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Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Ceremony and Transitions: Culture-based Approaches to Violence Prevention

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Indigenous Friendship Centres

About the OFIFC

Founded in 1971, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) works to support, advocate for, and build the capacity of member Friendship Centres across Ontario.

Emerging from a nation-wide, grass-roots movement dating back to the 1950's, Friendship Centres are community hubs where Indigenous people living in towns, cities, and urban centres can access culturally-based and culturally-appropriate programs and services every day. Today, Friendship Centres are dynamic hubs of economic and social convergence that create space for Indigenous communities to thrive. Friendship Centres are idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals, they are sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are, and they are safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports.

In Ontario more than 85 per cent of Indigenous people live off-reserve in urban and rural communities. The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly-growing population through programs and initiatives that span justice, health, family support, long-term care, healing and wellness, employment and training, education, research, and more.

Friendship Centres receive their mandate from their communities, and they are inclusive of all Indigenous people – First Nation, Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit, and those who self-identify as Indigenous from Turtle Island.

Learn more about the work the OFIFC does to support Friendship Centres at ***www.ofifc.org.***

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Executive Summary

The Ceremony and Transitions research project explored culture-based wise practices of gender-based violence prevention with four Indigenous partner communities across Ontario. We began with two main objectives for the project: 1) explore the contemporary landscape of ceremonies, life stage transitions, and other cultural practices with Indigenous youth in Ontario, and 2) explore how these practices constitute promising practices for eliminating violence against Indigenous women and girls.

This project employed the USAI Research Framework (2016, 2nd Ed), a community-driven research methodology that guides all OFIFC research projects. Within each community, a Local Community Researcher led research activities and data collection. Local Community Researchers worked closely with the OFIFC Research team to analyze research findings and produce this report. The project was active for one year (March 2018- March 2019).

Ceremony and Transitions was driven by the four Indigenous partner communities who approached this work in different ways. All partner communities recognized that culture-based approaches are necessary for addressing the context of gender-based violence within Indigenous communities. The project was framed and implemented with the recognition that violence against 2SLGBTQQIA+ people must be included in conversations and strategies regarding gender-based violence prevention. Under this shared root of colonial violence, partner communities engaged 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members in varying ways in project activities. However, research activities and the subsequent analysis were not 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific and are therefore limited in terms of representing this community.

Through this research, we identified two foundational common understandings of culture-based violence prevention: first, the importance of embodying and 'living out' one's culture, and second, the implementation of Indigenous pedagogies and their connection to successful violence prevention efforts. Despite differences in territories, languages, nations, and on-reserve/off-reserve contexts, these two understandings were shared amongst all communities as underpinning culture-based violence prevention in Indigenous communities.

We also identified four key promising practices toward addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. First, violence prevention initiatives should support the restoration of Indigenous relationships, investing in healthy social infrastructure to create violence-free community environments. Second, it is necessary to support long-term community-driven research to facilitate more opportunities to expand and deepen knowledge on cultural mechanisms to prevent violence. Third, initiatives should support the implementation of Indigenous pedagogies and cultural practices, to restore Indigenous practices of knowledge transmission that are integral to violence prevention. Fourth and finally, efforts should strengthen existing community-driven programs and initiatives to encourage integration and long-term impact, using a trauma-informed approach that minimizes the harm that can occur through unstable or short-term funding.

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Introduction

In every region of Ontario, both on- and off-reserve, urban and rural, Indigenous communities are grappling with an epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people . At the same time, Indigenous communities are engaged in the work to revitalize cultural practices, center Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and increase community members' access to traditional Indigenous Knowledge. These efforts are interconnected. Indigenous worldviews acknowledge the complex webs of relationships that join all life together, and gender-based violence constitutes a disruption to this order. As such, the work to end gender-based violence requires Indigenous communities, with the meaningful collaboration and support of non-Indigenous partners, to remember and regenerate the ways of being that make gender-based violence unacceptable.

In 2018, a group of Indigenous partners in Ontario developed a concept for a research project that would proceed from this culture-based understanding. Partners included the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Ontario Native Women's Association, the Métis Nation of Ontario, Independent First Nations, and Six Nations of the Grand River. Indigenous partners voiced the importance of research to identify culture-based wise practices of gender-based violence prevention, identifying youth as a key part of community to engage. Indigenous partners drew on their knowledge of their communities and cultures to identify that the research should explore the linkages between cultural connection and ending violence. Partners also put forward suggestions for communities to engage, based on their knowledge of where this cultural connection/ violence prevention work was occurring. The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) developed these ideas into the Ceremony and Transitions Research Project.

We are pleased to present this final research report of Ceremony and Transitions, which documents the work of four community partners: Ininew Friendship Centre in Cochrane; St. David Catholic Elementary School in Sudbury; Ohero:kon (Under the Husk) at Six Nations of the Grand River; and N'Amerind Friendship Centre in London. In every community, the work to end gender-based violence and support traditional Indigenous knowledge transmission was already underway. The Ceremony and Transitions Research Project created an important opportunity to engage local community researchers to document and support these efforts, greatly expand the reach of cultural activities and

knowledge transmission opportunities, generate wise practices, and learn from each other on how successful violence prevention efforts can be further grown.

The OFIFC shares this report with the hope that the insights, hard work, teachings, and generosity of the four participating communities can benefit other Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous partners working toward ending gender-based violence.

Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women in Ontario: Project Background

The high levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Ontario, present for decades, was brought to mainstream attention in 1989 with the release of the Breaking Free report by the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA). Breaking Free was an important milestone in commanding the public's attention on the issue of family violence in Indigenous communities, connecting this violence to ongoing colonial legacies, and demanding immediate action to end violence for Indigenous women and girls in the province.

Despite Indigenous communities' identification of these issues and calls for support, Indigenous communities (and specifically Indigenous women) continued to experience disproportionate levels of violence (Browndridge, 2008). In response to this lack of progress and the need for immediate action, the OFIFC and ONWA organized "A Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women" on March 20, 2007. The Summit brought together Indigenous community leadership from across Ontario and resulted in the development of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women (ONWA & OFIFC 2007). Between 2008-2012, the OFIFC participated in five additional gatherings with other Indigenous partners to create space for Indigenous women to advocate for change to end family violence across a number of key areas. These gatherings were important spaces to draw public attention to the issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls and help the provincial government understand the necessity of meaningful collaboration with Indigenous organizations to achieve positive outcomes.

The Ontario government formally adopted the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women in 2010, and with five Indigenous provincial organizations formed the Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women (JWG). In 2016, an initiative to end violence against Indigenous women emerged, largely based on the work of Indigenous partners through the Strategic Framework and the JWG. This cross-sectoral commitment by the government of Ontario focused on working with Indigenous communities on joint efforts to end violence. For Indigenous partners, the work undertaken through this initiative was an important journey of asserting Indigenous

understandings of collaboration and co-development in relationship with the provincial government in power at that time. Evolving from this work, Indigenous partners across Ontario have continued to advocate to end violence against Indigenous women as it relates to front-line service provision, research and in policy.

Ceremony and Transitions: A Co-Developed Project

Indigenous partners in Ontario have long advocated for community-driven research to develop solutions and wise practices to address violence in Indigenous communities. In 2018, the OFIFC worked with Indigenous partners to reach a common understanding of the specific needs and priorities of Indigenous communities in Ontario related to research and ending violence. Through these conversations, Indigenous partners communicated several key points to guide this work. Partners felt that research should be community-driven and aligned with local community priorities. Partners expressed that research should engage both on- and off-reserve, Northern and Southern Indigenous communities in Ontario that represent a diversity of Indigenous people. Partners emphasized that research should engage cultural Knowledge Keepers to better understand the causes of violence through a culturally-grounded lens, as well as youth to focus efforts on prevention. Finally, partners expected that research would identify wise practices to reduce the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. Informed by this input, the OFIFC led the development of the Ceremony and Transitions Research Project, funded by the government of Ontario as part of the work to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

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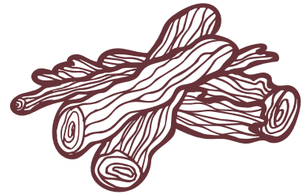
Research Statement and Objectives



The Ceremony and Transitions Research Project explored the role of ceremony and cultural connection among youth as a mechanism of violence prevention that can contribute to the elimination of violence against Indigenous women and girls, as well as a healing tool that can support youth who have experienced gender-based violence. The project worked with four Indigenous community partners to: 1) explore the contemporary landscape of ceremonies, culturally-grounded life stage transitions, and other cultural practices with Indigenous youth in Ontario, and 2) explore how these practices constitute promising practices for eliminating violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Key objectives of the project included:

- Conduct research that promotes healing and creates opportunities for communities to share wise practices to prevent and decrease violence.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer on gender roles and responsibilities, and understandings of how these roles and responsibilities have been disrupted by ongoing colonization.
- Support spaces for cultural teachings and values to be shared within communities.
- Promote Indigenous youths' access to ceremonies and cultural activities and examine the impact of these activities on youth.
- Create space for communities to voice Indigenous understandings of healing, violence prevention, and safety within the community.
- Ensure that research is done in a community-driven way, in which Indigenous communities can locally determine and locally develop all research activities and have ownership over all data, knowledge mobilization, and research products.

As outlined above, the project's scope and framing emphasized culture and gender-based violence prevention for women and girls, evolving out of previous collaborative work with Indigenous partners and the provincial government. However, according to OFIFC's community-driven approach, each partner community determined their own pathway for exploring the research question(s) according to their needs, context and priorities and in acknowledgment of a wholistic understanding of gender roles and responsibilities. In practice, this meant that some communities focused on a

broader scope of cultural activities and violence prevention work that was inclusive of 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members. Some communities also engaged community members outside the youth life stage, based on local priorities. The implementation of the project in each partner community will be outlined in more detail later in this report.

The collaborative decision to focus this project on youth, and the intersections between violence prevention and cultural connection made sense to all Indigenous partners. However, we recognize that outside the cultural framework of Indigenous communities in Ontario, these linkages may not be apparent. The need for community-driven research on the connections between cultural connectedness and ending violence may therefore not be evident. The following section reviews some of the research and policy literature on the broader linkages between Indigenous cultural connection, ending gender-based violence-- inclusive of 2SLGBTQQIA+ experiences-- and wellbeing, identifying some of the research needs that the Ceremony and Transitions Research Project seeks to address.

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Context: Ending Violence and Cultural Connections

Overview

This section situates the Ceremony and Transitions research project in relation to both Indigenous Knowledge as well as the current context of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in Canada, using the work of Indigenous communities, organizations and scholars. First, we overview some cultural frameworks from Indigenous communities across Ontario that demonstrate the profound utility of Indigenous Knowledge for living well together. We then examine statistics and documentation efforts that reflect and contextualize the violence that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face today. We discuss colonization as the root cause of this violence, specifically examining the Indian Act and residential school system as two mechanisms of colonization. We then discuss cultural disruption as a key outcome of colonization that contributes to violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Finally, we examine community knowledge and research literature on fostering cultural connections as a form of violence prevention.

Indigenous Knowledge for Everyday Good Living

Indigenous communities have always existed within distinct cultural frameworks that make it possible to live well on the land, achieve social cohesion within the community, and engage in reciprocal and respectful relationships with all of creation. Different nations across Turtle Island have different ways of referring to and understanding these frameworks for living well. At the OFIFC, the term “Everyday Good Living” is used to describe this ongoing, daily work of sustaining Indigenous lifeways. Indigenous communities also hold different bodies of Indigenous Knowledge- stories, teachings, laws, and concepts- that convey how to live and operate within these frameworks on a daily basis, as well as how to deal with violations or disruptions within relationships. While each community is different, common elements of Indigenous Knowledge include recognition of kinship networks and extended family, recognition of individuals’ gifts and identity, mechanisms for accountability, and roles and responsibilities for each person.

The transfer of Indigenous Knowledge is vital to ensure that community members understand how to uphold these ways of living and to ensure the overall health of the

community. "[Indigenous] culture contains within it intrinsic truths that have withstood centuries of assault and that form the strengths upon which [Indigenous] peoples construct connections to one another, the land, their ancestors, and their self" (OFIFC 2012). Indigenous Knowledge transfer requires both relationships and time: it requires "sacrifice, effort and energy, and it carries responsibilities for those sharing and receiving it" (OFIFC 2019).

While Indigenous cultural frameworks and processes of knowledge transfer have always survived, there have been massive disruptions. Indigenous communities in Canada today must contend with daily systemic challenges to living in a healthy, culturally grounded way, legacies of intergenerational trauma, and violence. Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in particular are vulnerable to, and experience unacceptable levels of violence.

Current Statistics on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls

Statistics point to the severity of the current context of violence against Indigenous women and girls: Indigenous women are more than six times more likely to be a victim of homicide than non-Indigenous women (Miladinovic and Mulligan 2014). Indigenous women in Canada between the ages of 15-24 experience violent victimization three times as high as non-Indigenous women (Boyce, 2016). Indigenous women make up 4.3 percent of the overall Canadian female population, but account for 11.3 percent of all cases of missing women and represent 16 percent of female homicides (RCMP, 2014).

At the same time, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are uniquely vulnerable to experiences of violence and discrimination and this is compounded by the de-prioritization and erasure of their experiences in gender-based violence conversations within both mainstream contexts and, often, community contexts as well. 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples' experiences of violence in Indigenous communities exist in tandem with challenges around safe and affordable housing, gender and sexuality affirming services, lack of inclusion and belonging, as well as a shortage of specific anti-violence resources designed for Two-Spirit people. Although limited statistics exist on violence against Two-Spirit people, we know that Two-Spirit and trans people experience violence nearly 5 times more often than their peers (Muree Martin & Walia, 2019). Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth suicide rates are 10 times higher than other groups (Wilson, 2016). Both 2SLGBTQ+ identified and Indigenous identified youth are overrepresented in homelessness statistics (Homelesshub, 2020). Moreover, Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth struggle to find safe and welcoming housing in both urban spaces and on reserve (Saewyc et al, 2017). These experiences of isolation and precarity expose community members to higher risks of violence and victimization.

The very existence of these statistics is the result of decades of work by Indigenous women's groups, Indigenous organizations and the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people who fought to bring mainstream attention to this issue (NWAC, 2010a). For years, the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people has been minimized, misconstrued or denied by mainstream media, law enforcement, and federal and provincial governments within Canada (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Pearce, 2013; Saramo, 2016). After years of pressure from Indigenous organizations and grassroots community initiatives' documentation of missing and murdered cases, on May 16, 2014, the RCMP released a report on missing and murdered Indigenous women which confirmed a total of 1,017 Indigenous female homicide victims and 164 unresolved missing Indigenous women from 1980-2012. The report also confirmed a total of 225 unsolved cases of either missing or murdered Indigenous women for this period. In response to ongoing pressure from Indigenous communities and organizations, international human rights groups, as well as explicit mention in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the Canadian government announced a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in August 2016. The Commission's mandate was to examine and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada by looking at patterns and underlying factors, and a Final Report was released in June 2019. The Final Report will be discussed further in the sections below, but it is important to note here that the Report concluded that Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are subject to systemic race-based violence in Canada and this violence amounts to genocide (National Inquiry MMIWG, 2019a).

Indigenous organizations, communities, scholars, and human rights groups have raised concerns with these institutional responses to documenting violence, while at the same time acknowledging the need for documentation to better understand and demonstrate the extent of the violence. Concerns include limitations on scope and timelines; the problematic nature of a 'Three-Stream Approach' (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) that does not recognize urban Indigenous communities; the inability of the inquiry structure to compel government or police action; limited community engagement and accessibility issues around providing testimony; the formalized nature of proceedings that may confuse or further traumatize survivors and families; the fact that the majority of violence against Indigenous women goes unreported to police; and the invisibility of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people within this data (Fobear 2014; Hargreaves 2017; Hunt, 2016; OFIFC, December 2018; IACHR 2014; Walsh 2017).

In addition, Indigenous communities and advocates note that while documenting violence is important, it is not enough - Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people continue to be murdered or disappeared even as these processes unfold, and many cases remain unsolved (NWAC, 2010b).

Colonization as a Root Cause of Violence

For years, Indigenous communities have answered conclusively that colonization is the root cause of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (NWAC 2008, NWAC 2010c, ONWA 1989, National Inquiry MMIWG 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). As Bourgeois (2018) explains, "Making sense of the contemporary social phenomenon of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada requires a theoretical understanding of settler colonialism as a dominant system of oppression that has long organized, and continues to organize, life in Canadian society" (p. 67). In their closing submission to the National Inquiry, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs state "...the crisis of MMIWG is a direct result of colonization. Colonial policies and laws established control over every element of our lives as First Nations people- our identity, our culture, our children, our movement, our relationships, our education, our lands, our resources, our food- our survival. All government institutions are built upon these racist foundations intended to erase our traditional and ceremonial ways" (p.4).

There is an extensive body of Indigenous research that examines historical and ongoing colonization in Canada, as well as the specific gendered elements of colonization which have targeted Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (see National Inquiry MMIWG 2019). While a full overview is beyond the scope of this report, there are several prevalent colonial concepts and narratives in Canada that are relevant to name as they constitute the foundation for the current context of violence. These include racist ideologies that dehumanize Indigenous people (Simpson 2016), justifications for the patriarchal domination of Indigenous women (Anderson 2016), hyper-sexualization of Indigenous women and conquest narratives (Razack 2016), erasure of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people and the violent enforcement of gender binaries (Taylor & Ristock 2011), and the ideology of terra nullius which underpins all violence against Indigenous people by justifying colonization in general (Borrows 2015). As scholars have argued, these ideologies are never simply ideas but are enacted and enforced through a wide range of state structures and policies, with the intent to dismantle or eliminate Indigenous communities (Palmater 2016). The Indian Act and the residential school system are two of many examples of colonial policies and structures implemented by the Canadian state which have had and continue to have destructive impacts on Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, as well as Indigenous people broadly.

The Indian Act and Gender-based Violence

The Indian Act is a piece of legislation that determines and restricts many aspects of Indigenous life. The Indian Act was designed to allow the Canadian government to govern Indigenous communities with a high level of control, despite the existence

of many historical treaties which pre-date the Indian Act and which represent more equitable understandings of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities would conduct themselves in relation to each other. While the Indian Act pertains exclusively to Status Indians, the Act defines who has 'Status' and who does not and therefore impacts (either directly or indirectly) the lives of both Status and non-Status Indigenous people in Canada. The negative and wide-ranging impacts of the Indian Act on Indigenous communities are widely documented and include: dispossession from lands, creation of the reserve and band council structure, criminalization of cultural practices and languages, imposition of poverty, negative health outcomes, and restrictions on Indigenous peoples' ability to travel or gather (Barker, 2008; Bourassa et al 2004; Lawrence, 2003; OFIFC, 1978; Palmater, 2014). Sarah Hunt (2016) explains the fundamentally problematic nature of the Indian Act as a colonial tool that attempts to define and contain Indigeneity:

> *"Having the possibilities for one's recognition determined by hegemonic power structures has implications that span representational and material realms, as the inability to be comprehended as a legitimate subject is both dehumanizing and deeply implicated in the normalization of violence. The imposition of colonial knowledge has served to erase Indigenous systems of knowing and being, and has de-legitimized Indigenous socio-legal norms and identities." (Hunt 2016, p. 27)*

The Indian Act also endorses systemic discrimination against Indigenous women through unequal sex-based criteria for who is considered 'Status', and therefore limits Indigenous women's freedom to exercise treaty rights, property rights, the right to live on reserve, and health benefits. As stated in the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, "[i]f Indian people generally can be said to have been disadvantaged by the unfair and discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act, Indian women have been doubly disadvantaged" (p. 276). The website of the Native Women's Association of Canada provides "A Short History of Sex-Based Inequities in the Indian Act" 2019) which provides a useful overview of these issues and Indian Act amendments. In brief, for 116 years a Status woman who married a non-Status man would lose her own Status and be unable to pass Status onto her descendants, while a Status man could marry a non-Status woman and pass Status onto their partner and children. In the 1970s, several important court cases were brought forward by Indigenous women to challenge the sexist provisions in the Indian Act. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell and Yvonne Bédard made separate legal challenges to section 12(1)(b) of the Act, through which they lost their Status after marrying a non-Status man. The cases were brought together to the Supreme Court, who ruled against the Corbiere Lavell and Bédard challenge and upheld section 12(1)(b). Sandra Lovelace Nicholas took her case, challenging section 12(1)(b) to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 1981, where the UN ruled in her favour. In 1985, in response to intense lobbying from Indigenous women and supportive Indigenous organizations, the government of Canada amended the Indian

Act with Bill C-31. Through Bill C-31, some women who had lost Status through 'marrying out' were able to have Status reinstated. Bill C-31 eliminated some forms of sex-based discrimination while introducing yet others, including separate categories of Status and a "second generation cut-off" for the grandchildren of women with Status reinstated through Bill C-31.

In 2006, the British Columbia Supreme Court heard the case of Sharon McIvor, an Indigenous woman who argued that the Indian Act remained discriminatory on the basis of sex despite Bill C-31. The court's decision in this case caused Parliament to pass Bill C-3 in 2011, which was intended to address the concerns raised by McIvor's case. However, some forms of sex-based discrimination remained, and further amendments to the Indian Act were passed in 2017 with Bill S-3, in response to the Superior Court of Quebec decision in Descheneaux c. Canada. Indigenous organizations, however, have identified forms of sex-based discrimination which still have not been addressed, including differentiation between 6(1)(a) (seen as male category) and 6(1)(c) status (seen as female category) (NWAC policy sheet). Indigenous community members and academics, including Lynn Gehl, continue to call attention to the numerous persisting forms of sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act, despite the federal government's claims that this discrimination has been eliminated.

While the Indian Act continues to discriminate against Indigenous women and the descendants of Indigenous women, it completely erases Two-Spirit and gender diverse Indigenous people. Similarly, the Indian Act also limits access to resources and rights for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (Hunt, 2018). The Act functions from a cisnormative and heteronormative position, in that the Act assumes all Indigenous people are cisgender and heterosexual, and subsequently privileges these identities. This assumption negatively impacts Indigenous communities as it effectively erases both 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members, their needs, and experiences while also denying inherent and culturally diverse community-grounded governance structures. Although Two-Spirit people are disproportionally impacted by these provisions, the imposition of cisheteronormative and patriarchal approaches to governance in the Indian Act have had long lasting harmful impacts on communities as a whole (Cannon, 2019). The use of a gender binary throughout the Act means that there is no provision for how Two-Spirit and gender diverse Indigenous people can pass Status onto descendants.

In addition to this discrimination, the use of the gender binary conflicts with culture-based understandings of gender, roles and responsibilities, and community membership. By using blood quantum as the means to determine eligibility for Status and enforcing a strict gender binary, the Indian Act is a tool of Indigenous dispossession and community fragmentation (Hunt, 2016). Indigenous scholars and activists have identified that the intention of the Indian Act is to ultimately legislate

Status Indians out of existence and assimilate Indigenous people into colonial society (Lawrence, 2004; Palmater, 2011, 2014). Morden (2016) notes that the Indian Act has been extraordinarily resistant to change as a result of a "legitimacy trap" in which "it limits the field of play by according or denying political actors standing in the policy discussion, but political leaders associated with it lack legitimacy in their constituencies because of that association" (p. 114). It is important to note that while we highlight the Indian Act here, colonial governments had developed several policies including the Gradual Civilization Act (1857) and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act (1869) with the clear intention of assimilating Indigenous people in Canada.

Sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act is directly implicated in the violence that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face today. Gender and sexuality continue to be factors in determining how Indigenous identities are validated by the government through the Indian Act, and therefore determining factors in who can physically remain in their communities (Lawrence, 2003). The physical (through forcible removal from community for individuals and their descendants), mental, emotional and spiritual violence enacted on Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people through the Indian Act has historically put these individuals at a greater risk for exposure to violence, through social and economic marginalization (IACHR, 2014). This systemic discrimination in the Indian Act was a key way in which Indigenous culture-based roles and responsibilities and culture-based understandings of gender were undermined, and gendered power relations were enforced (Hunt 2016, Wesley-Esquimaux 2009). While different Indigenous nations hold different understandings around gender, Indigenous scholars have documented how women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people were respected and honoured for their specific roles and responsibilities in traditional societies (Anderson 2011, Brant Castellano 2009, Hanson 2016, Simpson 2017). With the implementation of the Indian Act, Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people have been to a great extent robbed of the recognition of their position within Indigenous communities.

The Residential School System and Gender-based Violence

Indigenous communities, organizations and scholars have identified the residential school system as a force of colonization with gendered impacts for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The residential school system was a targeted attempt by the government and churches to eliminate Indigenous communities by separating children from their families as well as preventing and criminalizing the transfer of Indigenous knowledge and culture. The impacts of the residential school system have been widely documented and a thorough summary is beyond the scope of this report (see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a). However, there are specific gender based elements of the residential school system that are relevant to name to

contextualize the current epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The imposition of rigid gender norms enforced a patriarchal and cisheteronormative system of relationship rooted in Chrisitan morals that valued children who identified as girls or who were gender nonconforming less than their peers (Hanson 2016, Martin-Hill 2003). These gender roles permeated every aspect of life at school, including who children could spend time with, what they were allowed to learn, and who they were allowed to be. It is widely accepted that residential schools placed children into learning streams based on gender- for example, girls were expected to learn to sew, cook, and clean while boys were expected to do manual and agricultural labour. Residential schools also taught and reinforced negative stereotypes about Indigenous women, including their 'promiscuity' and status as incompetent mothers (Anderson, 2011). In general, residential schools normalized violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people through the enforcement of gendered power dynamics and cisheternormative and patriarchal values.

It is important to note that the residential school system emerged as a government-mandated attempt to assimilate Indigenous communities and disrupt our ways of knowing and being. This attempt was a more targeted effort at assimilation that emerged out of other efforts that preceded, and continued to occur in tandem with residential schools including the presence of Christian missionaries within communities and day schools. These other efforts had failed to completely interrupt the process of knowledge transfer and cultural ways of life so residential schools were an escalation of this attempt by physically removing children.

The ongoing attacks on Indigenous knowledge transfer is significant in the context of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people and violence, because it means that the roles and responsibilities of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people have also been attacked. In Indigenous communities, every person has a place in the circle and the ability to self-determine their community role (OFIFC, 2016a) including those who are 2SLGBTQQIA+. Indigenous communities supported children to explore and understand themselves, their gifts, and their role in relation to the community. Each nation had their own cultural teachings and governance structures that facilitated these traditional understandings of roles and responsibilities with the intention of supporting and sustaining balance in the community.

2SLGBTQQIA+ people were uniquely targeted and mistreated by staff at residential schools for not conforming to the rigid gender roles imposed on children (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada 2016b, p. 148). Although all children, including those who were cisgender and heterosexual, were vulnerable to violence in residential schools, children who exhibited diverse expressions of gender and sexuality were targets of increased rates of sexual and physical violence. Despite the fact limited stories have been published, many Two-Spirit community members participated in the Truth

and Reconciliation process to raise awareness of the experiences of 2SLGBTQQIA+ survivors of the Residential School system. The official Truth and Reconciliation reports and publications did not reflect the volume of these contributions, but grassroots communities and organizations have documented 2SLGBTQQIA+ experiences and continue to create spaces for their stories to be remembered.

To further ignore and de-prioritize the stories of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people within conversations of gender-based violence is to replicate the same cisheteronormative and patriarchal systems that interfered with our communities via the residential school system and other assimilation attempts. Honouring the unique experiences of 2SLGBTQQIA+ survivors of the residential school system is one of the many ways we can begin to understand the root causes of gender-based violence experienced by Indigenous communities.

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The findings of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, released in June 2019, align with these community understandings of colonization as the root cause of violence. As stated in the Executive Summary:

> *The history of colonization has altered Inuit, First Nations, and Métis Peoples' relationships to their culture and identity through targeted policies designed to sever their cultural and kin connections. These attacks on culture, which include residential schools, the Sixties Scoop and other assimilatory policies, are the starting points for other forms of violence Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people experience today. (National Inquiry MMIWG 2019a, p. 23, 2015)*

The final report is conclusive in its findings that "racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia" are embedded in the lives of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people through daily encounters, institutions, systems, laws, and policies (National Inquiry 2019a). The Report outlines four "pathways" of colonial violence which were recurring themes in the testimonies of survivors and families, and which increase the risk of violence when present in the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people:

- Historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational trauma;
- Social and economic marginalization;
- Maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will; and
- Ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Both the Indian Act and residential school system were outlined here as two forms of gendered colonization that contribute to the conditions for violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. In the following section, we will delve deeper into the root cause of violence by specifically examining the ways in which colonization causes cultural disruption, and cultural disruption in turn normalizes and creates opportunities for violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Cultural Disruption and Violence

The colonial legacies and ongoing colonial processes described above have led to a crisis of violence in which Indigenous peoples' bodies, and specifically the bodies of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, are seen as acceptable places for violence (Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016; Simpson, 2016). Many Indigenous communities and scholars have identified that the disruption of Indigenous knowledge transfer and colonial interference with cultural practices in particular has contributed to increased violence or risk of violence in the lives of Indigenous people (Kirmayer et al., 2000). In their closing submission to the National Inquiry, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs describes how colonization has disrupted cultural practices which then leads to violence:

> *"As a direct result of colonization, many First Nations people no longer hear or know these teachings. They will not experience ceremonies. Many will never hear teachings about the sacredness of life- or hear that all women are sacred. They will not understand their role as protectors of land and water. They will not know that violence against Mother Earth is violence against women… Those of us who do not pass through the stages of life through ceremony and teachings are more vulnerable to exploitation and violence as we do not know who we are. We have lost value for life- our own life and the lives of others."*

In response to the Canadian government's Statement of Apology to Residential School Survivors in 2008, Beverly Jacobs (former National President) released a statement on behalf of the Native Women's Association of Canada in which she noted:

> *"The government and churches' genocidal policies of the residential schools caused so much harm to that respect for women and the way women were honoured in our communities. There were ceremonies for young men and young women that taught them how to respect themselves and each other. These ceremonies were stolen from them for generations."*

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG identified that the consistent violation of the Right to Culture of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people

is a key area through which colonial violence is perpetuated. The Right to Culture is understood as "the ability to pass on cultural traditions, language, and ways of relating to other people and to the land" (National Inquiry MMIWG 2019a, p. 23). As the Report outlines (2019b, p. 332),

> *"...witnesses also described how the violence directed toward their communities that contributed to the loss of culture and cultural practices has, in its simultaneous destruction of these value systems and world views, fundamentally changed the nature of family and community, and, specifically, the position of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people within family and community."*

These quotes demonstrate some of the ways in which colonial processes have resulted in cultural disruptions that have had negative mental, physical, emotional and spiritual impacts on all Indigenous people, and Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people specifically. Colonial systems attempted to invalidate or erase cultural teachings that taught respect and recognition for Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. As a result of these disruptions, Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people have suffered from experiences of alienation, lower self-worth, cultural disconnection, confusion, shame, and helplessness (Lawrence 2003, OFIFC 1978). These experiences often increase vulnerability to violence by placing individuals in situations or socioeconomic conditions in which violence is more likely.

It is important here to reiterate that colonization is a legally entrenched system in Canada, both historical and ongoing, that is designed to eliminate Indigenous people and targets women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people specifically. Therefore, the incidence of violence against Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people cannot be reduced to peoples' individual lifestyle choices or behaviours, or indeed their potential lack of connection to culture as a result of colonial interference. The following statement from Amnesty International, in their Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada, sheds some light on the complex relationship between cultural disruption and violence:

> *"The painful loss of ties to family, community and culture is a common element of many of the stories of missing and murdered women that have been reported to Amnesty International… Such loss is not a necessary consequence of children being removed from their families, or even of being adopted into a non-Indigenous family… Nor is loss of culture a direct cause of violence. However, for young people in particular, a loss of a sense of identity, belonging and ultimately self-worth needs to be understood and addressed as a critical factor potentially contributing to self destructive behaviour and in vulnerability to exploitation by others" (Amnesty International 2004, p. 11).*

Identifying colonization as the root cause of violence does not mean that violence

happens to Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people as a result of the state of their (dis)connection to culture. While the next section will discuss how culture can act as a protective factor for Indigenous people, violence against Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is facilitated through large-scale processes that are both historic and ongoing. Ending this violence will require broad structural and political change and cannot be left exclusively to Indigenous communities. As Hargreaves (2017, p. 2) explains, "this violence occurs- and can only occur- with the tacit collusion of the police and the justice system, and the relative indifference of the Canadian public." In their detailed analysis of the Canadian dialogue on 'Indigenous family violence', Holmes and Hunt (2017) identify that most mainstream research focuses on "individual acts of violence between an Indigenous man and an Indigenous woman, overlooking the wider context of settler colonialism" (p. 12). They assert that a recognition of ongoing colonialism and dispossession is the first principle which should ground family violence prevention initiatives: "Settler colonialism is the current condition of life in Canada. Colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples is not something that happened in the past, it is indeed an active reality shaping the lives of Indigenous peoples and everyone living on the lands now called Canada" (p. 52).

Cultural Connections and Violence Prevention

There is a wealth of Indigenous community knowledge and research on cultural connection and participation in /reliable access to cultural activities as a crucial part of violence prevention and overall Indigenous community well-being. Indigenous communities hold teachings, practices and ceremonies that teach community members how to move through life in a safe and healthy way. As Kim Anderson explains, "Anishinaabe life cycle teachings stress (among other things) that the health and well-being of the individual is dependent on how well he or she fulfills his or her life stage roles and responsibilities" (Anderson, 2011, p. 4). From a culture-based perspective, the youth life stage is when young people prepare for entering into the world of adult responsibilities and expectations; as Anderson (2011) explains, "Community health and well-being is dependent on this education". Simpson (2014) explains that ceremonies for young people are important opportunities to teach lessons and help them generate meaning within their lives—ceremonies are not simply events but involve "ongoing ethical systems of accountability and responsibility" (p. 11). As Mohawk Knowledge Keeper Sylvia Maracle explained to Anderson (2000) with the example of the berry fast ceremony, specific lessons can include "patience, sacrifice, respecting their bodies, and taking time to build relationships". In a research project on the impact of Spirit of the Youth Unity Runs on Onkwehonwe youth, Freeman (2019, p. 22) observes that "culture-based action and connection with the land have the potential to awaken the soul of an individual and to access deep layers of personal and collective awareness through problems and issues that

stem from the experience of colonization, oppression and marginalization".

These are just a few examples in which Knowledge Keepers and researchers have articulated the importance of culture in ways that have clear connections to violence prevention. While a large and growing literature exists on the importance and value of cultural connection, it is rarely framed explicitly as a means of violence prevention- perhaps because within Indigenous worldviews and understandings, violence prevention is embedded throughout and is not the stated purpose of the teaching, ceremony or activity. Nonetheless these lessons and teachings are forms of culture-based violence prevention, as community members learn healthy ways of relating to one another, how to make healthy choices, and are equipped with tools for dealing with colonial violence.

Mental health research on Indigenous wellbeing demonstrates what Indigenous communities and organizations witness firsthand: cultural continuity within an Indigenous community fosters well-being and helps youth and young adults transition successfully into the next life stage (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Access to one's culture at this pivotal life stage helps cultivate a "sense of responsible ownership of a personal and collective past, and some commitment to one's own future prospects" (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008, p.4). In a review of research and related literature on the mental health needs of Indigenous children and youth in British Columbia, Mussell et al (2004) note the strong link between adult and children's mental health in Indigenous communities and observe that successful wellbeing initiatives are grounded in Indigenous worldviews and reflected the extended and interconnected nature of Indigenous kinship. In a research project with Indigenous youth of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Lines et al (2019) report that youth identified connection to land as a crucial element of health, including opportunities to practice cultural skills and participate in intergenerational knowledge transfer. However, in a comparative review of health studies in Canada involving Indigenous youth from 2000-2010, Ning and Wilson (2012) noted that only 14% of studies during that time examined culture as a key health determinant. This indicates that an understanding of the importance of culture for Indigenous communities may not yet be reflected in the broader health research literature as it is within mental health.

The positive role of cultural involvement in supporting the well-being and safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is also reflected in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG, which describes how many witness testimonies named culture as essential to their and their family's well-being. Engagement with culture was discussed both as a part of healing from traumatic colonial violence, as well as "an area in which their loved ones could have found comfort, safety, health, and protection from violence" (National Inquiry MMIWG 2019b, p 331). The necessity of self-determined solutions to eliminate violence is also a key theme of

witness testimonies:

> *"Of the many views expressed with reference to solutions, witnesses often pointed out that the answers must be self-determined. The right to culture and Indigenous understandings of culture are deeply rooted in their own identities, languages, stories, and way of life – including their own lands – and these ways of knowing must be recentred and embraced as ways to move forward" (National Inquiry MMIWG 2019b, p 397).*

Indigenous communities and organizations across Canada have long advocated for a wholistic, coordinated approach to ending violence that is grounded in Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and honours Indigenous self-determination and self-governance. As described above, Indigenous communities have traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices that inherently prevent violence by teaching roles and responsibilities. Indigenous communities across Canada are currently (re)vitalizing these systems and advocating to government and mainstream institutions for their support and a recognition of their efficacy.

Urban Indigenous organizations and service providers have been integral to this work of providing cultural programming and fostering cultural connections for Indigenous people. In the 1950s, urban Indigenous communities in Canada began to grow as a result of Indian Act amendments which permitted Status Indians to leave reserves. Friendship Centres began to form as culture-based gathering spaces for urban Indigenous communities across Canada, also providing key programs and services that responded to the needs of their communities. The Friendship Centre Movement is composed of self-determining, self-governing urban Indigenous communities that gather, create, celebrate, and work together with common goals and a common vision. As Newhouse (2004, p. 252) explains,

> *"The experience of urban Aboriginal life is mediated through community institutions. Participation in them gives a sense of community, a sense of history and a sense of shared values. They connect people to each other, both in the cities and in rural/reserve communities. They also give people a sense of influence and control as well as providing opportunities for employment, volunteer work, and leadership. They provide a way in which one can begin to shape the contours of everyday life."*

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres has been active for decades in the realms of urban Indigenous cultural programming, through the 29-member Friendship Centres across the province. Programs and services are available that span the entire life cycle of community members and incorporate elements of both violence prevention and addressing past violence. For example, the Akwe:go ("all of us")

program provides support and guidance within a cultural framework for children aged 7 – 12 who are at risk for specific negative behaviours and outcomes as a result of their circumstances in life. The Wasa-Nabin ("to look ahead") program, first implemented in 2008, offers similar support for the 13-18 age range and was developed after the identification of a gap in services for urban Indigenous youth. The Youth Life Promotion program is targeted for youth from 13-24, supporting their wholistic development and providing a continuum of care services including addressing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and well-being.

The Cultural Resource Coordinator (CRC) program engages all community members and was designed by the OFIFC as a family wellbeing program. The program addresses the multigenerational effects of trauma, promoting reconciliation and healing through delivery of culturally-responsive, prevention-focused supports. The program is guided by the principle that improving outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children, youth, and families requires a fundamental change that empowers Indigenous communities to take the lead in the design and delivery of effective, preventative, wholistic, and culturally-grounded services. The CRC Program Evaluation conducted in 2018 found that program participants emphasized that cultural connection led to healing, and also that the program fostered social cohesion by strengthening the social and cultural fabric of the Friendship Centre while also building relationships with external partners (OFIFC 2019a).

The Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin –I am a Kind Man program engages men and youth and is a culturally relevant program that supports healthy relationships and positive Indigenous identities through the provision of programming, one-to-one and group supports, education, leadership, and capacity building. The program engages participants to speak out against, and end all forms of violence towards Indigenous women, creating space for men to strengthen Indigenous cultural values, and promote wellness and resiliency in their communities.

The Community Justice Program is another crucial component to the OFIFC's work to promote community healing and foster cultural connection. The Indigenous community justice movement is a response to experiences of colonial trauma that impact the ongoing criminalisation of Indigenous people in Canada. The goal of the Community Justice Program is to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system through the provision of support to community level programs that facilitate pre-and post-charge diversion activities. Program objectives are: to enable and empower Indigenous community members to progress towards restoration, reconciliation and healing; to effectively address the causes of harmful behaviour in a meaningful and culturally appropriate manner; and to address the needs of those impacted by a criminal offence, which may include victims, families, and community.

3. Context: Ending Violence and Cultural Connections

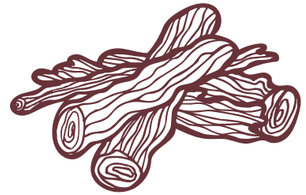
In addition to programs, the OFIFC also participates in other initiatives and ongoing efforts to end violence in communities. Kanawayhitowin was launched in 2008 as an Indigenous prevention and education initiative to raise awareness about the signs of woman abuse in communities. Initially a partnership with Neighbours, Friends and Families, Kanawayhitowin has grown as an Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women public education campaign. In 2014, the OFIFC re-launched Kanawayhitowin - Honour Life, End Violence program as part of a provincial strategic plan to end violence against Indigenous women and girls in Ontario.

The OFIFC has also produced a body of research and evaluation that explores violence prevention from a cultural perspective. The OFIFC conducted the Trauma-Informed Schools research project to consider how school systems can play a stronger role in cultivating safer environments for urban Indigenous students. This research project developed youth-voiced tools on trauma-informed practices that have been shared across the province with educators and systems leaders (OFIFC 2016b). The Breaking Free, Breaking Through research project, a collaborative project with ONWA, engaged Indigenous women using arts-based methods to examine violence and better understand the circumstances and experiences of Indigenous women's lives (ONWA & OFIFC 2015). Finally, the Akwe:go Wholistic Longitudinal Study was launched in 2012 and explores the impact of culturally-grounded programming during childhood for participants across their lifetimes. Findings in the most recent Phase II Report demonstrate that safe and culturally-grounded spaces are vital for the well-being of children and youth (OFIFC 2019b). Findings also demonstrate the resiliency and strength of participants in dealing with challenging life circumstances (including exposure to violence), and their "strong desire to positively affect social and individual change, as a result of their lived experiences" (OFIFC 2019b, p. 37).

As we explored in this section, Indigenous communities hold knowledge and practices that are integral for Indigenous people to lead healthy and safe lives, including how to prevent violence. Despite the systematic attempts to divide or eliminate Indigenous communities, marginalize Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and invalidate Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous communities continue to share and practice our cultures in ways that embed and promote violence prevention. From the OFIFC's decades of work in programming, policy and research, we know that investing in and further developing culture-based violence prevention is crucial for the well-being of Indigenous communities and the safety of community members.

4

Methodology



To respectfully engage with communities around the role of Indigenous ceremony and cultural practices in life transitions and violence prevention, the OFIFC utilized its USAI Research Framework as its methodological foundation. USAI consists of four principles: Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, and Inter-relationality.

Utility: Needs are based on current community priorities;

Self-voicing: Research, knowledge, and practice are authored by communities that are fully recognized as Knowledge Creators and Knowledge Keepers;

Access: Research fully recognizes all local knowledge, practice, and experience in all their cultural manifestations as accessible by all research authors and Knowledge Keepers;

Inter-relationality: Research is historically-situated, geo-politically positioned, relational, and explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is generated.

The key to appropriately implementing these principles stems from deliberately considering the community-driven component of the research project. The USAI Research Framework is a culture-based framework that is practical, community-determined, community-reflexive, and highly participatory. USAI is rooted in Indigenous Knowledge and helps lead researchers and communities to a place where they will have enhanced their capability to collectively identify a research process that has real and immediate impacts. “In traditional Indigenous societies, the values of our culture were expressed through our collective worldview, our Indigenous knowledge, which is based upon our millennia of experience on this land, our understanding of connectedness, inter-relationships, and the daily expression of all these things.” (OFIFC, 2011). The implementation of USAI resulted in a flexible approach to research in the Ceremony and Transitions project. This flexibility acts as a safeguard to help ensure that what is happening in each community remains congruent with the research process. As such, the methods of data collection varied widely by community, and are described the Research Activities section of each respective community.

Concepts such as 'moment in time', 'flexibility' and 'allowing for contextual change' refer to being responsive in Indigenous research contexts rather than acting reactively. USAI is responsive rather than reactive because Indigenous knowledge carries within it cultural standards which are passed down from one generation to the next, both orally and experientially. Recognizing what is relevant in a 'moment in time' involves taking into thoughtful consideration the accumulated relevant Indigenous knowledge of the past and applying it in ways that are responsive and useful within contemporary situations. It also involves a process of ongoing analysis throughout the research process.

Following USAI principles, the project design was structured so that each of the four partner communities identified their own Local Community Researcher(s) to lead local research activities. The planning and project activities reflected local needs, contexts and priorities and provided insight into the different approaches for exploring the role of ceremony (and culture-based activities more broadly) as a mechanism of violence prevention that can contribute to the elimination of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The OFIFC Research team provided research support as needed and was in ongoing communication with Local Community Researchers. By using this model, each community was able to identify research activities that were directly relevant to them, while also benefiting from the support network of the OFIFC and fellow Local Community Researchers. Each community was invited to self-determine how data and analysis would be shared with the OFIFC Research team, including what information would be shared with the OFIFC, what information was intended to be shared widely, and what information would stay within the community. The OFIFC coordinated three knowledge-sharing gatherings for Local Community Researchers and community members, in August, November and March of the 2018-2019 year. The first gathering was hosted by the OFIFC, and the second and third gatherings were hosted by partner communities, St. David Catholic School in Sudbury and Ohero:kon at Six Nations of the Grand River, respectively. These gatherings were opportunities for collective analysis and evaluation, and the insights gained through this research project are therefore directly grounded in community realities.

In addition to the USAI Research Framework, the OFIFC implemented community-driven evaluation approaches throughout the project. Much like the Framework, the four components of this evaluation approach—planning, relationships, development and implementation—provided a foundation from which to assess the successes and challenges of the project. The responsiveness of the project to community needs and realities is an example of the OFIFC's approach to evaluation in action. Each partner community had the flexibility to plan and structure their research process according to their own context, unique strengths and challenges. As new opportunities arose, the consistent communication and relationship-building between OFIFC and the Local Community Researchers meant that the project activities and timelines could be adapted to maximize time and resources while fulfilling community needs. The ongoing

evaluation process was also evidenced in the knowledge-sharing gatherings, where Local Community Researchers shared their process, what they had learned, successes, or where activities could be adapted, with guidance from community members, Knowledge Keepers, community Resource People and Elders.

5

Community Research Narratives: Cultural Connections and Violence Prevention

Using the community-driven approach described in the previous section, each partner community took different and innovative directions with the Ceremony and Transitions project. Given the diversity of the communities and their research activities, we share each community's distinct narrative of exploring culture as a mechanism for violence prevention. These narratives include a community background, the project trajectory, the research activities undertaken, data gathered, and community-driven analysis and evaluation. Each narrative holds distinct knowledge about the intersections between violence prevention and cultural connection, as research within each community was informed by different bodies of local Indigenous knowledge. Readers may find ideas, inspiration or insights within certain community narratives, based on community or cultural similarities. After the community narratives, we provide an overview analysis by reviewing common themes.

Ininew Friendship Centre, Cochrane

The Ininew Friendship Centre aims to develop, expand and preserve Aboriginal cultural identity through the institution of social/health programs, life skills programs, recreational events, gatherings and any other such functions that enhance the quality of life of all persons of Indigenous ancestry in the Cochrane area. The Ininew Friendship Centre was incorporated on November 19, 1974 and became a member of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) in 1975. The surrounding communities that the Ininew Friendship Centre serves upon request are: Kashechewan, Fort Albany, Attawapiskat, Peawanuk, Fort Severn, Smooth Rock Falls, Kapuskasing, Hearst, Constance Lake, Hornepayne, Timmins, Foleyet, Chapleau, Iroquois Falls, Montieth, Matheson, Kirkland Lake and Haileybury.

The Ininew Friendship Centre was invited to participate in the Ceremony and Transitions project based on their ongoing language revitalization work, emphasis on land-based activities and youth engagement, and a wealth of cultural knowledge held by community members that was shared with the OFIFC Research team in previous projects. While the Ininew Friendship Centre is inclusive of all self-identified Indigenous people, much of the cultural knowledge and programming in the Centre stems from Cree cultural frameworks and reflects the large Cree population within the urban Indigenous community.

At the start of the project, the Friendship Centre hired one Local Community Researcher. This researcher was familiar with the Friendship Centre community, had connections to local Knowledge Keepers, and had a culture-based understanding of the importance of ceremony. When the OFIFC Research team began to work with the researcher to support the development of a research plan for Ininew, it became clear that there were many possibilities for research activities and events, and that community interest in the project was strong. By leveraging other resources, a second Local Community Researcher with Cree language skills was hired to support the project.

The resulting work at the Ininew focused on two main themes: documenting and enhancing access to Indigenous Knowledge and creating language-learning opportunities in the community.

Documenting and Increasing Access to Indigenous Knowledge

At the start of the project, Community Researchers identified that the urban Indigenous community of Cochrane holds a vast amount of cultural knowledge that directly relates to violence prevention. Friendship Centre staff and the Community Researchers determined that documentation of this knowledge would be a valuable activity for the project. In the urban Indigenous community of Cochrane, similar to many Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, community members are grappling with how to effectively transfer cultural knowledge to younger generations. Community Researchers identified that the community continues to feel strongly the intergenerational effects of the residential school system and the strong influence of the Catholic church. The Friendship Centre recognizes that for many years, these institutions were responsible for forcibly taking many ceremonies and cultural practices from local Indigenous people. Administrators running residential schools directed the physical removal of Indigenous children from their families, disturbing cultural knowledge transfer and Indigenous language learning for generations. In addition, residential schools and the Catholic church promoted and enforced shame around Indigenous ways of being, including participation in ceremonies. Over time, this systematic assault on Indigenous culture resulted in fewer Indigenous people participating in ceremonies or other cultural practices. Community Researchers noted that a lack of access to ceremony– as well as fear and shame around participation– persist in the community to this day and impacts community members' decisions or ability to engage with their culture. The Ceremony and Transitions project was tailored to address this context by enhancing access to cultural and ceremonial knowledge in a safe, locally-determined, culturally-grounded way.

Community Researchers conducted interviews with community members and Elders to explore their cultural knowledge, and where appropriate and with consent, document

this knowledge to share with the community. Interviews revealed that community members and Elders consider the involvement of youth in rites of passage ceremonies and land-based activities as central to violence prevention. Through these interviews, Researchers documented a wide range of Indigenous teachings and practices to share with the wider community via social media and through community events. The goal of this knowledge dissemination was to encourage people in the community to (re)integrate ceremonies or cultural practices into their lives by providing information about each practice and details on its significance, context and history. As part of this work, the Community Researchers hosted different events to support intergenerational knowledge transmission processes. These events included several crafting and technology workshops for making ribbon-skirts, Powwow regalia, medicine bags and beading. Community Researchers also hosted video-editing sessions for community members to create digital stories, with the Researchers supporting storyboard planning and editing. In collaboration with other staff at the Centre, the Community Researchers also organized a New Year's Eve Pow Wow event and a memorial Round Dance ceremony, which included a Pipe Ceremony, a feast, a spirit acknowledgement as well as drumming and dancing for families.

Based on knowledge collected through interviews with Knowledge Keepers, the next stage of the research was to create short informational videos to make Cree knowledge and practices accessible to the wider community. The Community Researchers worked closely with the Cultural Resource Coordinator and a youth assistant at the Ininew Friendship Centre to develop the videos and were guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. The Community Researchers were able to document different ceremonies, practices and forms of cultural knowledge in a variety of settings. These videos included: teachings associated with ceremonial pipes, the roles and responsibilities of a Star Lodge Keeper, the meaning and purpose of a round dance, an introduction to traditional cooking and structures, and the ceremonial preparation of an eagle. With regard to the latter, the Centre had received the body of an eagle that had been found by a community member. Community Researchers and Friendship Centre staff emphasized that eagles are never hunted or killed intentionally. The Friendship Centre feasted and gave thanks to the eagle for its life and staff learned about the process of de-feathering and making eagle whistles. As one Community Researcher explained, "through these ceremonies, we honour the eagle and its life. We carry its spirit with us in the ceremonies we will use its body parts for". The Community Researchers also audio-recorded traditional stories from Elders (e.g. Wahshaykajak), teachings on Cree rites of passage, and Elders in conversation with each other.

Through this project, the community also identified a lack of Cree culture in the local school system. To address this, Community Researchers worked with local schools over the course of this project and organized a variety of culture-based events. These events included: presentations on Pow Wow dances and teachings (e.g. Jingle Dress and Fancy

Shawl), Rites of Passage ceremonies, and roles and responsibilities related to traditional living within family units. The Researchers also organized hand drum workshops for grade 7 and 8 students and Cree language classes. These activities built on the work the Ininew Friendship Centre has done with different schools in the district, offering immersive, experiential education opportunities at the Friendship Centre's Cultural Grounds. The community has responded well to project activities, with the Researchers creating interest on social media or by word of mouth. Some of the videos created as part of this project have already been shared on social media, with more planned to be released as soon as the editing process is completed.

There are several components of this work to document and share Indigenous Knowledge that provide insights into effective culture-based violence prevention. Over the course of this project, a large part of the work of the Community Researchers was to address fear- or shame-based responses to culture by building relationships. This builds on the more long-term work of the Ininew Friendship Centre and many staff members, Knowledge Keepers and Elders who build relationships in the community to break down shame, share knowledge, 'demystify' Indigenous culture, create safety, and encourage sharing and reciprocity. During the project, this work of relationship-building and relationship renewal occurred through the entire process of creating videos, facilitating workshops, and holding ceremonies. With strong relationships in place founded on trust, a positive atmosphere for learning and sharing is created. Such learning environments are healthy, culture-based places to gather and celebrate, and in the context of this project, this included ceremonies, community events, Pow Wows, and workshops. As community members learn about cultural practices or ceremonies in these spaces, they also learn how to weave cultural values into everyday life. Elders and Knowledge Keepers at Ininew consistently expressed that knowing and living out these values and teachings are a core component of violence prevention.

It is also important to note that the Community Researchers' ability to record cultural practices or ceremonies and interview local Elders and Knowledge Keepers was dependent on their ability to build and maintain positive relationships. Research activities at Ininew demonstrates how Indigenous research is based on relationships and the quality of the research is directly tied to the health and strength of those relationships. At the same time, it is important to understand that these relationships extend far beyond the timeline of a research project, and relationships should never be compromised or strained as a result of the research process. At knowledge sharing gatherings, one of the Community Researchers shared that at times, an Elder or Knowledge Keeper would consent to video recording of certain knowledge, teachings or ceremonies, and then during or after recording would change their mind. In these situations, the Community Researchers fully respected the participant's direction, understanding that video recording can be overwhelming, or participants may have re-considered the appropriateness of recording certain practices. Community Researchers understood

that maintaining trust and positive relationships with their Elders and Knowledge Keepers was the highest priority. In these cases, they were also able to create other opportunities for knowledge transfer that did not involve video, like teachings with Knowledge Keepers, workshops, and community events.

At the end of the project, Community Researchers and Friendship Centre staff reflected on the importance of emphasizing the "re" in cultural (re)vitalization. As they noted, it is important for community members to know that ceremonies and cultural practices were everyday components of life in their community before Euro-Western interference. As one person explained, "you have to understand that these [ceremonies] were here before and thriving. They're from here." By understanding cultural revitalization as a returning of practices and ways that belong to the community, Community Researchers and Friendship Centre staff felt that this nurtured a deeper kind of engagement and sense of responsibility. This in turn contributes to the success and longevity of culture-based violence prevention efforts.

Creating Language-learning Opportunities and Engaging Youth

At the Ininew Friendship Centre, revitalizing Indigenous languages is a key piece of cultural revitalization, which community Knowledge Keepers and Elders have in turn identified as a key form of violence prevention. Within this project, participants identified that creating language-learning opportunities that specifically targeted youth was a key community priority. The Ininew Friendship Centre's main language priority is Cree, specifically the dialects spoken locally in the Cochrane area and around the James Bay coast.

Taking direction from Knowledge Keepers and language speakers, over the course of the project the Community Researchers worked on developing educational resource materials to promote language learning within the home and the community. Similar to the cultural knowledge documentation work, Researchers identified that digital media was an important way to make language learning accessible and connect with youth. Researchers worked with community members to develop a database of terms and expressions in Swampy Cree (N-Dialect) that includes audio files with pronunciation and syllabics. The Ininew Friendship Centre also hosted a coding workshop for youth in March, to allow youth to develop coding skills and be able to create games and apps in Cree using the database. The Community Researchers also organized a language workshop to teach adult speakers about how to pass on the language to younger generations.

Language revitalization activities culminated in a Youth and Elders language gathering in March 2019. The Ininew Friendship Centre coordinated the event in partnership with four First Nations and the local community. The gathering brought community members

together for two days as a learning opportunity for youth to access language learning, teachings on traditional roles and responsibilities and culture-based activities on the land.

This language-focused research at Ininew confirmed what many Elders and Knowledge Keepers have consistently stated: teachings and Indigenous Knowledge are powerful and impactful when shared within Indigenous languages. Many community members also see the necessity and value of knowledge documentation and dissemination in English, given colonial legacies that separated Indigenous people from languages and the current context in which some community members speak exclusively English. However, participants emphasized that increasing community members' language skills is important, since Indigenous languages contain information about ways of being and relating that are highly relevant to violence prevention (and healthy living more generally). As one Elder shared,

> *"The most valuable tool, resource, activity that we can do for our youth, children and future of our people is to bring back our rites of passage. We need to introduce our children to our traditional ways, so they have a real sense of identity. They need to practice our ceremonies and speak the language. Our language has its own spirit, in it they will find themselves."*

Through a focus on increasing access to Indigenous Knowledge and revitalizing language, the Ininew Friendship Centre generated knowledge and resources on culture-based violence prevention that will continue to be useful both for the community as well as the broader Friendship Centre Movement.

St. David Catholic Elementary School, Sudbury

St. David Catholic Elementary School is located in the Donovan neighbourhood of Sudbury, Ontario, and has served the community since 1944. Today the area that St. David serves has been expanded to include the "Flour Mill", the centre of Sudbury's Francophone population. Over 40% of the St. David School population is First Nations children, and Ojibwe as a Second Language is offered as an option to all students. St. David School was invited to participate in the Ceremony and Transitions project based on the pre-existing work of school staff and local service agencies to support the needs of urban Indigenous children in school and provide an accepting and inclusive atmosphere for all students.

The project activities at St. David School were planned and implemented with a long-term perspective on impacts, which fit within the systems-change approach to collaboration among service agencies and institutions in Sudbury. For this project, a guiding committee was established with local service agency Better Beginnings, Better

Futures-Sudbury, staff from EarlyOn Centres, administrators and teachers from St. David School, Community Resource People and Elders. The relationships between Elders, St. David School and Community Resource People were integral to the project, which included the development of Elk Trails, a culture-based program for children. These relationships were also integral to the development of a culture-based approach that centered Indigenous knowledge and practices and facilitated an inclusive environment for students, families and staff through all project activities. The resulting work at St. David focused on two main themes: centering Indigenous culture through shared leadership approaches to creating caring, inclusive communities; and employing Indigenous pedagogical approaches to strengthen families and communities and support violence reduction and prevention.

The OFIFC is grateful to Dawn Wemigwans, Principal at St. David School, Colin Lapalme, Vice Principal and Elder Vince Pawis for articulating the first theme, including their description of their school community.

How Culture Supports Shared Leadership

When school administrators promote a circular model of leadership, there is a place for everyone. Shared leadership can, and should include opportunities for staff, students, families and community partners to have an equitable voice in the development of a school culture that values and respects all stakeholders. When people truly slow down and listen to each other, the entire school community has an opportunity to develop into a caring, inclusive school setting that keeps student success and overall well-being at the core.

St. David Catholic Elementary School is a school located in the inner city of Sudbury, Ontario. Although the property is surrounded by concrete and the hustle and bustle of city life, the school was intentionally re-built to provide opportunities for learning to transcend classroom walls and connect with the outdoors. The school building is "nestled in nature". Huge ceiling to floor windows, wood beams and cathedral ceilings help to bring the natural environment into the school. A traditional outdoor learning space, hiking trails and a rambling brook all surround the school building, helping to remind everyone who enters how interconnected to nature they are and how everything in life works in a circle, even the school's leadership model. St. David Catholic School has a student population of 260 students, almost half of which self-identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit. The school supports many families living in poverty, struggling with substance use issues, high crime rates and family illiteracy. Although families and the local community work diligently to ensure that the next generation of children will be proud, confident, educated leaders, the effects of residential schools and the 60s Scoop are evident at St. David School.

The school leadership model ensures that Indigenous voices and theory are part of daily practice. The biggest and best asset the school has is people. Diverse people bring a wealth of knowledge, perspectives and theories of innovation, that when tied together, build a school culture that is rooted in equitable, inclusive practice. Traditional knowledge, as well as contemporary narratives, need to be part of the dialogue for all staff to better understand and meet student needs. Theories of innovation include experiential learning opportunities on the land. This includes connecting with nature as well as integrating language and math in outdoor educational experiences. Teachers and staff members are encouraged to take calculated risks. They know their learners and ensure opportunities relate to equitable experiences for all. The introduction of a circular model of educational leadership supports the creation of a safe space and openness to take risks at all levels. People work together appreciating each other's gifts and using these gifts to better support student learning opportunities.

The voices of Elders and traditional people in the community are a vital component to creating a model of leadership that encourages diversity, respect and opportunity for different people to take on roles of leadership at different times. Traditional Elder, Vince Pawis, has worked with the St. David Catholic School community for many years actively promoting an increased awareness, understanding and appreciation of the rich histories, cultures and perspectives of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. Vince continues to help create a culturally inviting school atmosphere that welcomes Indigenous families, honours diversity and respects the beauty and history of traditional teachings. He supports the school in developing innovative approaches to meet the needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. Vince works with Indigenous youth and families who require support through mentoring projects and traditional counseling and supports the school community working to break down barriers and build positive relationships.

According to Vince, "Everything is in the circle. Once I share the teachings they belong to the people in the circle. Then it's up to them to share them and to pass on that knowledge. This is shared leadership. Usually people look up to an Elder or a traditional person for direction. When people participate in a circle, they receive the gift of knowledge. Traditional teachers and Elders that lead circles give people the voice to speak. It doesn't matter who is in the circle. Everyone is equal. People gain confidence in the circle and are able to speak and share knowledge with other people. When the teachings are shared, they are a gift that are supposed to be shared with other people. This is how we pass on knowledge and share leadership".

School administrators who want to encourage opportunities for shared leadership in a circular fashion will want to start this journey by modeling what they want to see in their school. Principles that guide the interactions and relationships in a school environment shaped by shared leadership include:

- Be an active participant;
- Believe in and listen to strong student voice;
- Provide purposeful visual supports throughout the school that speak to students, families, staff and community partners;
- Be creative in your use of resources;
- Recognize the brilliance of the people around you;
- Make room for diversity;
- Build trusting, reciprocal relationships;
- Collaborate, reflect and build a shared understanding of what leadership looks like in your school;
- Laugh;
- Be transparent;
- Co-teach and co-plan;
- Let your students and staff see you make mistakes;
- Own your mistakes;
- Don't be afraid to ask questions; and
- Take calculated risks.

Models of shared leadership will look different in different school settings, but the common thread is the overall transformation of relationships. Shared leadership models foster school cultures where belief in collaboration, equity and creativity promote schools that are open to innovative models of education and always put students first. When schools adapt a model of circular, shared leadership, the school community moves closer to a place of balance, success and wellness.

Indigenous Pedagogical Approaches Strengthen Families and Communities

As part of this project, the Community Research Mentor at St. David developed Elk Trails, a program that created opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transmission during and after school. The evening programming was designed after listening to community members, as families advocated for opportunities to learn about traditional crafts and teachings, and the responsibilities associated with roles such as caring for Grandfather drum. The program included lessons in traditional beading, skirt-making and opportunities to learn about Grandfather drum teachings and songs. Elk Trails was intended to build positive, safe relationships between family members and to reintroduce cultural teachings that promote kindness and patience. The program started with activities twice a week and offered dinner for all participants.

Three pillars guided planning and research activities: patience, kindness and respect. The Community Researcher modeled desired behaviours (respect, generosity, patience) and

provided children opportunities to both lead and take part in activities. This foundation in cultural values and engagement of the whole person as both a teacher and a learner were key aspects of the Indigenous pedagogical approach of Elk Trails. This approach was implemented in diverse ways to teach children about roles and responsibilities. In one example, the Community Research Mentor held a ceremony for feasting the spirits with kindergarteners and grade 3 students in November 2018. As part of the ceremony children were invited to hold different responsibilities and take part in the ceremony as helpers. The Mentor then reflected on how children demonstrated their learning by showing respect, kindness and patience in their interactions with each other, teachers and himself. St. David School also celebrates feast days and the change of seasons throughout the school year, and children and staff receive many teachings from Elders and Community Resource People on themes such as the seasons and animals. As a next step, the school is planning to create a feast bundle for all grade 3 students. The Native Studies students will also be learning about teachings surrounding feasting and will be encouraged to carry their own feast bundle. Through this ongoing education on feasting, children learn about their roles and responsibilities in relation to each other and Creation. The Elk Trails program was designed to start with children, with the intention and understanding that the teachings and traditional skills gained eventually ripple out to other generations. The program team identified that access to ceremonies and positive self-identification for children create a ripple effect for families and communities that reduces violence and creates safer communities.

At St. David School, the Elk Trails team's practice of modelling cultural values is a core component of violence prevention that is built into relationship-building and all program activities. By modelling patience, kindness and respect to children and program participants, and ensuring that these values are present through every stage of the planning process, the program engages in culture-based education that is in itself a form of violence prevention. Research activities at the school also revealed a need to engage caregivers in culture-based programming, as caregivers' relationships to Indigenous culture may have been disrupted which in turn can have detrimental impacts on younger generations. To this end, the Mentor sent home a small package that included a survey asking about caregivers' interests for skill building activities, and suggestions or ideas for activities they would attend or would want their children to experience. The response rate from parents/caregivers was good, with data analysis informing planning of subsequent activities. Teachers in school regularly engage parents on social media and reported seeing a lot of positive feedback on the postings related to the Elk Trails programming at the school.

At the same time, the Elk Trails program team were sensitive to the fact that schools can be uncomfortable spaces for many Indigenous people, as a result of the role formal systems of schooling have played in colonization. The team was intentional in planning fun activities that were not centred around academics, as a way to develop relationships

founded on more than simply the school context. Special family events were held specifically targeting families and caregivers who were not as actively involved. These events were planned as short, entertaining activities at various times of the day and in the early evening. They were designed to create an inviting, friendlier school atmosphere to make everyone feel welcome. Coffee and food were always provided as well as small take-home gifts. By engaging the whole family and developing trusting relationships, the program has greater impact as a mechanism for violence prevention. The whole family is exposed to teachings and cultural values that encourage healthy gender relationships and the fulfilment of roles and responsibilities. The school cultivates community relationships and provides opportunities for participation in ceremonies and cultural learning that many families may not have access to in their personal lives.

The Elk Trails program was successful and well received by people in the school community in part because of the way the development and implementation of the program reflected how cultural learning could happen in a school environment. Rather than working in separate 'bubbles', the program was integrated into the culture of the school, so that Elders and Community Resource people had an integral role in the program and could also feel like a part of the community by being able to interact with students outside of specific events. One concern identified by the Elk Trails program team is that in many District School Boards Elders and Knowledge holders must contend with precarious work opportunities that reduce what they can do in schools to offering one-off sessions or limited opportunities (e.g. once monthly) to cultivate relationships with students and staff. The implementation of the program addressed this concern by making sure that Traditional People, Elders and Community Resource People are offered the space and ongoing opportunities to build relationships and be part of the school community. By moving freely throughout the school and engaging with students, culture is taught outside of the classroom structure. This in turn changes the way Indigenous languages such as Anishinaabe are taught, as part of a child's everyday life and not in short scheduled sessions.

Another key aspect of the success of the project at St. David School was that its development strengthened the circle of relationships and partnerships among service providers in Sudbury, Elders and school staff and administrators. The Elk Trails program team identified the role of institutions and agencies as integral to creating safety and positive changes for future generations; with the school working to be a dynamic part of the community it serves by engaging in a process of consultation with students and caregivers to address any needs identified. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the Elk Trails program team reiterated that creating safety and preventing violence is an ongoing process and must be addressed in a sustainable way; one-off initiatives are not ideal, and change requires continuity to be achieved.

Ohero:kon (Under the Husk), Six Nations of the Grand River

Ohero:kon (Under the Husk) is a culture-based youth mentorship program that started in the Mohawk community of Akwesasne in 2006 and began in Six Nations of the Grand River in 2014. The program builds community and youth-positive spaces by supporting intergenerational mentoring and provides learning opportunities and support for young people to access their community's traditional knowledge. This program addresses a need that was identified both in Akwesasne and Six Nations: to reconnect young people to traditional roles and responsibilities, understanding that processes of knowledge transmission have been eroded as a result of colonization.

Within Onkwehonwe society, families and clans support young people on their journey into adulthood by passing down knowledge about ceremonies, wellness, and healthy relationships. Supporting youth on this journey is important to equip them with the knowledge to navigate challenging situations, help them to learn decision-making skills, and be able to see themselves as cultural Knowledge Keepers. Adults also cultivate a sense of pride and an understanding of roles and responsibilities by supporting youth's participation in ceremonies. The Ohero:kon program frames youth mentorship and knowledge transmission as a community responsibility, in alignment with cultural understandings and also sensitive to the fact that there are families in the community who do not have ready access to these traditions. Ohero:kon therefore takes a community approach to preparing youth for adulthood. At Six Nations, the program takes on a new group of youth each year. Youth are asked to commit to four years of the program with the group, followed by three years of work on their own. Youth are required to identify two helpers, either from their own family or from a group of available mentors, who will act as adult mentors as they progress through the program.

Based on this strong Onkwehonwe cultural foundation and history of supporting youth, Ohero:kon was identified as a key partner to engage to explore culture-based violence prevention in the Six Nations community. The structure of Ohero:kon aligned well with the Ceremony and Transitions project, as youth mentors of Ohero:kon were already well positioned to take up the Community Researcher role. As discussed by Indigenous partners in the initial visioning of the project, the intention of Ceremony and Transitions was always to support, explore and expand culture-based violence prevention in communities where this work was already underway. Ohero:kon is itself a ceremony– a four year ceremony with a group, followed by a three year ceremony conducted independently. The purpose of this ceremony is to transition youth from one life stage to the next in a good, healthy way that inherently involves violence prevention. The program also includes a strengthening and recognition of relationships to plant and animal relations, seasons, spirits and ancestors, as acknowledged through the ceremonies and practices that happen across these seven years. Ohero:kon therefore naturally aligned with the Ceremony and Transitions project. A reciprocal exchange was

created in which the project was able to offer further research support to this community-driven program, and in turn learn from their approach.

One of the primary research activities facilitated through the project was a youth-driven evaluation of Ohero:kon. Findings from this evaluation have been and will continue to be used to inform the design and implementation of Ohero:kon activities, outreach strategies, and supports for youth. In addition to this evaluation, the Community Researcher and another youth mentor explored the role of leadership in successful multi-generational mentoring and knowledge transmission practices. As part of Ohero:kon, a youth leadership program is currently being developed to:

- Provide opportunities for apprenticeships, so more youth can participate in ceremonies and eventually be able to conduct them;
- Cultivate active learning opportunities in the Long House so that youth can operationalize the teachings shared with them and enhance their language skills; and
- Create opportunities for community leaders to access learning opportunities and participate in ceremony while the youth are mentored, so these 'aunties and uncles' (adult mentors) can provide support after the youth finish the 4-year program.

The last point was meant to address a challenge that Ohero:kon has encountered in finding enough 'aunties and uncles' to provide mentoring and support to youth. As the Community Researcher explained, this challenge stems from the intergenerational effects of colonization and the breakdown of extended family structures: many older adults in the community have not had access to traditional knowledge or opportunities to engage in ceremony. As a result, there is a need to support older generations to gain the cultural knowledge and skills necessary to fulfil a mentorship role toward youth. By taking up this responsibility, the program contributes to the wellness and cohesion of the whole community and helps to repair and secure intergenerational knowledge transfer. This creation of opportunities for older adults in Ohero:kon is an example of how Indigenous-led, culture-based initiatives understand the importance of relationship, including within violence prevention efforts. Ohero:kon was able to be responsive and re-imagine program activities in order to address the current context while still fulfilling the larger vision of supporting youth to the next stage.

N'Amerind Friendship Centre, London

The N'Amerind Friendship Centre is a non-profit organization committed to the promotion of physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual well-being of Native people and in particular, urban Native people. The commitment is realized through

the implementation of culturally relevant programs aimed at social, recreational and educational needs; developing leadership; increasing awareness levels of Native heritage; establishing resources for community development; and in promoting the development of urban Aboriginal self-governing institutions. N'Amerind was invited to participate in the project based on the fact that this Friendship Centre serves a large urban population in southern Ontario, and the Centre has a strong interest in community-driven research.

When the Ceremony and Transitions project was initiated at N'Amerind, Friendship Centre leadership identified that the project would be a valuable opportunity to explore how culture-based notions of violence prevention could be further integrated across all programs and services within the Friendship Centre. The Friendship Centre provides programming to community members at every stage of life, across health, justice, cultural supports, education, well-being, and employment. While the Friendship Centre is a culture-based organization that already integrates culture into programming in many ways, leadership identified that a dedicated researcher to explore further applications would be very welcome and would ultimately enhance the ability of the Friendship Centre to support the urban Indigenous community. The Friendship Centre also identified that the Ceremony and Transitions work intersected with ongoing, separate research on the revitalization of Indigenous justice traditions and legal principles. The link between current violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and the systemic violence of the Canadian colonial justice system are widely known within Indigenous communities (National Inquiry MMIWG 2019a). This link was also immediately recognized at N'Amerind. In light of these connections, the Friendship Centre decided to employ a wholistic lens to the research, conducting activities that combined the objectives of Ceremony and Transitions with an exploration of traditional justice. This approach allowed the Friendship Centre to create research spaces to discuss the relationship between traditional justice and ending gender-based violence and develop a more nuanced understanding of how cultural approaches of violence prevention could draw on traditional justice principles.

Increasing Access to Cultural Education

N'Amerind Friendship Centre organized a series of traditional teachings for community members throughout Winter 2018 and Spring 2019 that provided opportunities for cultural education on an array of topics that Elders and Knowledge Keepers identified as relevant to violence prevention. Topics included: cultural understandings of roles and responsibilities, the relationships between the diversity of Indigenous genders, and the importance of creation stories and traditional teachings for responding to the current levels of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. The intention of hosting these teachings was to create greater access to traditional

knowledge among community members. Creating spaces where Elders and Knowledge Keepers could share traditional teachings was described by the Friendship Centre as a crucial step in their understanding of decolonization. By revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge, the Friendship Centre could help restore a sense of belonging and identity to community members that had been disrupted through colonization. Community members who participated in the research specifically identified that creation stories helped them understand traditional roles and responsibilities, including responsibilities to oneself and to others. This finding aligned with the message of participating Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who identified that healthy identity development and an ability to see oneself as part of the community were protective factors that would prevent future justice system involvement and represented a preventative approach to addressing violence. These teachings at the Friendship Centre utilized Indigenous pedagogical approaches that encouraged attendees and speakers to interact with the teachings and interpret them through the lens of their own experience and experiences of their communities.

Language Revitalization, Creation Stories, and Promoting Indigenous Pedagogy

In addition to these teachings, the Local Community Researcher organized two large gatherings for the project. The first gathering– Decolonization in the 21st Century– took place at Oneida Nation of the Thames. Two hundred community members, youth, N'Amerind Friendship Centre staff, and stakeholders working in justice, education, and other relevant sectors were present at the gathering. The invited speakers were Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock (Kahnawá:ke bear clan chief) and Akwesasne Mohawk Elder Tom Porter. The Elder and Knowledge Keeper spoke about the importance of language revitalization for reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing and being and explained that worldview is embedded within language. Both speakers and attendees discussed in depth the integral role of Indigenous language revitalization in supporting the prosperity and well-being of urban Indigenous communities. The speakers identified that loss of language and a damaged cultural belief system are impacts of ongoing colonization and a major disruption to the transfer of creation stories, original instructions, and roles and responsibilities.

This discussion of Indigenous language revitalization led to discussion of other ways that Indigenous people fulfil their responsibilities to all their relations and live in ways that are aligned with cultural values and teachings. The importance of creation stories as a core component of Indigenous pedagogy was again a key topic of conversation. Creation stories contain teachings of how one should live in the world, and therefore have relevance for responding to gender-based violence today. Speakers offered that creation stories contain an acknowledgement, and promote understanding of the interconnectedness among humans, the land, animals, and other life forms. This

understanding was the basis for culture-based violence prevention for Indigenous people in that territory.

Speakers and attendees also discussed how the current mainstream education system in Ontario is inadequate for teaching Indigenous history, perspectives, or cultural information. Indigenous community-based models of learning—through gatherings, ceremonies, visiting with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and being out on the land—provide Indigenous people with a robust understanding of who they are, where they come from, and where they are going, knowledge that is necessary for the formation of healthy identity and community wellbeing. Community members discussed the limitations of the current education system in responding to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of Indigenous people and shared insights into how Indigenous communities are currently filling the gaps where the mainstream has failed to provide culture-based support or integrate culture-based approaches.

Violence Prevention, Traditional Justice, and Limitations of Colonial Justice Systems

The second gathering was held at N'Amerind Friendship Centre and focused on the practical applications of decolonization and the intersections between traditional justice and violence prevention. Mohawk Elder Tom Porter, Knowledge Keeper/Traditional Healer and Executive Director of Tsi' Niyukwaliho:t^ Learning Centre Howard Elijah, and Professor of Law at the University of Windsor Beverley Jacobs were all speakers during this two-day gathering organized by the Local Community Researcher and Friendship Centre staff. The key message of this gathering was the insufficiency of the colonial justice system in responding to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBQQIA+ people, and an acknowledgement of ongoing state-sanctioned violence against Indigenous communities via police and the justice system. Elder Tom Porter spoke about working as a Native liaison worker in men's correctional facilities and shared what he learned from the experiences of incarcerated Indigenous men. Tom Porter explained that the purpose of his work was to connect Indigenous inmates to their culture, identity, and traditional ways. During this time, he observed a lack of culture-based and trauma-informed practices and noted that the punitive approach used by Western justice systems conflicted with Indigenous worldviews and traditional justice practices. He emphasized the important role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers in supporting Indigenous people who are healing from intergenerational trauma caused by colonization. He explained that many of the men that he supported were eventually released from prison and went on to become traditional helpers in their communities. By accessing culture-based supports these men were empowered to break out of the cycle of violence in their lives– both as victims and as perpetrators– and support other community members to do the same. This work to support Indigenous people within

the criminal justice system is critical in the context of Indigenous over-representation, and also an important form of violence prevention. However, speakers and attendees also identified that this work needs to be complemented by other simultaneous efforts to revitalize traditional justice practices in order to more effectively prevent violence toward and within Indigenous communities.

The importance of thinking outside the current criminal justice system was reflected in the teachings and discussion of the second half of the gathering, when community members engaged with the work currently underway to revitalize Indigenous Knowledge in relation to justice. Speakers explored traditional understandings of justice as alternatives to the mainstream justice system and discussed how traditional justice approaches could more appropriately support Indigenous communities. On the final day of the gathering Beverly Jacobs spoke about the Haudenosaunee legal order and principles as well as some of the justice-related practices to restore balance that emanated from cultural teachings. A key distinction made by speakers was the ways in which traditional understandings of justice promoted collective healing, a principle which is not reflected in the mainstream system.

Each of the gatherings were recorded with an intention to use them as a learning resource for Friendship Centre staff, community members, and other relevant stakeholders in the community. The Friendship Centre identified that by digital documenting the gatherings, this information would be preserved and could more easily be later integrated throughout Friendship Centre programming. By adapting local knowledge transfer practices through the use of video technology, research participants demonstrated how traditional Indigenous Knowledge is responsive to and relevant for addressing the contemporary epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Culture, Tradition, and the Utility of Indigenous Knowledge

Research activities and analysis conducted at N'Amerind Friendship Centre indicate that Indigenous cultures are fluid and dynamic, but that at the same time have continuity. Recognition of this simultaneous fluidity and continuity is important, because it affirms Indigenous communities' ability to self-determine how Indigenous cultures are preserved, interpreted, adapted, and carried forward. This recognition also opens up space for Indigenous communities to assert the utility of Indigenous Knowledge in a wide range of contexts, including violence prevention. This project offered an opportunity for N'Amerind Friendship Centre to assert the utility of this knowledge and share it widely with community members to advance the common goal of gender-based violence prevention.

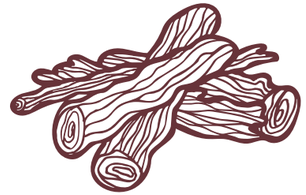
5. Community Research Narratives: Cultural Connections and Violence Prevention

Community Researcher Marlene Doxtator offered a summary of findings through her work on the project at N'Amerind Friendship Centre:

> *"Some things will always need to remain the same because we still live on the same earth, we still live in the same areas, we still have the traditions that allowed our ancestors not only to survive but to enjoy life as Ukwehuwe/ Haudenosaunee.*
>
> *These very same traditions will be essential for the future generations. Keeping the traditions alive and viable is the responsibility of each generation. These traditions are not simply words on paper that can be studied when needed. The traditions must be practiced each and every minute of every day. The Haudenosaunee way of life requires a commitment to make it happen, sometimes in spite of the current trends and desires of the people to change those traditions.*
>
> *There is a recognition that life in our communities has changed dramatically over the generations. Change is inevitable, but culture is a mechanism that ensures changes that are not detrimental to the social, ceremonial, economic, educational and political life of the community.*
>
> *Each generation of Ukwehuwe/ Haudenosaunee must apply all of the principles, beliefs and values to assess the world in which they find themselves. With traditional knowledge and teachings, they can formulate a response to their world that allows them to survive and have a good life on their own terms."*

6

Common Understandings of Culture-based Violence Prevention



Each community partner in Ceremony and Transitions is distinct and this is reflected in the stories, findings and analysis that each community generated. Much of the data was traditional Indigenous Knowledge that comes from specific nations, communities, territories, and cultural frameworks. Many of the research activities were culture-based practices that are similarly locally or culturally specific. This local specificity is important for understanding the relevance of community-driven research when addressing topics of violence prevention in Indigenous communities. Community partners emphasized that the community-driven research model ensured that research activities directly addressed Indigenous communities' concerns and priorities as they related to ending gender-based violence. As one Community Researcher explained, "violence prevention projects need to be hands-on". Community Researchers felt that work within this project was 'hands-on' as research activities were both opportunities to understand cultural mechanisms of violence prevention, as well as opportunities to enact them. As an OFIFC Research team, we observed and were honoured to support the different directions that communities took with the project. Each community's control over the research process was instrumental in ensuring the success of research activities, the participation of community members, and the integration of violence prevention into participants' lives.

While honouring difference in how we do things, it is equally important to explore our common understandings and common ground in relation to challenges. When we discussed each community's work at the final knowledge sharing gathering with Community Researchers and representatives, we learned that there was a shared collective understanding of culture-based violence prevention, despite the different directions of the work. Two main themes are discussed here: 1) the importance of embodying and 'living out' one's culture, and 2) the implementation of Indigenous pedagogies and their connection to successful violence prevention efforts.

Embodying and 'living out' Culture as Violence Prevention

A common thread running through the findings of each community was the importance of practicing culture and traditions as a way to encourage young people to live a good life and contribute to healthy communities where there is respect for all genders. The importance of cultural connections and participation in ceremonies

as a mechanism of violence prevention was an understanding commonly held by all participating communities prior to the initiation of this project. However, the research provided important insights around the specifics of what it means to embody culture for Indigenous communities across Ontario, and how these understandings can be mobilized to support healthy contemporary Indigenous communities free of violence. The following are some common elements of how it is possible to 'live out' culture, that were common for all communities:

- practicing and embedding cultural values in one's life;
- participating in ceremony and land-based activities;
- being an active member of the community;
- honouring kinship networks;
- seeking out knowledge and participating in cultural education opportunities; and
- carrying cultural practices and values into the present by connecting with youth and mobilizing technology when appropriate.

These examples of 'living out' culture are pathways toward positive identity formation and cultural connectedness, which many Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and scholars have connected to increased wellbeing and reduced violence in their lives (Barker et al 2017, Lines et al 2019, Ullrich 2019). Mohawk Knowledge Keeper Sylvia Maracle describes identity formation through the four lifelong questions: Who am I?, Where have I come from?, Where am I going?, What is my responsibility? (see Maracle in Brant Castellano and Hill, 1995, p. 46). Anderson (2016) identifies that these lifelong questions, along with other Indigenous concepts of identity formation, connect the past, present and future. This connection between the past, present, and future enables Indigenous communities to construct identities and live in a way that is responsive to the current environment, while at the same time taking direction from past generations and working to ensure a good life for future generations (Anderson 2016). At N'Amerind Friendship Centre, the Community Researcher's description of 'tradition' and 'culture' from a Haudenosaunee perspective includes this sense of past-present-future and also makes space for both fluidity and continuity. Traditions are the acts and ways of being which "must be practiced each and every minute of every day", handed down from past generations. The current generation is responsible for carrying these traditions forward, sometimes resisting pressures to change and sometimes taking into account the different context of the world today. Meanwhile, culture—or the strength, knowledge and relationships of the community as a whole—helps guide community members to ensure that changes made are aligned with core values and therefore beneficial to the community.

The notion of 'culture as a relationship' (OFIFC , 2015) was a core component of how culture-based violence prevention was reflected through this project in different

communities. Indigenous scholars and Knowledge Keepers have extensively documented colonial legacies as the root causes of contemporary violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals (see Context section). Colonial processes disrupt Indigenous relationships across genders, across generations, and to the land. When colonization is understood as a force of relationship destruction or distortion, culture-based relationship-building is a decolonizing process that has the potential to create healthier environments that are free of violence. For each participating community, relationships were instrumental in order to be able to 'live out' culture. The Ohero:kon program at Six Nations is based on the idea that cultural knowledge transmission through relationship is a community responsibility. N'Amerind Friendship Centre and Ininew Friendship Centre are community hubs where urban Indigenous people form and reaffirm relationships constantly. The community at St. David School understands their responsibilities as extending beyond the academic education of children, to creating positive relationships with and among Indigenous children, their families, and the broader community. In practice, the notion of 'culture as a relationship' means that culture-based violence prevention involves strengthening relationships in communities. Community relationships are necessary to facilitate the ways that people 'live out' or embody culture, which may take diverse forms and may involve different practices. For this reason, the community-driven aspect of violence prevention is important as outside notions of 'valid' or appropriate cultural activities may not have relevance. By focusing on relationships, communities create the conditions in which culturally-relevant violence prevention activities can occur.

In addition to caring for and maintaining relationships, 'living out' culture requires daily action. In each community, the work to investigate culture-based practices of violence prevention involved a great deal of action, from Community Researchers, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Friendship Centre staff, community members, and community partners. Action was required to prepare for and conduct the ceremonies that teach community members cultural values and knowledge. Action was required to produce deliverables that were immediately useful in the community, in the form of opportunities to attend gatherings, skill-sharing opportunities, videos, or other products. Culture-based violence prevention is not simply the absence of harm, but the active process of revitalizing cultural systems and practices that can positively impact community members' lives and alter the context in which current levels of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people takes place.

Implementing Indigenous Pedagogies

Indigenous pedagogies are ways of teaching used by Indigenous communities that are grounded in places and territories, founded in cultural values, require reciprocity and respect from both teachers and learners, encourage self-determination, and engage the

physical, mental, emotional and spiritual spheres of being (Ballantyne, 2014; Battiste, 2002; Simpson, 2014). The implementation of Indigenous pedagogies was a key component of communities' success in facilitating research activities that both explored and modeled how to prevent violence. Within this project, Indigenous pedagogies included the use of (but were not limited to) the following methods: modelling and normalizing certain behaviours or attitudes; teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers; land-based activities; ceremonies; land-based skill development; interviews; gatherings; video workshops and skill development; and use of community-driven digital research products as teaching tools.

Community Researchers demonstrated a variety of ways that Indigenous pedagogies, through these forms, are compatible with the objective of preventing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals. Indigenous pedagogies used in each community are founded in cultural teachings which, while diverse, all encourage respect for self and other genders. Indigenous pedagogies also require the learner to engage critically with what is being taught, and then to live it. For example, at gatherings and knowledge transmission events at N'Amerind Friendship Centre, Elders and Knowledge Keepers used stories from their own life experience related to violence prevention or Indigenous justice and explained their reasoning for certain actions or reactions. They invited participants to think about how these stories connected to broader cultural values and teachings, and what they signified in terms of building healthy violence-free communities. Participants were expected not simply to listen to the stories, but take what resonated or was helpful based on their own position and integrate those lessons into their lives. In this way, Indigenous pedagogies are well-suited to violence prevention efforts since they inherently contain a call to enact the education that is shared.

Indigenous pedagogies also ask the learner to become a part of an ongoing, intergenerational process of cultural knowledge transmission. An understanding of life stages and the accompanying roles and responsibilities, as well as their importance for the health of the community, is foundational to the Ohero:kon program. Young people participate in the program in order to be prepared for the next stage of life, which in turn benefits the entire community. Within this structure there is the understanding that as adults, these former Ohero:kon participants will in turn mentor youth, since this is a responsibility of the new life stage they inhabit. In the context of violence prevention, this commitment to intergenerational knowledge transfer is key as it supports the longevity of these efforts and decentralizes learning to become everyone's responsibility.

Research activities conducted at Ininew Friendship Centre reflect another facet of Indigenous pedagogies: that Indigenous knowledge and ways of teaching this knowledge are always practical and have direct application to the life of the community.

In the series of educational video resources that were produced through this project, everything that was shared related directly to activities, ceremonies or teachings that were relevant to the lives of the urban Indigenous community of Cochrane. This principle of the practicality of knowledge is a valuable quality for violence prevention efforts, since it helps to ensure the appropriateness of project scope as well as the utility of all activities within the local context.

Finally, the implementation of Indigenous pedagogies has supported the sustainability of this work in communities past the project end date. As one Community Researcher noted, community members were excited and interested in the project, but many asked questions about its length and the ability to achieve long-term results with a short-term project. A common sentiment within this community was: "this work is a good start, but this is not enough time". Community members and the Community Researcher felt that the root causes which contribute to violence against Indigenous women were deeply related to a long history of colonization, and that it was difficult to affect positive change in opposition to structural, institutional, and deeply-rooted sociopolitical forces within the project's timeline. At the same time, Community Researchers did observe that a remarkable impact was achieved within the short timeline and attributed this success to the fact that the project supported ongoing "grassroots" efforts, respected the knowledge and ways of teaching of cultural Knowledge Keepers, and engaged participants in a wholistic manner. By both respecting and implementing Indigenous pedagogies, participating communities have integrated knowledge gained through the project into an ongoing culture-based system of knowledge transmission and mobilization.

7

Identifying Promising Practices

This project identified multiple promising practices toward addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people:

Support the Restoration of Indigenous Relationships

Strong relationships were the foundation of all culture-based violence prevention work in Ceremony and Transitions. Supporting the restoration of Indigenous relationships through community-building initiatives contributes to long-term solutions for creating safer environments free from gender-based violence. Within this project, we saw how specifically focusing on strong intergenerational relationships creates the conditions for safety and for culture-based education to occur. As described above, 'culture as a relationship' (OFIFC, 2015) is a core concept that was applicable for all participating communities. By grounding all efforts with a primary focus on relationships, communities invested in the social infrastructure that will sustain violence prevention past the project end date.

In the context of future violence prevention work, supporting Indigenous relationships could involve: recognizing the building and maintenance of relationships as valuable project activities, providing communities and Indigenous organizations with ample time for the relationship-building stage of work, and recognizing the expertise that exists within pre-existing healthy relationships in communities or organizations.

Support Long-term Community-driven Research

The current context of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people was created through the long-term process of colonization. Further research to understand how to change this context through culture-based frameworks and practices will therefore require long-term attention as well. All Community Researchers voiced an interest in developing a longitudinal aspect to this research that would allow community partners to invest time and resources to implement and document cultural mechanisms and wise practices of violence prevention over a longer period of time. Long-term research would facilitate opportunities to expand and deepen knowledge

in diverse Indigenous communities on cultural mechanisms to prevent violence, and to study their influence at the community level. A longitudinal study would also help to further clarify the links between violence prevention, health and well-being, and individuals' participation in cultural events at transitional life stages.

Support the Implementation of Indigenous Pedagogies and Cultural Practices

Overall, this project demonstrated that community-driven, culture-based approaches to violence prevention were preferred by all participating communities. Restoring Indigenous practices of knowledge transmission was integral to this violence prevention work. All participating communities described processes of knowledge transmission that are land-based, intergenerational, and grounded in core cultural values and the revitalization of Indigenous languages. Other principles included consensual learning, an understanding of the responsibilities that come with knowledge, the concept of needing to achieve a certain 'readiness' to progress in one's learning, and the importance of critical thinking and self-reflection. Here are some examples of these knowledge transmission processes across communities:

- At St David School, the community identified the importance of emphasizing kindness for male-identified members of the community in their everyday living. The school planned special events for fathers, uncles and male relatives to come into the school and spend time with the children in a positive, fun, learning environment. The children and their male relatives enjoyed lunch together and participated in outdoor learning activities. The Native Language students and male staff members also participated in the Moose Hide campaign.
- The youth community mentor at Ohero:kon identified that for youth, access to ceremonies and rites of passage cultivates a confidence in self and understanding of roles and responsibilities that serves as a protective factor when encountering difficult situations (e.g. being offered alcohol, being pressured to take drugs).
- At Ininew Friendship Centre, one of the community priorities has been to use digital media to document and transmit traditional knowledge through film making, creation of digital stories, coding camps and photography. The process of using digital media has been adapted by the community as a collaborative, intergenerational learning experience.
- In N'Amerind, multiple connections were established between access to rites of passage—and the roles and responsibilities inherent in these learning processes—and a sense of belonging that is imparted in each person, which acts as a protective factor against coming into contact with the justice system.

Moreover, supporting the work of communities in revitalizing ceremonies, Indigenous languages and processes of Indigenous Knowledge transmission contributes to undoing the harms that 2SLGBTQQIA+ people experience in their daily lives as a result of being marginalised within the context of their own communities. Restoring rites of passage ceremonies and teachings also can also help to restore the identities, roles and responsibilities of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

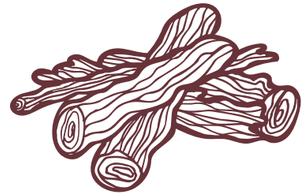
Strengthen Existing Programs and Initiatives to Encourage Integration and Long-term Impact

Community-driven approaches are critical when addressing gender-based violence or conducting research on this topic. Many Indigenous communities in Ontario are already engaged in violence prevention efforts, although they may not be explicitly described as 'violence prevention' in project or program descriptions. It is important to acknowledge and respect the pre-existing violence prevention work of Indigenous communities in order to maximize the impact of programs and initiatives and ensure that all efforts are culturally relevant. All of the partnering communities in Ceremony and Transitions leveraged pre-existing relationships, partnerships and resources to enhance the outcomes of this project and further the priorities that communities had previously identified.

Supporting already existing programs, partnerships and infrastructure is also a trauma-informed approach that minimizes the harm that can come from starting a new program or service without sustainable, long-term operations or funding. Indigenous communities have long experienced harm from the sudden closure of programs and services that were discontinued as a result of a lack of foresight in planning, inadequate funding models or a lack of a community-driven consultation process to determine needs and existing expertise. Programs and projects --especially ones that target gender-based violence--often require considerable time and energy to become established. It is more trauma-informed to respect a community's self-voiced priorities and the momentum that they have already created, rather than require a new approach.

All our partner communities approached and planned project activities and goals within a strength-based framework. Rather than focusing exclusively on talking about the violence faced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, the activities aimed to support young people in feeling secure in their own identities and connected to their communities by supporting them in accessing ceremonies, rites of passage, language learning and mentoring opportunities in a multi-generational context.

Conclusion



The Ceremony & Transitions project facilitated opportunities for much relationship-building and knowledge-sharing between community partners, and it is exciting to consider the possibilities for further culture-based violence prevention work with these partnerships. At the closing gathering at Six Nations in March 2019, all community partners reflected on the incredible amount of cultural programming, learning moments, and community healing opportunities that were made possible through this research. Community Researchers also brought forward the comments and insights of community members and research participants who had seen the impact of this work over the course of the project, and reflected on the possibilities of deeper, more long-term changes at the community level with sustained funding. Community Researchers emphasized that based on their analyses, gender-based violence prevention research projects with Indigenous communities should be Indigenous-led, hands-on, actively contribute to culture-based systems of violence prevention, be consistent in terms of support offered, and ideally long-term, to foster the trust and acceptance of participating communities.

Collectively, there is still much work to be done in future violence prevention projects and initiatives to center 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members consistently and in an intentional way. While this project implemented an inclusive framing for the community-driven research, findings specific to the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community are limited. The trajectory of this research project reflects a collective need- within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities- for greater understanding and inclusion of 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members and their experiences.

These findings from the Ceremony and Transitions project are valuable insights for any group or organization interested in developing culture-based violence prevention projects. This research process, facilitated through ongoing community-level activities with periodic knowledge-sharing gatherings, allowed participating communities to identify priorities and needs related to ending violence that can be carried forward and incorporated into future projects. Finally, the collaborative nature of the research meant that project participants, Community Researchers, and the OFIFC Research team worked together to build knowledge on coordination, execution, and analysis of culture-based violence prevention. Since the project engaged many people in each participating community, these lessons will live on and can be used to vision and implement successful projects moving forward.

Conclusion

The OFIFC extends our deep gratitude to each of the partner communities: Ininew Friendship Centre, St. David Catholic Elementary School, N'Amerind Friendship Centre, and Ohero:kon at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. The OFIFC wishes to thank the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, adults, and other community members who contributed their expertise to this work. The OFIFC especially wishes to thank the Community Researchers and project teams for supporting the work of building healthy, vibrant Indigenous communities.

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