versions of the Indicators have been used as family assessment tools and pre- and post-test tools. All of these and other options occur along the continuum of meaning and measurement.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE: THE FAMILY CENTRE INDIGENOUS CAPACITY EVALUATION

Founded in 1942, the Family Centre of Northern Alberta Association (TFC) is a non-profit organization in Edmonton, Alberta, that exists to foster healthy families in healthy communities. TFC empowers children, youth, and families to

effectively navigate through change, raise healthy children, develop strong and healthy relationships, and heal from trauma. The leaders of TFC engaged in a deliberate and long-term process of building their Indigenous capacity to shift service provision while enhancing their practice and relationship with *iyiniw* people.

Methodology

The TFC and our team had first established a relationship through the provision of *omanitew* training—a four-day immersive ceremony and language-based training program providing direct training on providing culturally and teaching-based services to Indigenous families, children, individuals, and communities. The *nêhiyaw* term “*omanitew*” refers to a teaching about how visitors are to be treated—we see service-users as visitors to our agencies and try to treat them in accordance with the *omanitew* teachings. One component of the four-day training is a brief exploration of the Indigenous Program Indicators, their history, and the various goals that can be achieved through their use. From the beginning, the relationship between the TFC and our team has been based in ceremony and in the teachings—and is focused on Relational Accountability between one another and the ancestors. Some of the participants in the evaluation groups had previously attended the *omanitew* training.

Participation in ceremony fundamentally changes the relationships of all those who are involved. Having a ceremonial relationship between the team and the TFC allows us to work together in a collaborative framework that is defined by the Seven Teachings and the Natural Laws. As a direct outcome of the success and impact of the *omanitew* training, the TFC expressed an interest in using the Indigenous Program Indicators to evaluate the TFC’s abilities to provide appropriate resources to their Indigenous service users, to evaluate the TFC’s capacity in this area, and to develop a teaching program to provide extra support in specific areas as defined by the evaluation.

A plan was put in place to meet with a representative sample of TFC staff groups and to use the Indigenous Program Indicators to determine the levels of understanding and knowledge of each group when providing services to Indigenous service users. In the fall of 2019, members of the wisdom-seeking team met, in ceremony, with five staff groups at TFC with representation from children’s services-based staff, Indigenous staff, senior leadership, supervisors, and community-based staff. The wisdom-seeking team leading the sessions included an Indigenous Elder, a Métis facilitator, and an experienced non-Indigenous *wicistasowak* (one who comes to help).

Each session began in ceremony with a smudge, a prayer, and a song. Staff were then guided through a directed self-evaluation (using a modified version of the Indigenous Program Indicators) of their understanding of *iyiniw* knowledge and teachings within the four realms (mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical). The wisdom-seeking team explained and explored specific examples and

teachings in the five areas of each of the four realms (20 total areas). For example, while evaluating staff knowledge and understanding of the mental realm, teachings about *nêhiyaw* age and stage teachings (the Turtle Lodge Teachings) were shared with the session participants. Participants were free to anonymously self-score their level of knowledge and understanding in each of the 20 areas. The wisdom-seeking team requested that the participants complete their Indicators in accordance with the Natural Law Teachings (respect, honesty, determination, courage) that were shared at the beginning of each session.

A total of 59 staff members participated, and each session lasted approximately two hours. In addition to self-ranking the areas in the Indicators, participants were also encouraged to record any challenges they had experienced in their work, any feedback regarding the Circle process, any support they felt might be required to build their understanding of *iyiniw* knowledge, and any questions they had about the teachings or the material shared. The forms were collected, and the responses were analyzed and interpreted according to each staff group.

The findings were interpreted using coding and scoring, theming and interpretation, and, in one specific case, a quantitative data analysis tool was used. First, the format of the forms provided the opportunity to create a basic scoring table. Each area in each realm was associated with a score from 1–4. For example, if a participant selected a low level of knowledge or understanding of a specific area in a realm, they would receive a score of 1. A high level would receive a score of 4. Generally, someone scoring a low level of knowledge and understanding in all 20 areas would receive a total score of 20, while a participant scoring a high level in all areas would achieve an overall score of 80. While admittedly a simplistic form of scoring an evaluation, with many threats to internal and external validity and reliability, the primary goal of the process was for each participant to hear the teachings and examples and connect their own level of understanding with each of the specific areas. Second, participants were encouraged and given space to record their own qualitative questions and/or responses to each of the areas. We received extensive questions, comments, and requests—many participants used the spaces provided and the back of the forms to record their thoughts. Finally, we were curious to see if there was a statistical relationship between overall scores for individuals who had attended the *omanitew* training. The scoring table was completed, and all of the comments were transcribed and arranged according to staff group and Indicator realm and area. The team gathered together and, after starting in ceremony, reviewed the data and the responses, identifying strengths and areas requiring further support and training. In addition, the scoring table was used to run a *t*-test comparing overall realm and area scores with individuals who had previously attended the *omanitew* training.

The following section explores the aggregated responses to the Indigenous Program Indicators. For the purposes of this article, we have briefly summarized the results gathered from the five staff groups within each of the four realms.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF OUR LEARNINGS

Emotional realm

In our evaluation, the emotional realm was one of the most robust realms overall. All levels of staff indicated a sound understanding of colonization and the transmission of trauma that is situated within the emotional realm. Important to note, however, is that this understanding came from academic learning and personal interest, along with specific trauma education provided by TFC.

Staff also listed many barriers faced in practice, such as “racism, tokenism, differences between Western and Indigenous worldviews, hierarchies, policies, restrictions, poverty, neglect, and travel to community.” Indigenous staff, in particular, experienced these challenges at multiple levels and affirmed that more supports are required with an emphasis on healing through ceremony and access to Elders.

Considerable systemic barriers were noted when it came to working within Western institutions and systems. Many staff were aware that these systems encourage Western perspectives on healing, which in return creates a struggle to have Indigenous resources and supports recognized and accepted. Multiple participants identified that there is “a lack of connection to Elders for the purposes of healing.” Additional comments concerned capacity building, learning through experience, and the “integration of self,” which was paramount to understanding spirituality and ceremony. While leadership understood the importance of cultural supports and ceremony, they lacked connections to Elders and community cultural resources and were limited by policy and Western understandings of trauma and healing.

Mental realm

Within the mental realm, staff had an understanding of colonization and history, gained through both formal and informal (stories) knowledge as a “general, global understanding.” On average, however, staff agreed that although they indicated a higher level of awareness, they still felt it was not as robust as it should be. *moniyaw* (non-Indigenous person) staff expressed a reluctance to be “a leader in Cree concepts that I feel are not from my history.” The mental realm also saw a significant conversation regarding the appropriateness of a non-Indigenous helper introducing and/or reconnecting clients to their culture.

Of particular relevance was Indigenous staff’s recognition of the importance of Indigenous languages and the vitality of the role of language in healing and developing an in-depth understanding of Indigenous worldviews. One participant described “language [as] creating a relationship to self.”

Spiritual realm

Within the spiritual realm, staff continued to acknowledge the importance of ceremony. One issue that was focused on significantly was a request for more support in participating to become more comfortable with ceremony. It was also

noted that the ability to practice ceremony in staff's professional life had a positive impact on their personal life as well.

Staff added that they aspire to move forward with sharing and applying the teachings. They expressed some hesitation, however, such as misrepresenting expertise in Indigenous teachings, where/how to access or attend ceremonies, and the need to build confidence to take the initiative to participate in ceremony. There was also a noteworthy request for "advocacy training for allies with regard to cultural advocacy," and even creating advocacy roles within TFC.

One area of note was the connection between understanding the importance of ceremony in healing and the skills and tools to support people in accessing such ceremonies. Within this realm, there were deep conversations about settlers feeling uncomfortable with facilitating the connection to ceremony as well as engaging with Ceremony-Holders and Elders. This indicates a crucial need for building relationships as foundational features in organizations.

The importance of "integration of self" and "self-connection" to ceremony and cultural practices was expressed. However, it was also identified that throughout the organization, there is a gap between understanding Indigenous Knowledge and sharing and applying this knowledge in practice.

Physical realm

The physical realm was by far the weakest realm for staff. Consequently, there were multiple requests for immersive, land-based, and experiential learning opportunities for the many teachings in the physical realm, including the Tipi Teachings, Medicine-Picking, parenting and pre-contact attachment, Moss Bag and Swing Teachings, a formal agency contact for a healer, community cultural resource, and a cultural calendar.

Additionally, it was noted that "we supply car seats, diapers, formula, why can't we have supplies and space for Moss Bags, Swings, etc.?" Staff also requested "more opportunity for medicine picking with families and with staff as an agency."

BRIEF SUMMARY OF SCORING ANALYSIS

Based on the overall scoring, it was suggested that attention should be directed toward the following specific indicator questions: emotional realm #1; spiritual realm #3; physical realm #2, #3, and #5. In addition, indicator questions mental realm #3 and spiritual realm #2, and #4 should also be explored for additional training. In addition, the physical realm, and, to some degree, the spiritual realm should be explored for overall additional teaching and training.

Summary of t-test analysis of training/no training comparison

According to the *t*-test, there was a significant difference in the average scores between people who have been moderately or extensively involved in Indigenous teachings and ceremony and those who have had minimal or limited involvement.

The average score for people who had been involved in Indigenous teachings and ceremony (the *omanitew* training) moderately or extensively is 14.47 points higher than people who have had minimal or limited involvement. The Pearson's *R* equals 0.678, indicating a strong positive association with past involvement with Indigenous teachings and level of Indigenous capacity. People involved with more training are more likely to score higher in Indigenous capacity.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

As a result of compiling the comments and feedback from the five staff groups at the Family Centre, the following recommendations were proposed that would support the continued development of their Indigenous capacity.

Continued training and capacity building

The Family Centre staff acknowledged the impact of the Indigenous training initiatives and teachings previously received. To further this knowledge building, we would suggest that TFC continue to offer the current training provided while expanding into other training areas.

Relationship building

All of the five staff groups reiterated that they lack connections to Elders, cultural supports or resources, and/or Indigenous communities. We would suggest that TFC develop a strategic approach to enhancing the agency's overall understanding and relationship with these resources and supports. The five staff groups also indicated that TFC and Children's Services need to work towards strengthening their partnership and relationship—especially in the area of practice with Indigenous children and families. We would therefore suggest that TFC consider potential relationship building strategies such as joint cultural training, creating a relationship in ceremony, and engaging in the Circle process to have a continued dialogue with their partners that is based in ceremony and relational accountability.

Support to Indigenous staff

A number of Indigenous staff disclosed that they face significant challenges outside of the agency in their work related to racism, discrimination, and tokenism.

A culturally supportive framework and infrastructure for practice

TFC staff commonly acknowledge the importance of culture, ceremony, and teachings but indicate that the agency should continue to develop and support an "Indigenous Practice Framework." It was recognized that some staff and teams are using ceremony in practice, but this typically occurs in isolation and is not led as agency-wide service provision.

Building capacity for advocacy

Many staff indicated that they understand the importance of connection to culture and ceremony, but they are impacted by Western service delivery and legislation when trying to integrate ceremony into practice. Staff often acknowledged that they do not have an in-depth understanding of Indigenous worldviews in order to fulfill the role of a cultural ally or advocate. It was also suggested that TFC consider having specific service-delivery positions that are focused on advocacy. We would suggest that TFC consider the creation of advocacy positions internally or provide staff with further training aimed at being an ally or a cultural advocate.

Knowing and doing: Building staff confidence and comfort

A common remark shared by TFC staff was that “I have the teachings but am not confident or comfortable with sharing them.” The ability to discuss and share the teachings is often linked to one’s ability to live the teachings and understand the importance of “knowing and doing.”

Continued support from the Family Centre’s Knowledge Holder

TFC staff acknowledge the importance of having a Knowledge Holder and seeking their support as they continue to develop their Indigenous practice and collaborate with Indigenous families and communities. We would suggest that TFC support staff with building their confidence and comfortability to engage in cultural practices by utilizing the support of TFC’s Knowledge Holder to provide continual coaching on protocol, how to approach Elders, and being a mentor or guide with staff in ceremony. Also, providing ways to support continued discussion and review of the teachings received through engaging in the Circle process could be helpful. Finally, routinely hosting learning ceremonies and cultural events specifically for staff will support their ongoing personal and professional development with regard to living the teachings.

CONCLUSION

As more social services organizations recognize the need for Indigenized program design and delivery, innovative approaches and tools based within Indigenous knowledge, culture, language, teachings, and ceremony that meaningfully assess and evaluate programs will be needed. It is imperative that these agencies also consider the complexities involved in these processes of assessing and evaluating, as well as not only its staff’s ability to support Indigenous children, families, and communities but also how staff themselves are able to embody the concepts inherent within Indigenous capacity building and program delivery. Using TFC as an example, we have demonstrated the fundamental importance of adopting Indigenous evaluation processes as part of a new path for service delivery that honours Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing and effectively supports Indigenous children, families, and communities.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

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Leona Makokis is a member of the Kehewin Cree Nation and has dedicated her life to supporting the growth of programming that balances *iyiniw* language and worldview with contemporary experiences. Dr. Makokis was the *nocikwesiw* for this project, providing guidance and leadership to the team.

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Kaila Kornberger is a Métis–Cree woman from Edmonton, Alberta, with ancestral ties to the Red River Métis. Kaila had the privilege of centring her MSW education on restoring *nēhiyaw* birthing practices through the stories and teachings of her people. Kaila continues to learn and grow through the teachings of her ancestors, which she applies to her social work practice.

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Carol Turner is a supervisor with The Family Centre of Northern Alberta (TFC), serving children, youth, and families and is an *oski kawimaw* (new mom) to *otanisa* (her daughter) Emma. Carol has been gifted with a Ceremonial Cree name—*mihko pihēsīw iskwew* (Red Thunder Bird Woman)—and has been involved with Indigenous teachings from *nēhiyaw* knowledge keepers.

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