

ROOTS

CIRCLE OF LEARNING-AN URBAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION FRAMEWORK



RESEARCH AND REPORT
DEVELOPED BY ALBERTA NATIVE
FRIENDSHIP CENTRES
ASSOCIATION

JULY 2021

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Circle of Learning- An Urban Indigenous Education Framework
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Disclaimer:

The views expressed within this document are those of the individual organization and/or speaker and are not reflective of the Government of Alberta or Alberta Education.

All data collected is in accordance with Canadian data collection ethics, ANFCA ethics, PIPA, FOIP, and OCAP.

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Acknowledgments


As we reflect upon our journey that is summarized within this document, we would be remiss to not mention the many people and organizations that provided resources, research, stories, and connections that made this report possible.

The Alberta Government provided funding through Alberta Education First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Directorate branch to support the research, assessment, and resources to deliver a two-year initiative at Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association (ANFCA) with the involvement of two Friendship Centres of Exploration, Napi Friendship Association in Pincher Creek, and in Hinton, the Hinton Friendship Centre. We are grateful not only for the funding resources needed to develop and share this report but also for the many people at the Directorate who shared their time to answer questions, collaborate and provide feedback. We appreciate your involvement and acknowledge your commitment to bettering our education system.

Friendship Centres are Urban Indigenous community hubs providing wrap-around services to all people. Grounded in respect for Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being these organizations are paramount to improving the lives of individuals and families who are involved with them. Unique to their communities, yet similar across the province and nation within the Friendship Centre Movement, all 21-member Friendship Centres have contributed to this report in so many ways and for that we are thankful.

Special acknowledgement and thanks go out to the Napi Friendship Association and Hinton Friendship Centre for hosting this Circle of Learning initiative. Our Education Researchers and Navigators in these two centres have been devoted to the children and families involved in the project and it is easy to see the relationships that were built and maintained. Their job at a grassroots level although rewarding can be heart-wrenching and frustrating as they walk with those they serve to help navigate the challenges that are faced daily. We are grateful for the endless hours of support and advocacy for families and children and their professionalism in dealing with schools and community agencies. We recognize the continuous research, surveys and reports submitted, meetings held, resources developed, forms filed, stories shared, and supports provided in a culturally safe way was done from a place of love and respect. Your dedication, and the support of your Friendship Centre team, will continue to impact the lives of the people you have come to know.

As Knowledge Keepers, our Elders provide guidance without judgment. As part of the Provincial Education Advisory Committee, they have offered prayers and teachings, provided mentorship, and shared stories for each of us to learn and grow. Others have contributed to the committee with academic and lived experience to enhance our awareness of Urban Indigenous Peoples' struggles within the education system. It was inspiring to meet with the Advisory Committee and witness the beauty and resiliency of these individuals who have overcome historical residential school trauma and yet bravely support the education system. It is with gentleness Elders whisper prayers of hope for a system that embraces their stories, histories, and values while honoring generations to come. To the Education Advisory Committee members, thank you for celebrating culture and language, practicing ceremony, respecting the land, hearing the ancestors, modeling patience, and walking in truth to create a space of sharing and learning.



School administrators, teachers, and staff have the unique responsibility of caring for and nurturing children that have been entrusted to them each school day. The COVID-19 pandemic placed immense pressure on educators to provide instruction virtually within days of a global closure much to the dismay of those households that did not have access to technology or connectivity. Additionally, educators were mandated to provide virtual, face-to-face, and a hybrid of the two learning environments over the past two school years. Throughout all of this, they did their best to serve students while navigating health protocols to maintain a safe school environment. Educators should be celebrated for maneuvering around these roadblocks to ensure education was delivered, your commitment did not go unnoticed. We are grateful to the teachers and principals that develop relationships with our Friendship Centres to ensure culturally safe services were provided. We appreciate your dedication to our children.

We recognize the challenge of 'walking in two worlds' or what is currently pinned as 'Two-eyed seeing'. We have done our best to evaluate and honour both traditional and academic resources and knowledge bases. We realize the exorbitant contribution of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, storytellers, academia, statisticians, and others too numerous to mention that we have gleaned information and data from during our literary review. You are trailblazers who provide a platform from which the conversation of reconciliation can begin. We thank you.

It is imperative to realize that Friendship Centres do not do work 'for people' but 'with people'. It is in this spirit that we recognize the enduring contributions of parents as we undertook this research. It was evident the unconditional and unwavering love families have for their children and the important role they have in their education. We further recognize the immense burden placed on them throughout the pandemic. Stark inequities surfaced in areas of transportation, technology, academic proficiency, and food security, yet families rose to the challenge to equip their children for sustained learning. We thank families for their involvement throughout the initiative at community and online events, completing surveys, and providing feedback, and entrusting us with your voice.

Finally, and most importantly, we would like to acknowledge the children for whom this initiative was conceived. Creator has gifted us with a collective responsibility to create safety, instill hope and share truths with you so you may realize your dreams. We thank you for your enthusiasm, curiosity, playfulness, and laughter, as we journey together know that you are valued beyond words.

We thank Creator for our gift of talents and abilities. We lay down tobacco asking to help guide our words with kindness that they may be received without judgment. It is our hope that within this report the reader endorses a framework of collaborative partnerships that embark on systems change at the community, provincial, and federal levels.

Acronyms

ANFCA: is the acronym for Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association and is used for abbreviation purposes only

E-Scan: Environmental Scan conducted throughout 21-member Friendship Centre communities

HEARD: Honesty, Equality, Awareness, Reconciliation, Dedication (Partnership Committee with Crescent Valley School)

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

TRC: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Definitions

Cultural Competency: understanding of cultural protocols, customs, celebrations, disparities, contemporary and historical issues

Growth-fostering relationship: a relationship that is comprised of Relational-Cultural theory model of mutual respect, increased self-worth, empowerment, and increased vitality

Inherent Knowledge: knowledge that is given to us at birth by Creator, rather than something that is learned through experience

Intergenerational trauma: symptoms of trauma may be increasing rather than diminishing with the passage of time, exacerbated through intergenerational relationships

School Community: means the staff of the school authority, along with students, parents/guardians, and school council members; (Alberta Education, 2019)

Site of Exploration: member Friendship Centre that has been selected based on population and services criteria for the purpose of explorative research

Student-centered/child-centered: the focal point of service, policy, and development is based around the child, the child comes first when making decisions

Parental Involvement: in this context parental involvement is described as the level of engagement the parent has in terms of interaction with the school community

Trauma-Informed: practices, approaches, interactions, and relationships that are built on an understanding that an individual has experienced, or someone close to them, has experienced trauma

Tried and true: denoting something that has been proven in the past to be effective or reliable

Wrap-around services: services that encompass all basic necessities, higher personal attainment, and varied supports encompassing a holistic perspective, typically provided through a community approach

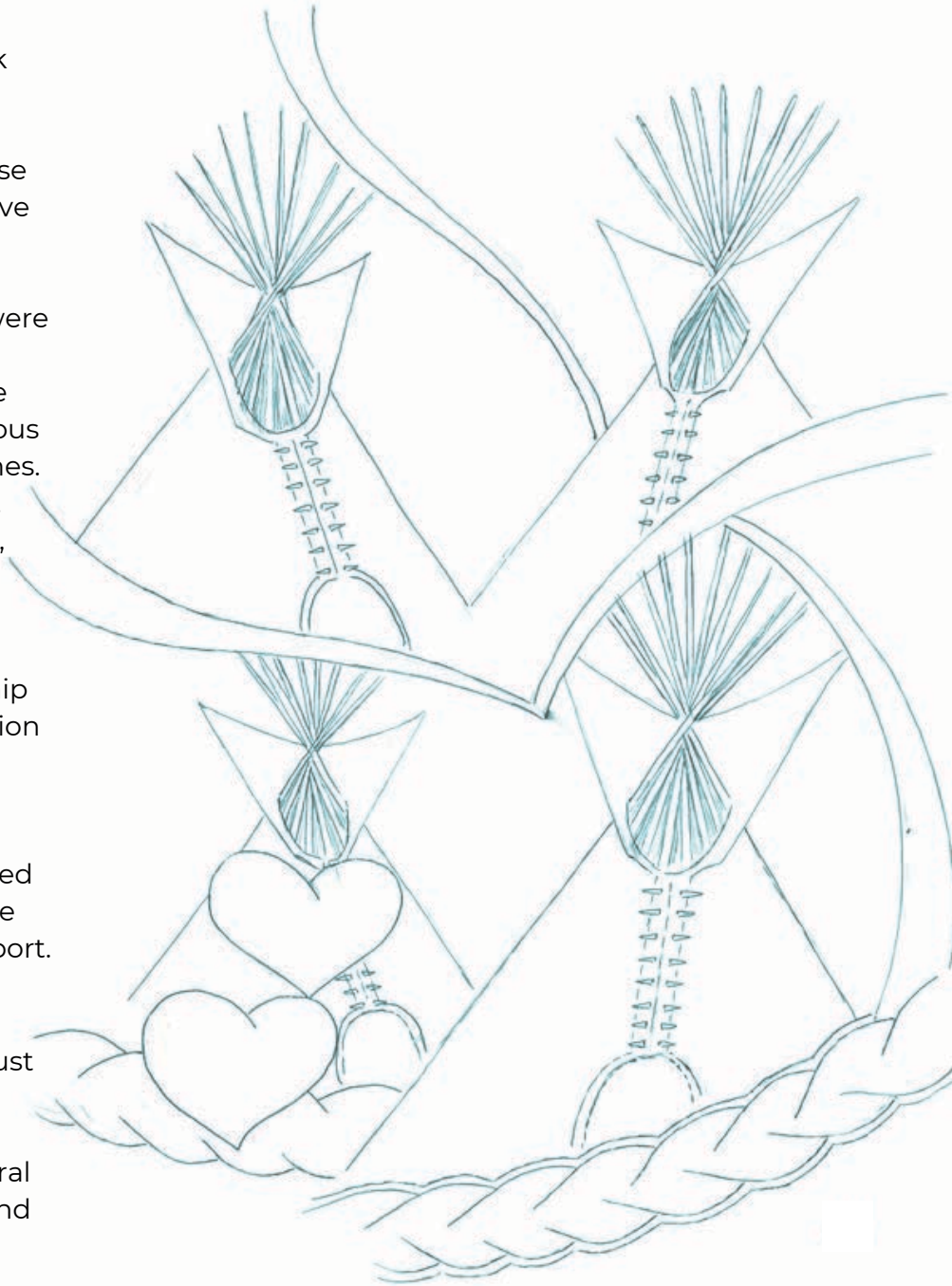
Executive Summary

The Circle of Learning initiative was developed with a purpose to explore, assess, and better understand possible reasons for the disconnect between urban Indigenous students and their families from the Alberta public education system. Within this initiative, Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association and two-member Friendship Centres sought to not only identify the barriers and gaps which reduce the impact of Alberta's public education system on the lives of urban Indigenous peoples, but to also discover opportunities for forward action to overcome identified barriers.

Findings identified through this work might be described as shocking for some, however, within the urban Indigenous community, many of these findings are not a surprise as they have been quietly talked about for generations. From the disparities identified, five key actionable steps were recognized as priority undertakings which are essential to strengthen the relationship between urban Indigenous people and public education outcomes. With a lens to focus on engagement, empowerment, community capacity, and cultural identity, through this initiative, Alberta Friendship Centres have discovered opportunities for impactful educational and relationship paths forward. Working in collaboration with Alberta Education, Friendship Centres, as grass-roots community-based cultural organizations, are uniquely qualified to build the required bridges that will allow us to overcome the disparities defined within this report.

At its core, a meaningful urban Indigenous education framework must include factors of foundational importance such as sustainability, growth-fostering relationships, cultural safety, links to knowledge keepers, and trusted community and cultural connections.

We invite readers of this report to not only reflect on research undertaken, but to also find opportunities where they see themselves as a part of the a multi-faceted solution.



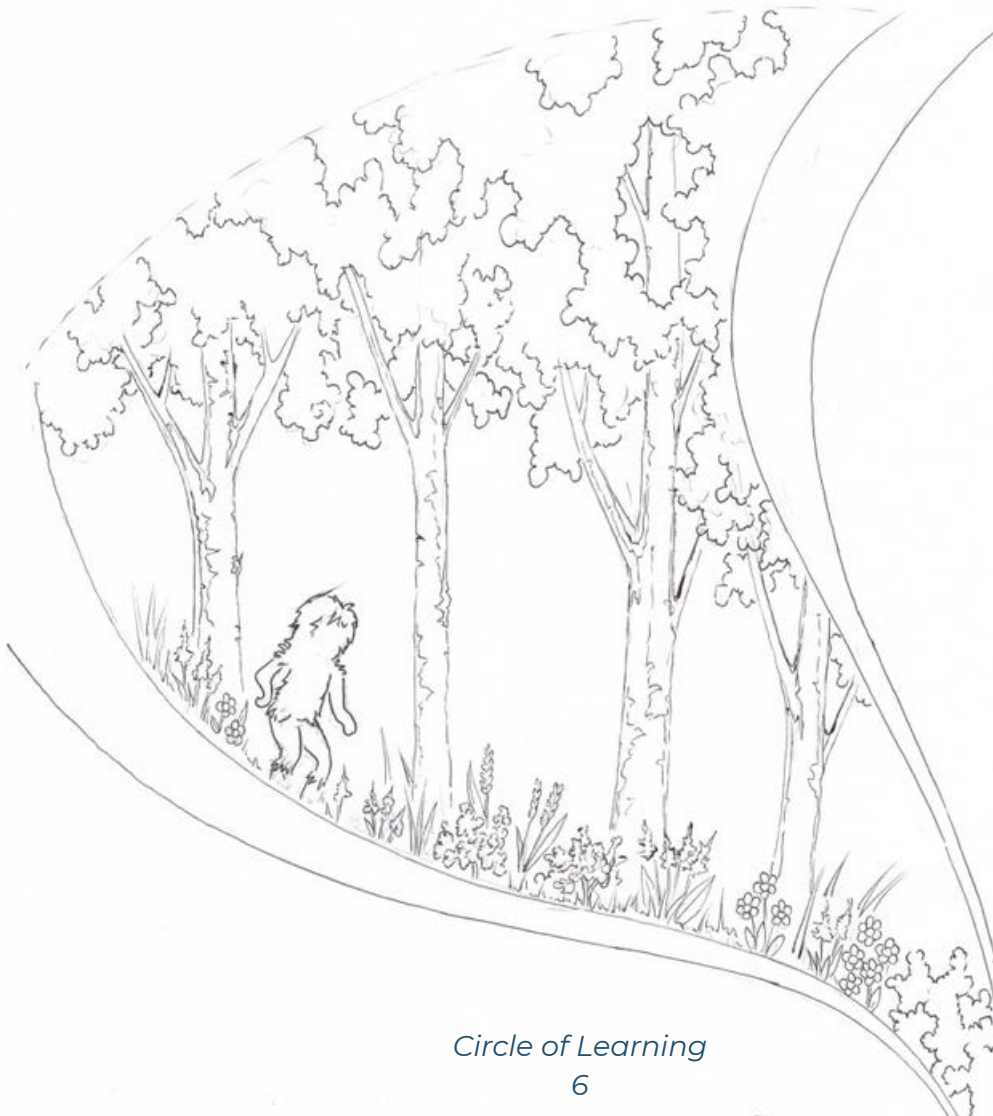
Introduction

Circle of Learning

Circle of Learning Initiative- An Urban Indigenous Education Framework aims at investigating, assessing, and uncovering potential reasons for the disconnect between urban Indigenous students, their families, and the Alberta education system, specifically in the primary school grades.

ANFCA has utilized granted initiative capacity to:

- Conduct research to determine possible reasons for the disconnect between urban Indigenous parents and caregivers and the K-12 education system;
- Conduct an E-scan of 21-member Friendship Centre communities to determine baseline data on the barriers and gaps for urban Indigenous parent engagement with the K-12 education system;
- Identify two (2) communities of exploration for analysis of what is working and potential best practices;
- Develop resources and a framework to support urban Indigenous parent and family engagement within the education system;
- Inform Alberta Education of best practices, resources, and framework developed;



Circle of Learning Initiative

Summary Highlight of Two Communities



266

PARENTS ACTIVELY
ENGAGED ONLINE WITH
CIRCLE OF LEARNING



95

DIVERSE FAMILIES
ACCESSED CIRCLE OF
LEARNING



219

SURVEY RESULTS
RECEIVED WITHIN SITES
OF EXPLORATION



138

PARENTS ACTIVELY
ENGAGED THROUGH
CIRCLE OF LEARNING

Circle of Learning

Support Impact Highlights

Impact	Impact on Family	Impact on Community
Access to technology for education	Students are reliant on internet for schoolwork, having home internet and access to a laptop creates access to information, teachers, peers, and resources.	Students are successful and feel inspired to continue educating themselves, leading to economic and employment innovation within Alberta.
Transportation for students to school	Child's attendance improves due to transport solutions. Increased school attendance improves access to learning and engagement within the school community.	Students can get to school stress-free and therefore are successful in school. Increased safety of children increases trust between community and schools.
Educational take-home kits	Education kits and Indigenous books encourage literacy and learning at home, fostering a sense of lifelong learning and positive self-identity. These have been impactful on families who are less connected to the school system.	An increase in literacy and numeracy skills builds a stronger more resourceful Alberta.
Organizational referrals, red tape reduction for families utilizing service agents	Providing wrap around services through Friendship Centres creates a range of referrals and advocacy to organizations, services, and financial supports. Meeting needs of safety and security, families can focus on educational success for their children.	When families are not struggling for basic needs and have a sense of safety and security, they are able to be a successful member of their community.
Dynamic communication pathways	Families and parents become a part of an online community via social media, having access to resources in a social-like setting. Being able to communicate with Education Navigators through multiple pathways has proven beneficial to families.	Families have the supports they need at their fingertips, have a relationship built with one person, and have the knowledge they need to be involved in the school and community.

Circle of Learning Objectives in Two Sites of Exploration

- Uncover potential reasons how and why urban Indigenous children and their families become disconnected from the public education system.
- Explore how culturally-based community programs, services, and supports can influence the success of urban Indigenous students.
- Identify and engage in relationship building with local schools, school boards, and community organizations.
- Identify and create supports for urban Indigenous families and students regarding the public education system.



Rattle craft with Students, Hinton Friendship Centre

Hinton Friendship Centre

Hinton, AB

Home to the Hinton Friendship Centre, the Town of Hinton, Alberta has a population of approximately 9,205 with 10.5% of this area identifying as Indigenous and 7.9% of the total population speaking an Indigenous language (2016 Census Canada). Hinton is known culturally as a gateway to the Rocky Mountains and many sacred sites. Within this site of exploration, it has become apparent that transportation, mental health, and socio-economic barriers affect the educational engagement of families and students.

A Head Start Program operated within Hinton Friendship Centres allows families to connect to the Friendship Centre and in doing so connect to vital supports, culture, and community. Head Start is a conduit between urban Indigenous families, their culture, and the Western world of education. Head Start provides parents with a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, viewing the education system through an Indigenous lens. It has been found that 69% of parents surveyed who feel involved with their child(ren)'s education have been involved with the Aboriginal Head Start program. This indicator speaks strongly to culturally appropriate practices and wrap-around services. However, when transitioning to public educational systems, cultural missteps occur. Additional adequately funded partnerships are vital to the educational successes and engagement of urban Indigenous families and students.

Seven Sacred Teachings

The Seven Sacred Teachings Award program has been developed within Hinton Friendship Centre, in partnership with Crescent Valley School. This award has introduced an aspect of Indigenous culture that can be celebrated amongst the entire school population. This cultural award is given to one student every month who models the virtues of the Seven Sacred Teachings (Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, Truth). Incorporating Indigenous teachings and stories into everyday life, through this award has been well received by the school, staff, parents, and students, creating a sense of accomplishment and recognition.

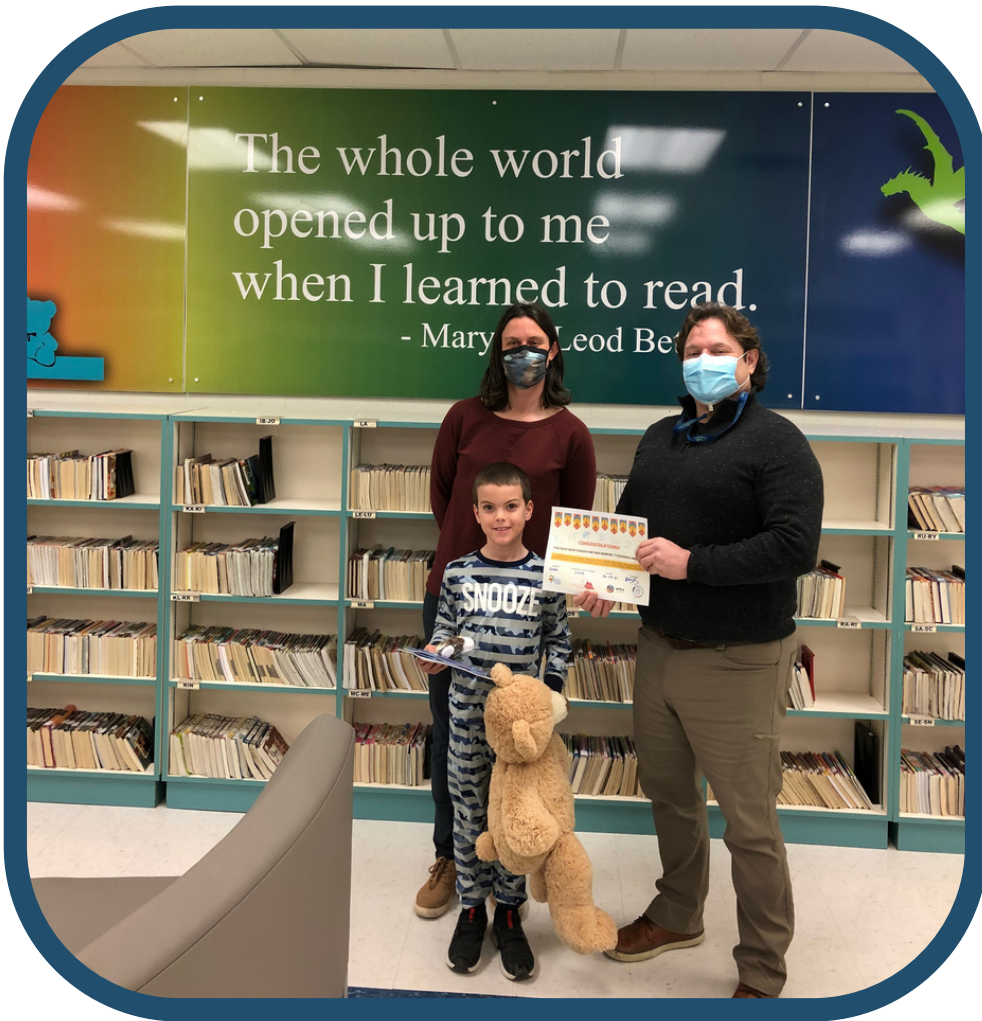
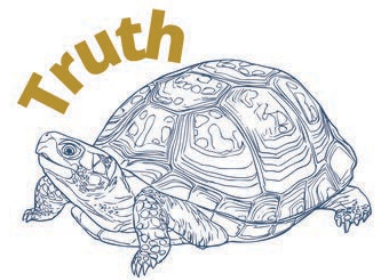


Figure 1

Education Navigator (left), and Principle of Crescent Valley School (right), presenting the very first recipient of the Seven Sacred Teachings award with their certificate and prize



Education Navigators within Hinton Friendship Centre were able to foster an in-school partnership known as the HEARD committee, created through a group representing the Friendship Centre, Crescent Valley School, and the Grande Yellowhead Public School Division. Focusing on engagement, culture, and resources for urban Indigenous families and students. This partnership represents reconciliation and knowledge sharing by providing engagement opportunities, cultural supports, and other resources for Indigenous students and their families.

To celebrate these monumental long-term commitments, the Honourable Rick Wilson, along with other community leaders, held a traditional Tipi raising outside of Crescent Valley School. This ceremony represents the commitment to Two-Eyed seeing within Crescent Valley School and the benefits it has had for the community. Through school-based support and referrals, the Circle of Learning approach was able to connect resources to over 600 school community members. Long-term relationships through ANFCA provide potential professional development opportunities and resource creation.

The complexities of family dynamics, needs, and experiences cannot be addressed with a short-term approach like Head Start. Our children need more support across their whole education journey. Implementing an approach like Circle of Learning must be long term to follow families and assist them with culturally relevant resources, practices, and supports when they need it most. This approach would be more effective if an Educational Navigator follows families from early childhood to graduation, allowing families and students to access supports and resources as needed.



HEARD Partnership Ceremony, (July 2021). Minister Wilson- Hinton Visit (Facebook)
https://www.facebook.com/614914985553297/videos/553016912530838/?_so__=channel_tab&__rv__=all_videos_card

Napi Friendship Association- Pincher Creek, AB

Home to the Napi Friendship Association, the Town of Pincher Creek, Alberta has a population of approximately 3,624 with 22.1% of this area identifying as Indigenous (2016 Census Canada). Napi Friendship Association is located within the heart of the Blackfoot Confederacy, within this site it has been identified that barriers for parental involvement are largely due to socioeconomic factors and cultural differences between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples. Environmental scan within this area shows that more student supports are needed at all grade levels, systemic racism must be addressed, and stronger relationships between the schools and community have to be developed.

Many supports implemented within Pincher Creek have been in collaboration with Napi Friendship Association, through tutoring programs and food security. Education Navigators act as a community hub, utilized by parents as the main source of information regarding resources for navigating online school, student activities, advocacy, referrals, education, and technological supports. This has been beneficial in closing the gap of communication and has increased perceived safety while relationship building and interacting with schools.



The implementation of resources and culturally relevant educational supports like education kits, backpack programs, books, and Chromebook lending, assisted urban Indigenous students and families to maintain a connection with education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources were shared collectively over 304 times within the Napi community and surrounding area; allowing urban Indigenous families to navigate the hardships of online learning, public health closures, and a fast-changing environment while keeping their children engaged in learning.

Friendship Centres provide flexibility through trusted wrap-around services, advocacy, and programming. Families within the community know that Napi Friendship Association is a place they can turn to access diverse family and individualized programming.

As an organization that is a voice of the urban Indigenous community, it was difficult to build relationships with the school boards and corresponding schools within this area. Multiple letters, emails, follow-ups, and phone calls were made throughout the time of the initiative to school leadership to no avail. This indication of skewed communication from organization to organization demonstrates a fraction of the hardships Indigenous parents face, with involvement or voicing their opinions and concerns about the education system. It is important to note that Circle of Learning may have gained more ground in this community as an active partner with school boards.

This gap in communication speaks volumes to the difficulty that parents face, the inability to build relationships with educators, and administrative staff; creating more fear, and causing more pull-back from urban Indigenous parents. This lack of communication and mutual respect has been detrimental to the outcomes of Indigenous students within Alberta and does not align with the Professional Quality Standards or Alberta Education's business plan Outcome 2 that has been implemented since 2009.

Friendship Centre Wrap-Around Supports

A Highlight of 21-member Friendship Centre Supports*

Educational Supports

- Land-based education
 - berry-picking
 - medicine picking
 - trapping, fishing, hunting
 - tracking
- Indigenous Language Programming
- Pathways to Education
- Brighter Futures
- Family Literacy
- Aboriginal Head Start
- Youth development
- Tutoring Programs
- Strengthening the Family Circle
- GED course support
- Technology Access/Support
- Elder in residence
- HEARD partnership
- STEM learning
- Genealogy Workshops

Life Skills

- Teen Centre
- Youth Drop-In
- Honouring Life
- Outreach Programs
- Financial Support
- Seeds of Empathy
- Cooking
- Financial Literacy
- Cultural Workshops
- Traditional Crafts
- Parenting Program
- Healing Circles
- Summer and Winter Camps
- Ceremony
- Elder Supports
- Filing our Tipis
- Sport and Recreation
- GDL Training/Drivers Education
- Se7en Stars Youth Cultural Society
- Addiction and Mental Health solutions

Employment Skills

- Employment Guidance
- Academic Mentorship
- Career Counseling
- Application and Resume Help
- Diversion Programing

*This list is not exhaustive

Within the time of Circle of Learning's implementation, it has been clear that Friendship Centres provide wrap-around services within communities to the benefit of urban Indigenous families. Education Navigators, through dynamic communication and holistic approaches, inform urban Indigenous families of opportunities for community involvement, family supports, and cultural activities. Sharing educational resource kits has played a vital role in ensuring urban Indigenous families and learners remain connected to education, literacy, and numeracy in a culturally relevant and exciting way. The inclusion of books from Indigenous authors, traditional crafts, Indigenous language resources, land-based, and cultural teachings have allowed those that may have experienced barriers in education due to COVID-19 to stay culturally connected while continuing to be engaged in education.

Kohkom (grandmother) is the main caretaker of multiple school-aged children, when school was moved online she had little previous technological experience. This Site's Education Navigator, recognized as a community pillar, was able to connect with this Kohkom who knew and trusted the Friendship Centre. Through this connection and relationship, Circle of Learning was able to assist the Kohkom by teaching her step by step how to navigate Google Classroom so the children were able to continue their education.

- Circle of Learning Navigator Story

The challenges of navigating a 'new normal' while sustaining a sense of community and accessible technology have been challenges within both sites of exploration. The strong relationships that Friendship Centres create within the community provide a cultural safety net within urban centers. Partnerships with individuals, organizations and the community allow Friendship Centres to establish programs, build capacity, and assist patrons in multiple sociological, cultural, spiritual, and other needs beyond the Social Determinants of Health. Providing a safe space to hold ceremony, educate, and infuse Indigenous culture into community allow all peoples to move forward and live reconciliation.

Friendship Centres support schools

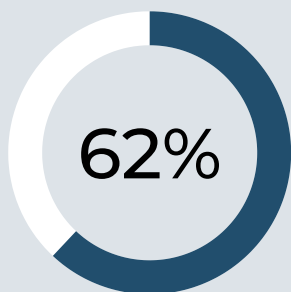


Figure 2

62% of Friendship Centres analyzed are regularly called upon to support schools with cultural programming

Friendship Centres strengthen relationships

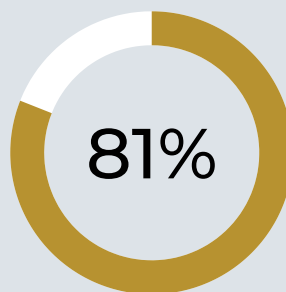


Figure 3

81% of Friendship Centres analyzed have identified relationships with the schools in their community

Friendship Centres focus on literacy

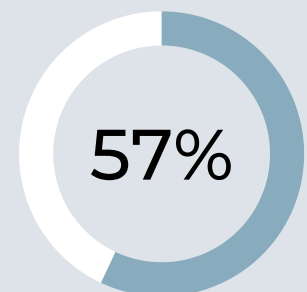


Figure 4

57% of Friendship Centres analyzed have formal literacy and/or Indigenous language programs operating within their Centre

Within Sites of Exploration, cohorts of urban Indigenous parents in the corresponding communities were formed. When parents within both communities were asked open-endedly what the largest gaps and barriers they face when engaging with the education system it was best summarized as lack of transportation, distrust within the school system, lack of cultural sensitivity, and lack of consideration of disparities faced by low socioeconomic families.

Alberta Education has invested time and money into identifying issues at the root of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education and in doing so have taken on pledges to specifically tackle these core issues.

However, recommendations that Alberta Education has taken responsibility and accepted, do not come to fruition. Not publicly following up on these recommendations increases distrust among urban Indigenous parents within the education system, specifically when initiatives that would fill large gaps, for example, a regional support consortium for First Nations and Metis Education, with neighboring school jurisdictions and First Nations education authorities. This is specifically in response to Inquiry and Community Engagement Team Recommendations. In 2014, when this initiative was implemented parent involvement was identified through the Accountability Pillar at 69.8% involvement, and in 2020 parental involvement is identified at 69.8%. This absence of change in parental involvement within the Accountability Pillars shows how much more effort must be put into trauma-informed relationship building and cultural competency.

Transportation barriers

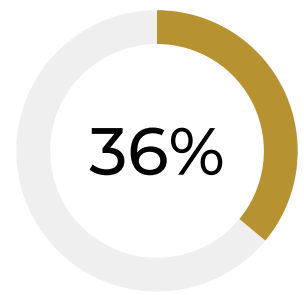


Figure 5

36% of Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified transportation to and from school and supports as a barrier

Parents feel involved

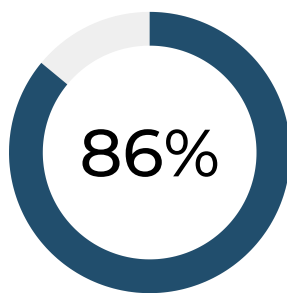


Figure 6

86% of Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified that they agree or strongly agree that they feel involved in their child(ren)'s education

The indicated Accountability Pillar does not reflect what was found when surveying and conducting the narrative inquiry with urban Indigenous parents within Sites of Exploration. It was identified that 86% of Circle of Learning parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that they 'feel involved in their child(ren)'s education.' This uncovering is intriguing, as conducting research identifying why urban Indigenous parents are not involved within the public education system, 86% of parents surveyed feel they are involved. Upon investigating this further it was discovered that definitions of parental involvement are different based on Indigenous and Non-Indigenous world views.

Differing Definitions of Involvement

Alberta Education:

Percentages of teachers and parents satisfied with parental involvement in decisions about their child's education indicated on factors of opportunity for decision making about their child(ren)'s education, school, and if these decisions are considered (*Alberta Education*).

Provincial Education Advisory Committee:

Engagement is about relationships, friendly inviting voice into a setting, not doing things for people but with people.

Circle of Learning Urban Indigenous Parents:

Participating in dialogue with the child, supporting the child wherever possible, being patient, kind, and understanding while being supportive for all those involved in the child(ren)'s education. Involvement is not always defined as taking place within the school setting.

"...broaden the definition and understanding of what parental involvement is. Our economy and society has changed from the expectation that an engaged parent is the one in the schools...parents and school staff need to shift understandings of what an engaged parent can look like."

- Circle of Learning Parent

Changing the narrative of what parental involvement within education looks like, may open up pathways for urban Indigenous parents that may not feel they 'fit the mold' of an engaged parent.

Lack of opportunities and supports

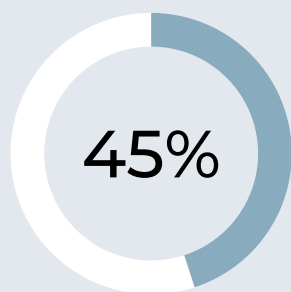


Figure 7

Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified that there were none or they were unaware of volunteering opportunities within their child(ren)'s school or opportunities that encourage parental participation

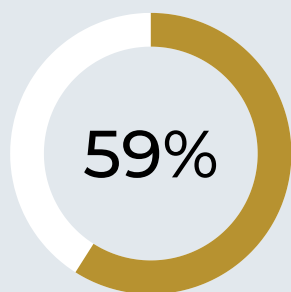


Figure 8

Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified they are unaware of supports in place within the school or community to help their child(ren) succeed academically

Urban Indigenous parents identify themselves as being engaged within their child's education through discussion and engagement with their child directly. This relates back to the Indigenous values of the child at the centre of community. Differentiating worldviews combined with cultural deficits has depleted the education systems within Alberta and Canada continuing to divide and increase gaps, as we see with only 'one eye' within a Two-Eyed world.

Two-Eyed Seeing:

Two-Eyed Seeing is a concept developed by Mi'kmaw Elder, Albert Marshall and describes living as "to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012). It is common that two-eyed seeing is the way urban Indigenous peoples experience and navigate the modern world.

Actionable Item:
Alberta Education works hard to communicate with urban Indigenous parents through multiple forms of communication to develop a plan, within 1 year of announced responsibility of a recommendation. Include the input of Indigenous perspectives with engaged organizations, community, stakeholders, and research to ensure the best outcomes for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education in Alberta.

The perception that urban Indigenous parents are not involved in their child's education is false. Through the engagement of urban Indigenous parents within the Circle of Learning, the thought process that parental involvement is non-existent within this cohort is incorrect and potentially harmful, furthering stereotyping and systemic racism. However, it is important to note that there may be parents that we were unable to reach through Circle of Learning due to COVID and increased barriers such as, access to technology, technological literacy, and isolation.

Parents surveyed identified the largest gaps for engaging with schools and teachers as, limited time for school activities, poor relationships with school system, hesitancy towards teachers, lack of transportation, and inadequacy of cultural safety and competence within the education system.

Relations are the foundation of knowledge transfer and integrated as a requirement across the 2019 Quality Standards documents defined as Building Effective Relationships. There cannot be parental involvement, quality child education, and educational attainment without the foundation of building relationships, especially cross-culturally. It is important that as Canadians we honour and understand Canada's First People and celebrate the unique attributes of local Indigenous culture and understanding of the land base of which we live.



"Teachers need to be respectful to parents on a regular basis so parents feel comfortable in reaching out."

- Circle of Learning Parent

Relational-Cultural Theory

The relational-cultural theory specifies criteria to determine if mutual growth and learning have occurred within an interaction or relationship; according to relational-cultural theory mutually growth fostering relationships meet three sets of criteria:

- a) the beliefs of the individuals,
- b) the relational skills to achieve growth fostering relationships,
- c) the outcomes must be mutual for the interaction and/or relationship to be considered mutually growth fostering (Jordan, J.V. 2000).

This approach is a proven practice when it comes to interaction and relational development, in particular when navigating culturally diverse communities.

Relational-Cultural theory identifies the *Five Good Things* as outcomes for growth-fostering relationships:



Figure 9
Circle of Learning
adaptation of
Relational-cultural
theory in practice to
support parent-school
relationships.

Relational-Cultural Theory In Practice

Partners in Education (Mapp and Kuttner, 2013) acts as a scaffold for the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and program implementation within the school system in America, with a strong focus on family-school partnerships. Within the case study at Stanton Elementary School, it was identified that there was a need to build mutually respectful relationships with trust between home and school as the foundation to successful parental involvement. So much so that in the 2009/10 school year only 12% of families attended parent-teacher conferences and in the 2011/12 school year 55% of families attended all parent-teacher conferences. This foundation was built on mutual respect, empathy, connection, and desire for relational experiences beyond initial interactions.



Head Start Classroom, Hinton, AB

First 5 Santa Clara County adopted a family-centred approach, by partnering with a 'Family Support Centre', a multi-service centre offering resources, advocacy, literacy, food security, workshops, and learning opportunities with the flexibility to adapt to the needs of those served. A Community Worker within the Centre reaches out to families in the community and shares information making the 'Family Support Centre' a centralized location where families can access resources, support, educational opportunities, and referrals. Utilizing a community hub and building a strong relationship with schools allowed the school community to build trust between schools and families, enhance their own capabilities and increase cross-cultural networks for both the parents and educators (Mapp and Kuttner, 2013).

Friendship Centres act as a community hub, similarly as noted within the International tried-and-true practices outlined above. The relationship foundation that is laid out within Aboriginal Headstart creates a gateway for many parents into the Friendship Centre for wrap-around services and the cultural safety that is embedded within the Centre.



Circle of Learning

By collaborating and partnering with the ANFCA, to access Friendship Centres, Alberta's education system would be enhanced within each aspect of Teacher Quality Standards (TQS), Leadership Quality Standards (LQS), and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standards (SLQS) for all children. Establishing cultural safety and wrap-around services is a vital gateway to urban Indigenous peoples' culture, knowledge, and ways of being. Friendship Centres cannot only assist with supporting competency 5 (*Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit*) within the TQS, LQS, and SLQS but also within other strands of these quality standards. This partnership enhances effective relationships, career-long learning, inclusive environments, integrated leadership through student-centered processes, provides research on community-based FNMI experiences and practices, and implements wrap-around supports for families.

A Child Centered Model

When looking at relational models and parental involvement for the betterment of educational attainments and holistic development of our children it is vital to discuss a combination of worldviews, like Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Development, through an Indigenous lens.

This theory places importance on contextual influences of physical, cognitive, and social worlds, similar to the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. Circle of Learning utilizes Bronfenbrenner's theory as it simply applies to multiple worldviews and cultures, and the application of relationships as an outcome for identity and understanding of society.

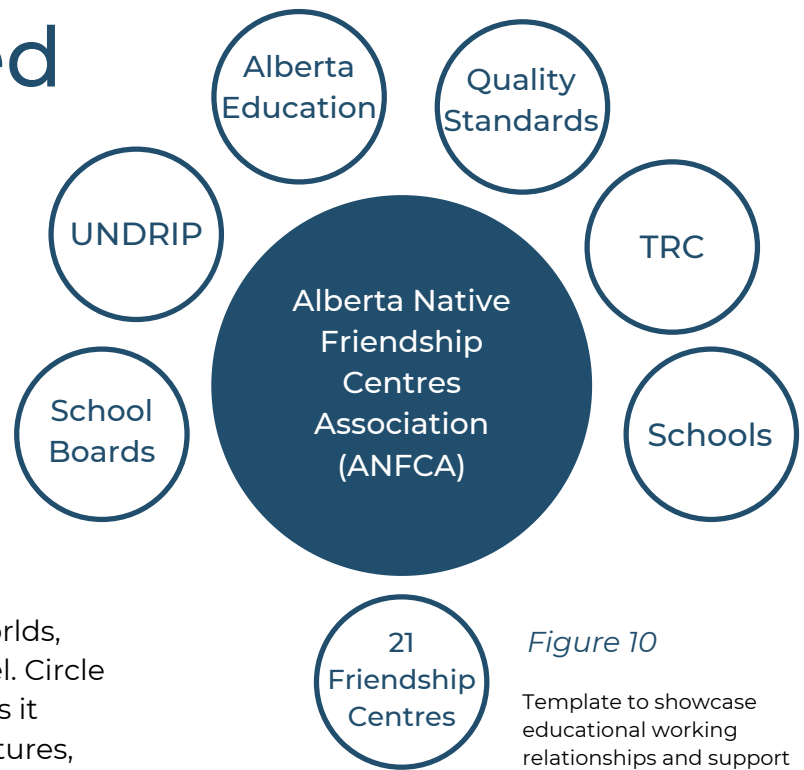


Figure 10

Template to showcase educational working relationships and support honouring a child-centered model.

"[In] a perfect world my kids would have a voice in their education. I feel like parents are always making decision[s] on education and we are not the ones in school. Our children need a voice."

- Circle of Learning Parent

Holistic approaches to a child's development highlight the complexities of developmental processes, it is vital to evaluate the systems children live within and determine how each system influences the individual. If we do not look at all systems, we are not taking the whole environment into context. A child is a product of their environment, not a one-off cause and effect, utilizing Bronfenbrenner's model indicates a holistic look at the source of a problem without making assumptions of a child's life.

With the Child in the center, much like Indigenous worldviews, the learner is to be taught and is to teach, as when we are born, we are born whole, with inherent knowledge. The child at the center holds within themselves self-esteem, resilience, and identity/self-concept. This diagram is to showcase how wrap-around community support systems can be a protective factor for the societal and educational outcomes of the child. Combining this 'Western' model of theory with Indigenous perspectives reiterates how everything, all my relations, is interconnected.

Within this model adaptation, shown in *Figure 11*, the central child is covered and wrapped by family; addressing the importance of family bonds synonymously across Indigenous cultures. With a foundation in culture, emotional skills, and family as first teachers, the child is surrounded by cousins, grandparents, parents, and siblings.

Teachers, Schools, and peers surrounding the child's inner ring affecting the child directly in instances of support or discouragement; thus influencing interpersonal skills. Culturally safe and wrap-around community support systems can be a protective factor of this system.

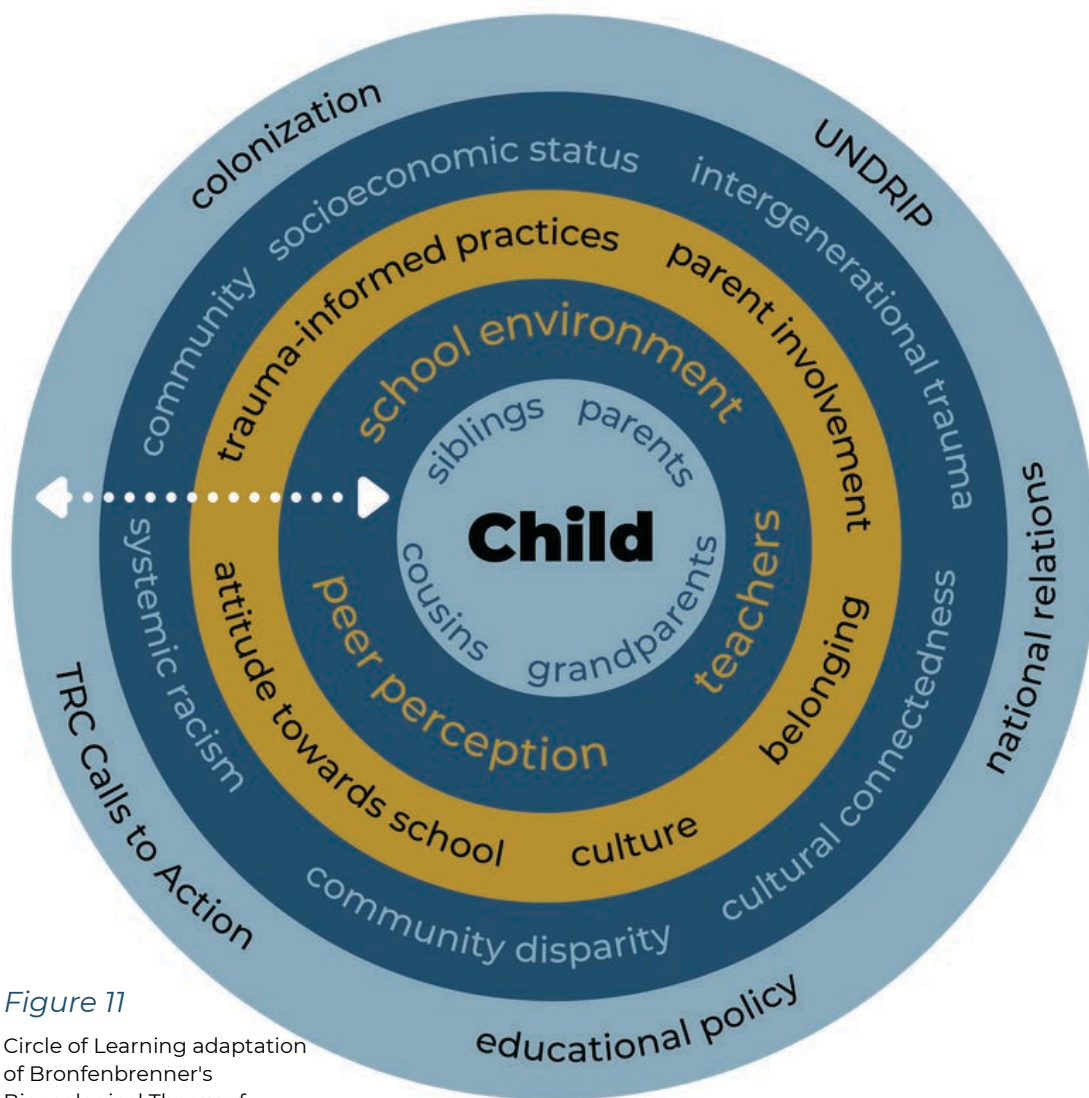


Figure 11
Circle of Learning adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Development.

The child is then enveloped by relationships between those that surround the child (family) and those that have external influence (teachers) on the child. Impacts of this relationship dynamic on a child's development are determined by parents' relationship with the education system, issues within the home (socioeconomic), or relationship to culture influencing the child's academic performance.

Community, socioeconomic status, intergenerational trauma, and ineffective parenting practices influence interconnected relationships that are indirectly affecting the child through their perception of relation to others. For instance, this is where stigma and perceived repercussions of accessing social support fails. For example, families that face food insecurity worry about sending their children to school without a lunch, as they anticipate child services being called for neglect.

Within this model, circling the complexity of the Child and their developmental path is educational policy, colonization, and national relations. When creating policies, it is important to acknowledge how these systems, directly and indirectly, affect the child.

Looking at the education system from a child centred model and understanding the direct effects of relationship networks within that child's caregivers, grandparents, Elders, knowledge keepers, land, environment, and infrastructure showcases what type of supports, structures, and identity that child must develop within themselves. These relationships support the child to become exceptional citizens that are well-developed and have minimal Adverse Childhood Experiences, because of strong communal relationships that encompass the child throughout life. Understanding how we honor Indigenous and western world views and braiding those views together into a clear framework can be incorporated into existing education structures.

Multigenerational effects of emotional interdependence recognize the importance of trauma-informed practices within schools. Implementing a child-centered approach in education by taking into context that children are a sum of their relationships inside and outside of school will positively affect educational outcomes (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000). Utilizing the framework developed through this initiative will help guide this child-centered approach in a sustainable way.

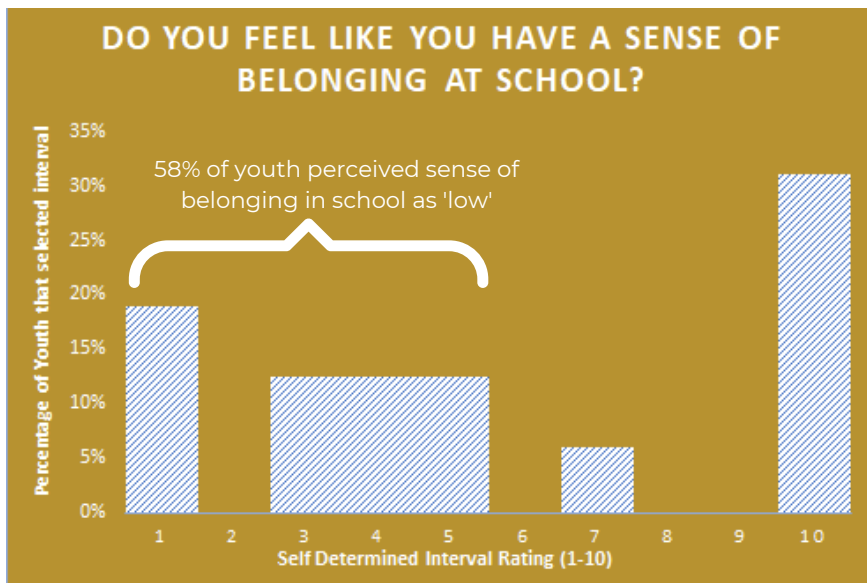


Figure 12
Word cloud made from answers of Youth participants open-ended question of "share a story of what belonging looks like"

“Belonging looks like being accepted [for] who you are...Belonging is when you are treated fairly just like the other students. Belonging is [taking] a stand for yourself and building up from it.”

-Youth Participant

Who Am I?



58% of urban Indigenous youth surveyed, aged 13-29, scored their perceived sense of belonging as 'low' or 1-5 on an interval scale out of 10. This concluded that 19% of participants identifying the lowest possible score for their own sense of belonging within school. Although this youth cohort is not the main focus of Circle of Learning, it is important to look at the aspects of school completion, and the disparities that are faced by urban Indigenous students. These real-life accounts showcase the importance of representation within the education system through positive role models and the visible celebration of culture.

Table 1

58% of urban Indigenous youth, aged 13-29 scored their perceived sense of belonging as 'low' or 1-5 on an interval scale out of 10

"For over a century...the establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as "cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015). It is important to note that the effect of the residential school system links to a negative or lost sense of identity, particularly within the education system. 92% of parents surveyed identified that it is important to see and hear Indigenous culture, values, and traditions reflected in their child(ren)'s schoolwork and/or at school. Furthermore, 48% of Circle of Learning parents surveyed identified that their child(ren)'s school is not meeting their family expectations for Indigenous culture, values, and content.

"... positive self-identity is one of the factors that result in a greater commitment and connection to schooling by Indigenous students, leading to better school outcomes...successful school outcomes by Indigenous students implies that they will have access to the full range of further education, training, employment, and life changes..." (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, Gunstone 2000).



Perception of self is foundational for setting FNMI students up for success. Establishing positive role models, focusing on the development of self-efficacy, and solidifying positive perceptions of self-identity within the education system has the potential to positively increase Indigenous students' success within education, life, and social aspects. Alberta Education has the ability to become an international leader in Indigenous education by developing a deeper understanding in its students of what it means to walk in two worlds.

Indigenous values

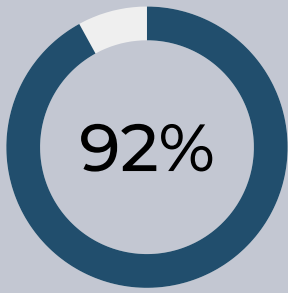


Figure 14

92% of parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to see and hear Indigenous culture, values, and traditions reflected in their child(ren)'s schoolwork and/or at school

Cultural expectations

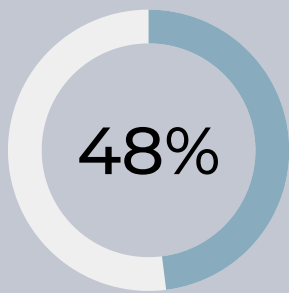


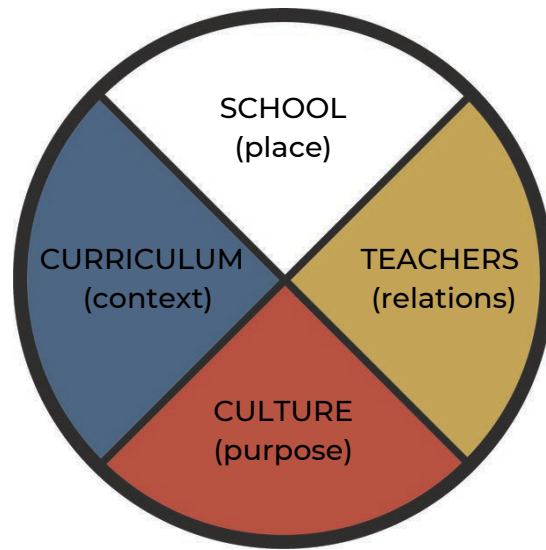
Figure 15

48% of parents surveyed disagree or strongly disagree that their child(ren)'s school is meeting their family expectations for Indigenous culture, values, and content within their child's school and school work

Urban Indigenous parents see Indigenous culture as something vitally important for their children to learn. Studies within Australia have concluded that positive self-identity, as a student, is likely to be associated with school success (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe & Gunstone, 2000). Included within this is that positive self-identity is forged when students recognize the value of school, this study further discusses that service integration (covering all quadrants of the medicine wheel) is better positioned to address the relationship between educational attainment and connection to culture and socioeconomic status. Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe & Gunstone (2000), also identify that when students have positive conceptions of themselves successful school outcomes will be more likely than when there are contradictions between being Indigenous and being a successful student.

Figure 16

Adapted from teachings of *Breath of Life Theory* (Blackstock, 2011) determining the need for a holistic context to be taken into effect, just as demonstrated within *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* (Maslow, 1948)



Factors identified that are associated with positive school identity are school (place), teachers (relations), culture (purpose), and curriculum (context). The constant conflict between being a successful student and being an Indigenous person presents challenges within Alberta's current education system. Remedying this by incorporating local Indigenous knowledge and representation at school has the possibility of positively transforming FNMI student outcomes.

Actionable Item:

Alberta Education partners with Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association to implement culturally safe professional development solutions across Alberta schools and school boards to ensure a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approach within pedagogy and school community through cultural competency training.

Needs of the Individual Effect the Whole

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been described as a successful tool adapted from traditional Blackfoot knowledge (Blackstock, 2011). Maslow states, "If both the psychological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs... Now the person will feel keenly, as never before... He will hunger for affectional relationship with people in general, namely for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world..." pp.9 (Maslow, 1943). Maslow repeatedly mentions that relationships are the 'goal' of his theory, climbing the ladder until the individual has the ability to execute impactful relationships with the community.

When reflecting on Indigenous ways of knowing and being, The Breath of Life theory takes into context the ethical space response through relational worldview principles of fluidity, relationships, and harmony of the mind, body, spirit, and context. This approach is practical and aligns with Indigenous values and worldviews of interconnectedness.

"...change is very important and being of First Nations/Metis descent. It is important to let those who are non-indigenous peoples know that we all matter just the same as anyone else, but with the changes of our history, culture, and languages that were almost taken to come to light once again... reconciling with one another."

-Youth Participant

The education system exists within an agentic state, Canadians have been ill-educated on Indigenous contributions, needs, and belief systems, by not questioning authority systems. Contributing to the continuous demise and disparities faced by Indigenous children and families the education system lacks a community source of connections and referrals for families as a whole unit. By incorporating culture and relationships as the basis of the education system wrap-around services at the community level should be supported.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Social Determinants of Health, and Breath of Life theory all incorporate aspects of physical, mental, and spiritual wellness. This is demonstrated through the Report on the State of Public Health in Canada (2008), through the determinants of health behaviors, early childhood development, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transcending to belongingness, love, and safety. By adopting models of relational-cultural theory into the education system, along with the consideration of bioecological models of development it is possible to create an education system that encompasses economic development, innovation, and a thriving province.

“Schools can be really scary and daunting place for kids and parents, lots of barriers... [like] language barriers, [parents have] less education... when there is a cultural presence within the school it really breaks down those barriers.”

- Member Friendship Centre



Figure 17

Cultural safety model adapted by Circle of Learning through community research and engagement

The outcome of cultural safety within interactions is defined by Dr. Jessica Ball (2009) as feeling accepted as an individual in connection to their cultural identity and behaviours, reducing the risk of resistance in interactions with systems. Cultural safety takes into preference parents' experience of feeling respected, having their cultural location, and values taken into context when interacting with the educational structure. For urban Indigenous parents to interact with the educational structure within Alberta means "crossing cultural borders, to the foreign culture of a mainstream institution" (Ball, 2009). Ball states that the risks associated with cross-cultural encounters, like discrimination, peer perception, racism, and microaggressions can be mitigated through a cultural navigator.

Outlined within Australia's *Positive Self-Identity for Indigenous Students and its Relationship to School Outcomes* (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, Gunstone 2000), the link between positive cultural awareness is likely to be associated with school success, their recommendations for developing positive self-identity as an Indigenous person and as a student are associated within the following factors:

- School: students feel belonging
- Teachers: welcoming, supportive, positive expectations
- Curriculum: identifies with Indigenous student and their culture
- Community Supports: encouragement from family, peers, and community

Integrating tried-and-true practices of the basis of cultural safety integration allows for opportunities for urban Indigenous children to succeed and thrive within and beyond school, allowing for a more economically diverse and prosperous Alberta.

Implementation of *Pathways to Education* within the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, provides cultural support, incorporation of Indigenous language, referral services, and community relationship building within the local education system. When this program first began in 2017 one school *Pathways to Education* is implemented in had high incidences of suicide in young teens, in what was believed to be induced by "harsh bullying and elitist mentalities" (French, 2017). Collaborative efforts with the Friendship Centre have now increased awareness among students, faculty, and parents bringing representation of Indigenous culture, belonging, trust, and family to the school. By operating out of a Friendship Centre the flexibility and range of referrals, supports, and cultural ties provided, connect families within schools to baseline supports.

These supports include food security, transportation, educational and cultural programming families need but would otherwise not reach due to the stigma and cultural vulnerability that comes with accessing systems. Collaboration between the education system and Friendship Centres has transformed the environment of these schools to one that is culturally sensitive and leads with success by implementing Indigenous celebrations, smudge, and teachings within all classes.

The Brain Story Certification, created by the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, in collaboration with over 30 leading experts in neurobiology and mental health, is an in-depth course to showcase the important social interactions and stress at a young age can increase the risk of physical and mental health outcomes, including addiction.

This course identifies evidence-based approaches to build resiliency in children and families across their lifetime, beginning at the most vulnerable point in social development—in childhood. Foundational understanding within early brain development, effects of epigenetics (intergenerational trauma), and how Adverse Childhood Effects influence executive functioning as an adult is vital for educators to understand. Schools are a main, everyday point of contact for many children, by acknowledging this the education system can implement early intervention through strong community partnership and referral services that are culturally safe.

Understanding *The Brain Story* on a scientific and emotional level showcases the effects of reoccurring intergenerational trauma and how difficult it is to break the cycle. Although, it may be hard to learn about, it is important to have a deeper understanding on why behavioral, emotional, and physical issues can develop due to Adverse Childhood Experiences. Developing a deeper understanding of traumas and adversities others face allows us to create a better education system for all by approaching through a trauma-informed lens.

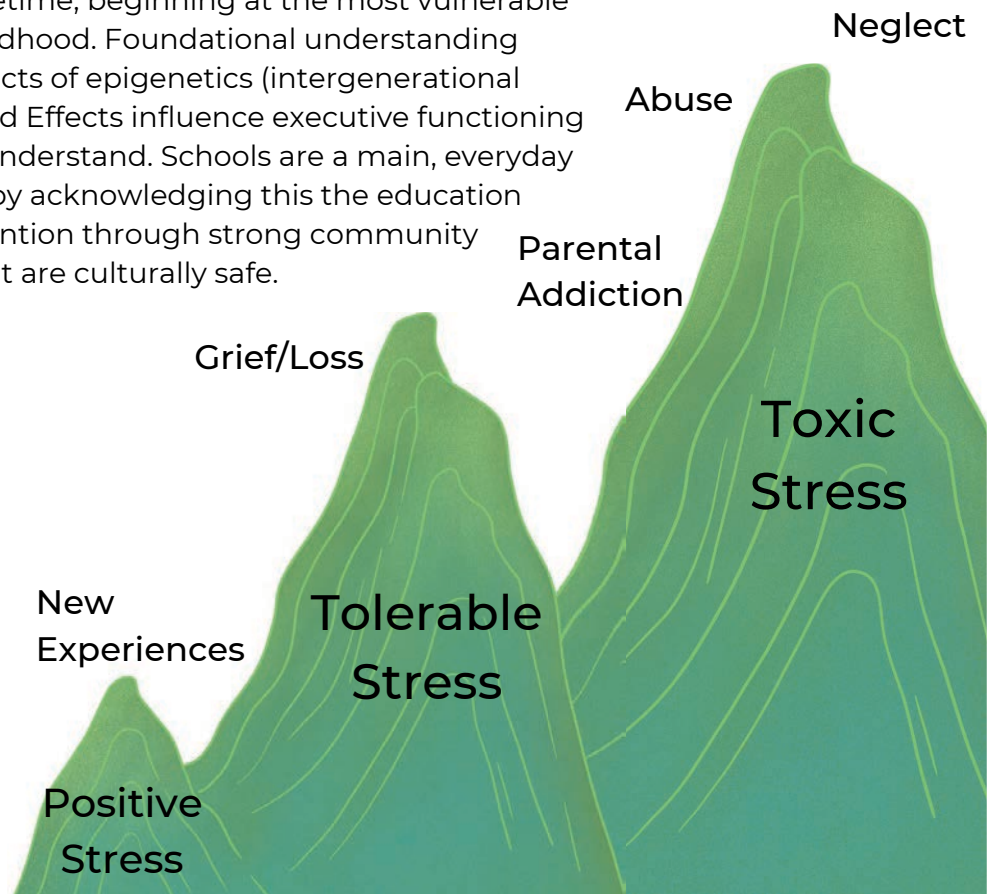


Figure 18

Circle of Learning's adaptation of the *Brain Story Model* ("Brain Story Certification", 2021)

Charlton Weasel Head, the acting principal at Kainai High School, in Southern Alberta encourages others to become certified through *The Brain Story*, which positively affects Indigenous communities by understanding what intergenerational trauma means, and what adversities children face. Through this certification Teachers in Kainai High School have a better understanding of what children are dealing with daily and how to mitigate that as a community and trusted adult.

Brain Story certified professional, Kesa Shikaze describes the benefits of translating the science of brain development into something that is utilizable to the public. Through policy, program development, and early intervention *The Brain Story* creates a communal baseline understanding of effective methods around intergenerational trauma, supporting caregivers, children, and youth that have been impacted by trauma.

Environmental Scans

21 Alberta Communities

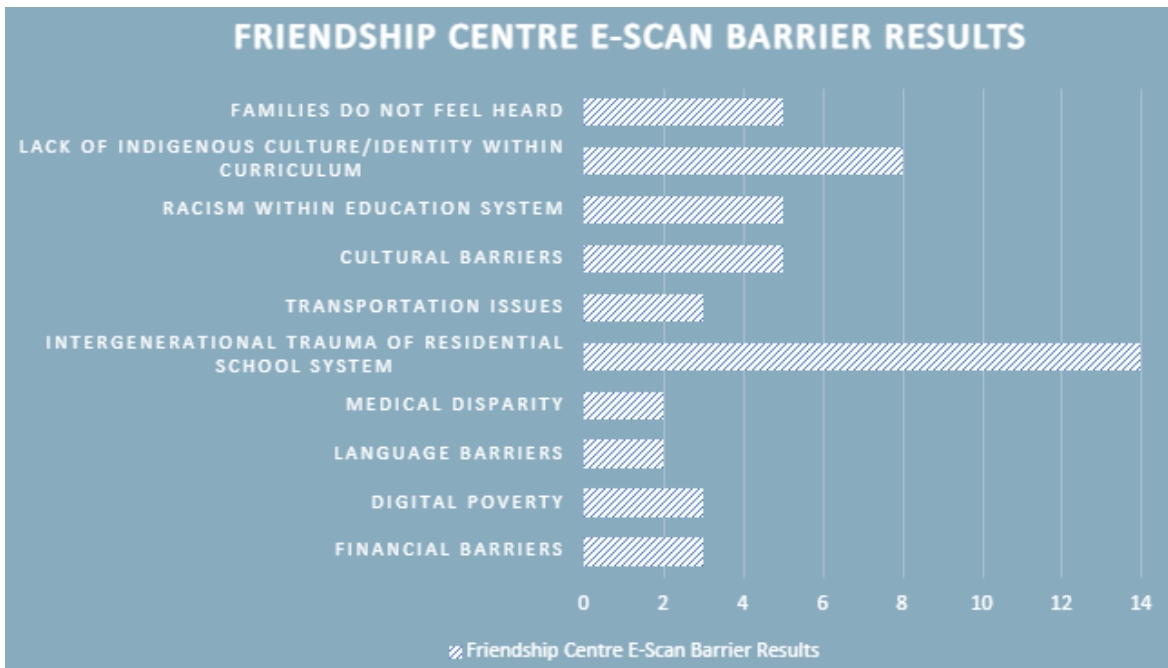


Table 2

Friendship Centre Environmental Scan results of 21-member Friendship Centres

Within the E-scans, data has been collected on current supports within Friendship Centres, their partnerships, parental engagement, barriers, and perception of education within each community. E-scans are a narrative inquiry of tacit knowledge into each 21-member Friendship Centres' location with an active approach to data collection.

When conducting the narrative inquiry with Friendship Centres through environmental scans the following were identified as barriers and gaps to being engaged through the perspective of the individual. Some of the above themes were identified more than once within one environmental scan, it is important to note that these barriers were not pre-identified but were brought up by the interviewee.

The largest barrier, referenced approximately 14 times across 21-member Friendship Centre communities was intergenerational trauma, inflicted by the residential school system. Racism was also referenced across environmental scans conducted. This does not align with the path to reconciliation.

Actionable Item:

Alberta Education in partnership with ANFCA and Friendship Centres build bridges across educational gaps, challenge current education system structures, and are innovative when it comes to relationship solutions that have transformative effects on students. This can be but is not limited to, resource development, trauma-informed practices, cultural protocol, and pre-contact history.



School division perspective

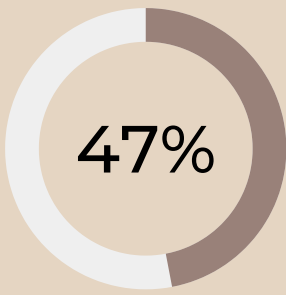


Figure 19

47% of school divisions identified within 21 Environmental Scan communities publicly identified having a student support worker or Indigenous liaison

Friendship Centres curate programs based on evaluation of community needs producing supports and resources for families from a foundation of cultural safety.

Environmental scans identified the following:

- 47 different Alberta School Divisions identified in Friendship Centre communities
- Only 47% of those divisions have an Indigenous liaison within communities
- 43% of Friendship Centre communities have no relationship present or a negative relationship with school boards in the area

- 68% of communities identified that FNMI liaison workers are unavailable
- 67% of Friendship Centres have neutral or positive relationships with schools
- 100% of Friendship Centres analyzed have had some form of relationship with schools in the community

The disconnect between the community and the school boards is one of the largest roadblocks within the relational wheel of the school system within Alberta, understanding that adapting new policy, like *The College of Alberta School Superintendents Act* takes time.

This disconnect has been identified within Circle of Learning, while approaching school boards to discuss our initiative within Sites of Exploration, it was difficult for the school boards to understand how Circle of Learning would impact their students, highlighting a disconnect between the understanding of cultural safety and wrap-around services within education at the Board level. It is evident that board-level involvement creates positive relationships and partnerships which evolve as permanent solutions within Site of Exploration schools, thanks to the openness and understanding of both parties.

Alberta Education can create a sense of safety within the public education system by providing Friendship Centres, schools, and school boards, with resources to implement welcoming environments, Indigenous safe spaces, and cultural competency training to all educational staff in coherence with the Quality Standards documents.

Community perspective

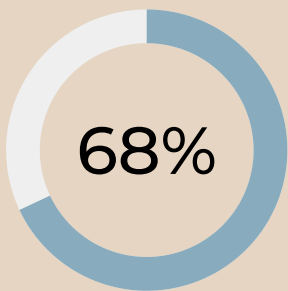


Figure 20

68% of 21 Environmental Scan communities identified that FNMI workers are unavailable within their community

Relationship

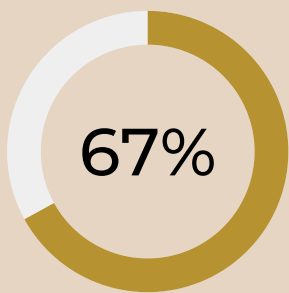


Figure 21

67% of 21 Environmental Scan communities identified a neutral or positive relationship with community schools

Resource Development

Language Supports: Syllabics Table, Card game, Stencils

These cards have been developed to be multifaceted within their approach and can be utilized within the existing curriculum (ecosystems, food chains, colour theory, etc.) while being strongly tied to Indigenous teachings, storytelling, and the Medicine Wheel. Utilizing these cards within Friendship Centres, schools, and families will enhance literacy, multi-linguistic skills, cultural inclusion, and identity.

Cree syllabics have been developed as a resource through the Circle of Learning initiative, with the intent of the syllabics to create a deepened sense of identity by connecting all peoples to Indigenous languages that hold meaning, stories, culture, and history.



Figure 22

Cards created for literacy and engagement in Indigenous Plains-Cree, English, and French language

The border included within this page is a sample of the syllabics that have been developed as a resource within the Circle of Learning initiative.

Identity: Land Acknowledgement, History

Educating and guiding community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on the truth of history and the meaning of reconciliation, the TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP, and incorporating these practices into daily life has been integral within Circle of Learning resource development. It is important for all, to hold the responsibility to learn and understand that land acknowledgment has a purpose showing recognition and respect for all Indigenous peoples and ancestors that inhabit and have inhabited these lands. A land acknowledgment is a recognition of reconciliation to all while honoring Indigenous protocol and inherent knowledge of land and place.

Figure 23 Syllabics developed by ANFCA to promote literacy and Indigenous language revitalization

Teaching Bundles

Through ANFCA partnerships, we were able to leverage \$650,000 for the Student Supports Initiative which saw Centres provide tutoring services, mental health supports, physical activities, connection to Elders and cultural ceremonies. Additionally, Centres were able to decrease barriers to technology and connectivity through the purchase of Chromebooks, tablets, and laptops.

Through this funding, ANFCA supplemented the Circle of Learning teaching bundles by sharing resources that supported land-based education. Further programs, having 390 participants province-wide, were developed through physical activity to promote cultural connections and mental and physical wellbeing.



Figure 24
Moose-skin ball used as a traditional game

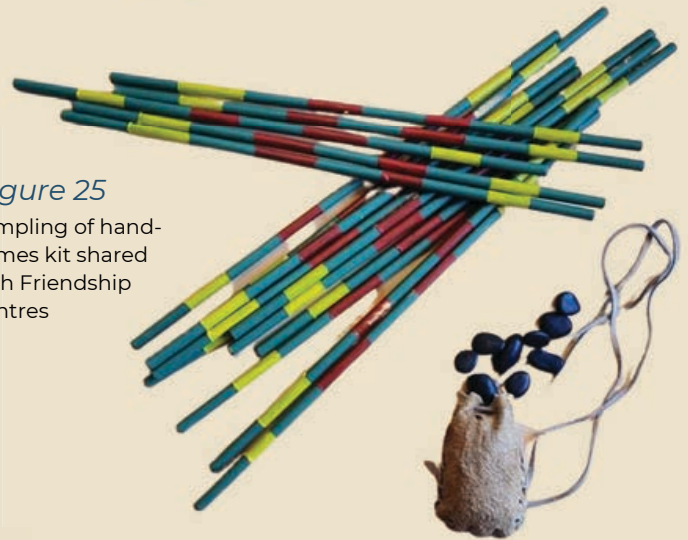


Figure 25
Sampling of hand-games kit shared with Friendship Centres

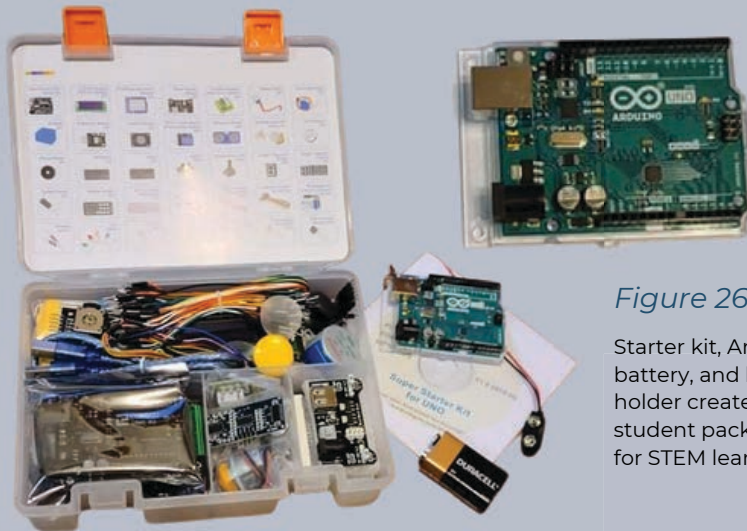


Figure 26
Starter kit, Arduino, battery, and battery holder create student package for STEM learning

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)

Through a relationship developed with a strong external partner, ANFCA saw the creation of STEM-based activities for 190 urban Indigenous students, including 21 Elders and mentors. This project continues to thrive.

Orange shirt day, and the slogan "Every Child Matters" aligns with the intent and spirit of this initiative. Communicating the history of residential schools and the origin of Orange Shirt Day to share with Friendship Centre communities teaches us to move forward together from a basis of reconciliation.

Figure 27
Design for orange shirts to be distributed to 21-member Friendship Centres



Policy Influence

Identified within the contribution agreement the 10 Principles of Reconciliation are outlined within Circle of Learning. These themes are important to re-evaluate and incorporate into every aspect of society and interaction with one another as Canadians.

1 The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.

2 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.

3 Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.

4 Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity

5 Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

6 All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.

7 The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.

8 Supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.

9 Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.

10 Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society

(What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation, 2015)

Multiple policies encompass the education system to advance reconciliation. Implementing aspects of TRC and UNDRIP even further into education would truly put Alberta at the forefront for Indigenous education initiatives, striving towards reconciliation. Ultimately this supports the implementation of Outcome 2 that has been in effect since 2009, stepping forward and becoming the international leader in Indigenous education Alberta strives to be (*Alberta Education*, 2021).

All aspects of the following policy analyzed have an impact on urban Indigenous educational outcomes, the policies do not stand on their own, if there is no implementation or full plan of the policy being integrated into systems it is useless to all. We must take a stronger stance and align the similarities of these policies for the betterment of our children and do better for our Indigenous peoples.

Policy Analyzed:

- UNDRIP
- TRC
- Children First Act
- Education Act
- Alberta Human Rights Act
- School Transportation Regulation
- UNCRC
- The College of Alberta School Superintendents Act

Implementation of strong policies like the Children First Act, The Quality Standards, UNDRIP, and the TRC ensure that programs and services have the child at the center of the design and application of these policies will ultimately lead to the successes of urban Indigenous students.

Some of the barriers indicated by parents throughout surveys and barrier analysis within the 21-member Friendship Centres indicate that institutionalized racism and policy in the form of transportation are some of the largest for parents and communities, greatly impacting Indigenous children from meeting their true potential.

It is important to note that throughout Circle of Learning the issues surrounding transportation were brought up within both Sites of Exploration cohorts, as well as a prominent issue depicted by environmental scans from 21 Friendship Centre communities. It is important to note that transportation fees and distance are determined by Alberta's school boards. In Sites of Exploration instances of lack of transportation to school, due to socioeconomic barriers, resulted in depleted attendance for urban Indigenous children. Having a strict policy around transportation, combined with a lack of funding creates a possibility of both children and parents becoming completely disconnected from the education system.

A Mother of two Kindergarten/Grade 1 children works outside of cell service and is unable to provide reliable transportation to and from school. The transportation barrier is increased as the School Division transportation system does not service their location, but the Mother feels her children are safest at this school. Circle of Learning was able to provide a bus pass for public transit and created a system, in collaboration with the children's school to check in on the children's safety when the Mother is out of cell service. The children's attendance improved and the Mother felt more secure knowing her children has someone to contact in an emergency.

- Circle of Learning Story

Similar instances as outlined above have occurred and having a Circle of Learning Education Navigator within the community allowed parents and children to improve their lives in multifaceted ways, due to the trust that encompasses Friendship Centres and the dynamic wrap-around services.

"I feel like a huge weight is off my shoulders"

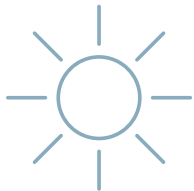
- Circle of Learning Parent

FASD Parent struggling with online learning for children was unable to provide them with in-person schooling due to new restrictions added to the bus policy due to COVID-19. With no options or assistance from the school/school board with this issue, the family did not feel supported by their current school. Circle of Learning Education Navigator was able to help get the children to in-person learning by assisting the family in the drastic move of switching schools for better supports. This family was supported in other aspects through transportation solutions, check-ins, door-drops, and services, school supplies, tax filing help, and mental health supports. The family is now healthy and thriving, with students attending school regularly.

- Circle of Learning Story

Positive attendance best practices are vital for ensuring educational success. If the student is unable to participate due to lack of transportation can we expect them to become successful students? Identified within *First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education: Promising Practices in Fort McMurray (2013)*, staff awareness and reducing financial barriers, contribute to full participation within school life; including fees, field trip expenses, and instrument rentals. The Fort McMurray Catholic District determined that it was this ill-informed policy that was the largest barrier to student success, "...it was attendance that was making the difference, not if the student was First Nations, Metis and Inuit. This caused a mind shift from 'they [FNMI] can't do it to 'getting kids to attend'" (*Alberta Education, 2013*).

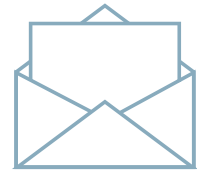
Actions schools can take for increased parental involvement, identified by surveyed urban Indigenous parents include community-based activities, cultural events, newsletters, sunshine calls, encouragement, and protocol.



Sunshine Calls: Positive Information and Check-Ins celebrating accomplishments



Understanding cultural protocol, ceremony, and holding cultural events for families



Newsletters in multiple forms (online, email, mail, sent home, etc.) containing involvement opportunities



Including local community members within conversations, events, and highlight local role models



Encourage urban Indigenous parents, be supportive and listening, working together for the betterment of our children.

Actionable Item:

Schools across Alberta, in the spirit of Reconciliation, honour Indigenous peoples as Canada's First Peoples and create culturally safe spaces within the school and showcase local Indigenous culture, protocol, voices, and stories.

Hub and Spoke model

The Hub and Spoke model is the basis that Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association has been utilizing within member communities. ANFCA provides networking and advocacy to create partnerships to enhance Friendship Centres wide array of programs and services. From a grass-roots level Friendship Centres connect individuals and families to these programs at the community level.

Adapting this model and extending partnerships to include a more in-depth relationship with Alberta Education, implementation of professional Quality Standards, and strong relationships with school boards will have the ability to create a large ripple effect within educational outcomes of FNMI students in Alberta.



Figure 28
Circle of Learning example of hub and spoke model

Actionable Item:

Alberta Education funds ANFCA and Friendship Centres supporting the Hub and Spoke model to ensure cultural safety and increase student success in Alberta's schools. ANFCA is a conduit for establishing family liaison or cultural education hub workers to assist schools and school boards in building relationships with urban Indigenous families.

Transitional Services

It is clear within *Managing School Transitions: Promising Practices in Alberta's Schools* (Alberta Education, 2009) that there is a lack of culturally relevant transitional programs. This document is a guideline for schools to create positive experiences for FNMI students however, it misses the mark in creating a holistic and balanced educational experience.

Best practices of transitional services originated within the community are operated through partnership with Friendship Centres, many of them being culturally focused.

Space provided

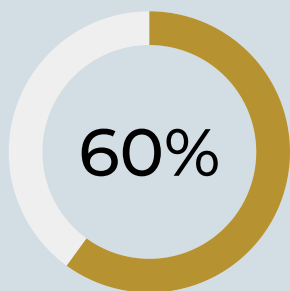


Figure 29

60% of transitional programs identified within Circle of Learning Sites of Exploration provide space for these programs within the Friendship Centre

Home-to-school transitions

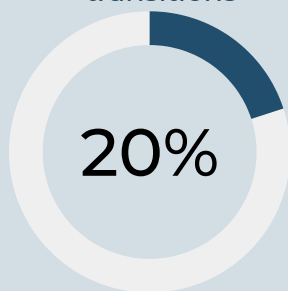


Figure 30

20% of transitional programs focus on Home to School transitions identified within Circle of Learning Sites of Exploration

All transitional periods

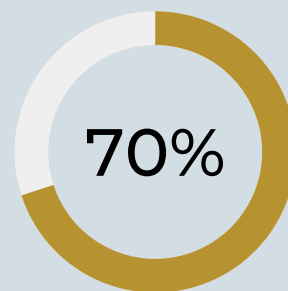


Figure 31

70% of transitional programs identified are classified as supporting all transitional periods from home-to-school-to-employment readiness

Within Sites of Exploration, it was discovered that 60% of transitional services are connected to the community by utilizing the infrastructure that Friendship Centres provide. It is important to note that there are more transitional services needed for home-to-school transitions and even more so, within the transition from Elementary-to-Junior HighSchool. As this data is limited to only two communities within Alberta, this may not be the case for all Alberta communities and should be investigated further.

Friendship Centres are identified as trusted places that offer many different types of transitional services from home to school to employment. Wrap-around services and relationships that are continuous in the form of an education navigator or Indigenous liaison based outside of the school and within the Friendship Centre can be a promising practice as relationship building takes time. In a system that has historically and systemically inflicted harm on Indigenous peoples, there must be a safe 'third party' that can guide families and students throughout the schooling journey. This aligns with Indigenous relations, ways of knowing and being, and westernized fundamentals that the child is at the center through our Urban Indigenous Framework.

Notable Tried-and-True Practices

While reviewing tried-and-true practices provincially, nationally, and internationally, it was identified that Alberta Education has attempted a child-centered learning model before (Alberta Education, 2012). A key component outlined within the child-centered model involves community perspectives and engagement. Community is a source of trust, respect, and collaboration, and a place where one feels safe and heard. This has been lacking in Indigenous Education Frameworks since its implementation. It is vital to the success of urban Indigenous peoples to understand the diversity within our urban centers and honour these within our education structures. Approaching education with knowledge of diverse teachings, culture, language, and traditions honours the student as a whole person, which is the key to their development as a successful citizen.

Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017), specifically notes relationships and respect, deliberate intent, action on multiple fronts, and implementation of change at the system and local levels. "Indigenous scholars and representative organizations highlight distinct and broader criteria of educational and learning success, such as positive self-concept, strong cultural identity, happiness and confidence" (OECD, 2017).



OECD identifies that 'Engaging Families' has the highest impact regarding school-level priorities to boost education outcomes for Indigenous students. This OECD report notes that a single worker in one school has a more positive impact than spreading the same resource over a number of schools. This was also noted within tertiary research of the individual schools, school boards, and school-based supports within all 21 Friendship Centre communities. In Alberta, many school boards have one liaison across multiple schools, leading to inaccessible supports, resources, and services when a child may need it most.

When turning to International tried-and-true practices for Indigenous education, Australia is an international leader, implementing supporting structures of family-school relationships, support networks, reviewing school policy and procedures to ensure room for growth-fostering relationships. Utilizing key dimensions of communication, home connection, building community, honouring identity, recognizing the role of family, and collaborating with the community beyond the school environment round out this practice.

Family-school communication needs to be taken seriously and must be valued, recognized, and rewarded by schools and education systems. It is essential to provide teachers and school leaders with education and training programs to prepare them to communicate effectively with families in an approachable manner. It is equally important to empower and encourage families to communicate effectively with schools.

By analyzing tried and true practices locally, nationally, and internationally, we have been able to gather main themes and processes that have worked within the communities analyzed. Not only for parental engagement success, but student, family, and community success as a whole.

Main themes presented:

- Creating a neutral zone outside the school and within the community for parents and teachers to meet
- Integrating cultural ways of knowing and being within the school and curriculum
- Trauma-informed training, cultural training, and relationship mentoring for teachers and administrative staff
- Family-School Liaison workers who are heavily involved in the community and work with students/families one-on-one
- The school acting as a community resource, not only for educational knowledge, but also to inform parents of access to health supports, cultural supports, work experience, adult education, recreational programs, and social support programs or services
- Partnerships with already established community groups and safe spaces are often utilized for referral, Elder, and knowledge keeper supports.
- Recognizing the role of family and parents as first teachers and incorporating it into educational and engagement strategies

Internationally



Challis Early Childhood Centre (Australia)

- Provide wrap-around services
- Teacher training

Trauma- Sensitive Approach (Australia)

- Recognizes transgenerational disadvantage
- Focus on relationship repair with parents and the education system

OCED PISA Report (2015)

- Definition of success is different for an individual
- Wholistic wellbeing focused
- Effectively addressing educational barriers

Nationally



BC- Healing Families, Helping Systems

- Focus begins with the child, family, moving on to staff, and policy next
- Relationships are prioritized for sense of safety

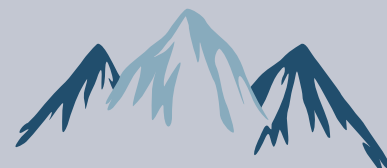
Ontario- Better Beginnings, Better Futures

- Integration of programs into schools
- Integration of multiple social service agencies

Ontario- Winnipeg Boldness Project

- Relationship and trust building focus between parents and education system

Locally*



Fort McMurray Promising Practices

- Focus on visual acknowledgement of culture within schools
- Talking/attendance circles
- Strong relationship with local Friendship Centre

Kainai Board of Education

- Offer counselling, ceremony, and implement aspects of culture within pedagogy and curriculum
- Brain Story certification utilized to implement proactive solutions

Pathways to Education (Friendship Centre)

- Students are individually paired directly with a liaison worker
- Cultural activities hosted within and by the school

*multiple best practices occur across Friendship Centres, for ease of reading only two are presented here

Lessons Learned

Relying on surveys rather than sharing circles, ceremonies, and face-to-face interaction is difficult when it comes to building growth-fostering and trusting relationships with urban Indigenous families and schools. When surveys are involved sometimes parents are hesitant to be transparent with the barriers they face if there is not a level of trust established. With the difficulty of building relationships with school boards and organization to organization, it is only imaginable what difficulties parents would have when needing to address an issue or have a discussion around a policy. This relationship is a large barrier that needs to be explored in further detail or addressed at the ministry level, as it is causing continuous disengagement at the parent and community levels.

It has been identified that many different barriers exist for individual families, and assisting students and families on a needs basis, ensuring their wellbeing is covered, opens the student and family up for further success within education and life.

Although families are unique it is important to note that many women would come to the Circle of Learning program with different backgrounds, experiences, and sometimes related trauma. This is especially important to note as it seems educational responsibility and success falls into the lap of the mother figure within the family. As this may not be true for all families it is important to note, with the data collected Friendship Centres, schools, school boards, and Alberta Education can utilize this information to tie programming curated for women's needs to the education system for a more dynamic approach to service delivery.

"It is unfortunate that the Circle of Learning is just a pilot program. It has been able to fill in the gaps that are simply out of my control. What some may deem as simple conveniences or necessities others would find it a luxury. With online learning my [students] would not otherwise have been able to "learn" if not for the gift of the laptops and the hotspot for internet [from Circle of Learning]. The fact that [the Circle of Learning Navigator] and I were able to communicate with one another in a consistent manner allow[ed] us to monitor the [students'] academic and mental wellness. I am able to "see" the [students] on our Google Meets everyday to interact with them. The [students] are able to text me via our Google Hangouts to keep that all important connection with one another.

They are children. Our most vulnerable who did not ask for the situation that they find themselves. The Circle of Learning allows for another trusted individual who the children can count on. The services that the Circle of Learning provides is vital but must be implemented in an ongoing basis in order to be effective. Lastly, the personnel who work with the families must be a "good fit" both in knowledge and compassion. I certainly appreciated [the Circle of Learning Navigator] contacting me and requesting feedback for the [students] on their behalf for the assignments given. It is my sincere hope that programs such as the Circle of Learning will be funded to provide the much needed additional support."

- Educator Connected to Circle of Learning

Framework

To assist the reader with the concept of Two-eyed seeing we offer these teachings from an Indigenous perspective coupled with theory placed in brackets from a Western worldview. This teaches us balance.



We introduce you to our Framework for Education, which at its core enlists the values of generosity, belonging, and reciprocity. Expressed as drum paintings, we envision a journey forward that supports the well-being and success of children. This concept, encompassing and flexible observes our shared responsibility for all children. Aware of the diversity of Indigenous cultures, these teachings may vary from community to community. The following section provides brief interpretations of each segment of the drum. We invite the reader to reflect on this information and see where their contributions can be shared.

Drum teachings are varied across cultures, however, typically agreed upon as a sacred gift of Creation and the heartbeat of Mother Earth. This drum was formed from the standing people (trees) and the four-legged (elk); its' shape reminds us of the Circle of Life. Recognized as a living thing, the drum teaches us of rhythm and timing and reminds us to work in harmony with each other. These relationships are the basis of our framework (Breath of Life).

A sacred gift from the Creator, born with inherent knowledge, **the child** is at the center and is the focal point of the framework. We are responsible to love, nurture, and guide this tiny being as he or she grows thereby instilling a sense of safety and belonging. Natural skills and talents are uncovered and as the child journeys forward in life, these gifts are cultivated and shared with the world (Bronfenbrenner's, Maslow, Relational-Cultural Theory).

Many **umbilical cord** and bellybutton teachings are sacred. Bellybutton ceremony grounds the child and recognizes that child's purpose in the walk of life. The umbilical cord is the link from the ancestors to the physical world, creating that child's identity (Maslow's, The Brain Story, Breath of Life).

There are many teachings about hair. The **Braid** was purposefully placed on the drum to illustrate the connection from birth, through all the cycles of life; infant, child, youth, adult, and Elder. Continuing through the arrow and onto the sweetgrass road we are mindful that all of life works in a constant cycle. This life journey can be difficult; however, like the part in the hair, we are reminded to walk a straight path. The hair, braided with love and kindness is said to carry the individual's spirit, an extension of their thoughts. The braid is part of the child's identity and signifies strength, balance, and flexibility honouring the connection to Creator and the ancestors (Relational-Cultural Theory, Cultural Safety, Breath of Life).

The child is born into a circle of love, the family, comprised of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who become the child's first teachers. The **two hearts** on the drum represent the love that encompasses the child as he/she enters school for formal education. It is hoped that the child is received with the same love thereby feeling a sense of safety and belonging (Maslow, Circle of Courage, Hub and Spoke).

The **Dreamcatcher** and **feathers** symbolize the dreams of the child and the dreams of the parent. The bead placed on the dreamcatcher represents a spider on a web, as an example of the world we live in. Much like the spider, the child can feel and experience a gentle sway or violent shaking. Through this interconnectedness, both sense all that transpires in their world. We are reminded to support these dreams with kindness (Bronfenbrenner).



Circle of Learning

As traditional structures in many areas, the **Tipi** was utilized as homes and ceremonial lodges. All aspects of the structure were significant, the shape, each pole, the rope, the fire, the tipi covering, and the placement of the tipi; all provided teachings and education for the dweller as life lessons. Tipi poles teachings included, Obedience, Respect, Humility, Happiness, Love, Faith, Kinship, Cleanliness, Thankfulness, Sharing, Strength, Hope, Good Child Rearing, Ultimate Protection, and Control Flaps. The drum showcases coloured tipis around the outside of the braid to represent urban Indigenous children from all directions of the Medicine wheel, each with a unique story. The white tipis on the inner circle of the drum represent the lodges of education such as but not limited to; schools, school boards, school councils, Alberta Teachers Association, and Alberta Education. It is sometimes difficult for Indigenous children to feel safe and to see themselves within these education structures, perhaps in part due to the historical trauma felt by their parents and grandparents. Still, the young child walks softly through the doors of these educational lodges eager to learn (Cultural Safety, Relational-Cultural theory, The Brain Story).

Honouring the child's inherent gifts, the **book and feather** showcase the best of two cultures, Indigenous knowledge, and Western worldview. Success is realized when this balance is achieved (Two-eyed Seeing).

Reconciliation begins with the **land**. The land does not belong to us, we belong to the land. This connection is recognized by All Our Relations, and the responsibility for Mother Earth is ours (TRC, policy).

Flowers in the four directions of the medicine wheel represent the medicines gifted to us by Creator. It is important to honour our internal medicine; spirit. The colours of the flowers signify the four colours of man, recognizing we are unique and equal (SDOH).

Arrow used for protection is straight and direct. It teaches us to speak with truth. This truth is our protection. When we share our stories and knowledge we speak with truth as we know it (policy).

The **7-sacred teachings** when shared with children, provide an example of how to live a good life. Love- Eagle, Respect- Buffalo, Bravery- Bear, Humility- Wolf, Wisdom- Beaver, Honesty- Sabe, and Truth- Turtle (The Brain Story, Relational-Cultural Theory, Cultural Safety)

Trees are our relations, each tree, every blade of grass, all herbs have different gifts that they share with us. The willow teaches us flexibility, this teaching can assist the education system in supporting the diversity of children. Extending education beyond the walls of school will enhance a child's sense of curiosity and wonder, creating life-long learners.

The 21 **stars** that wrap around the braid represent the 21 Alberta Friendship Centres and the ribbon that runs through them is the support of ANFCA, the star in the east represents the National Association of Friendship Centres. Working together we support, advocate, and honour urban Indigenous peoples (Hub and Spoke model).

The two stars in pencil, to the inexperienced eye, may look like an error or mistake. This teaching provides an example of our imperfections, thereby teaching us humility. This graphic mirrors the continuous circle of life (Breath of Life theory).

Every item on the drum has significance and many of the teachings cannot be fully shared. Through reciprocity, we would like to build respectful partnerships with Alberta Education for children to realize their dreams.

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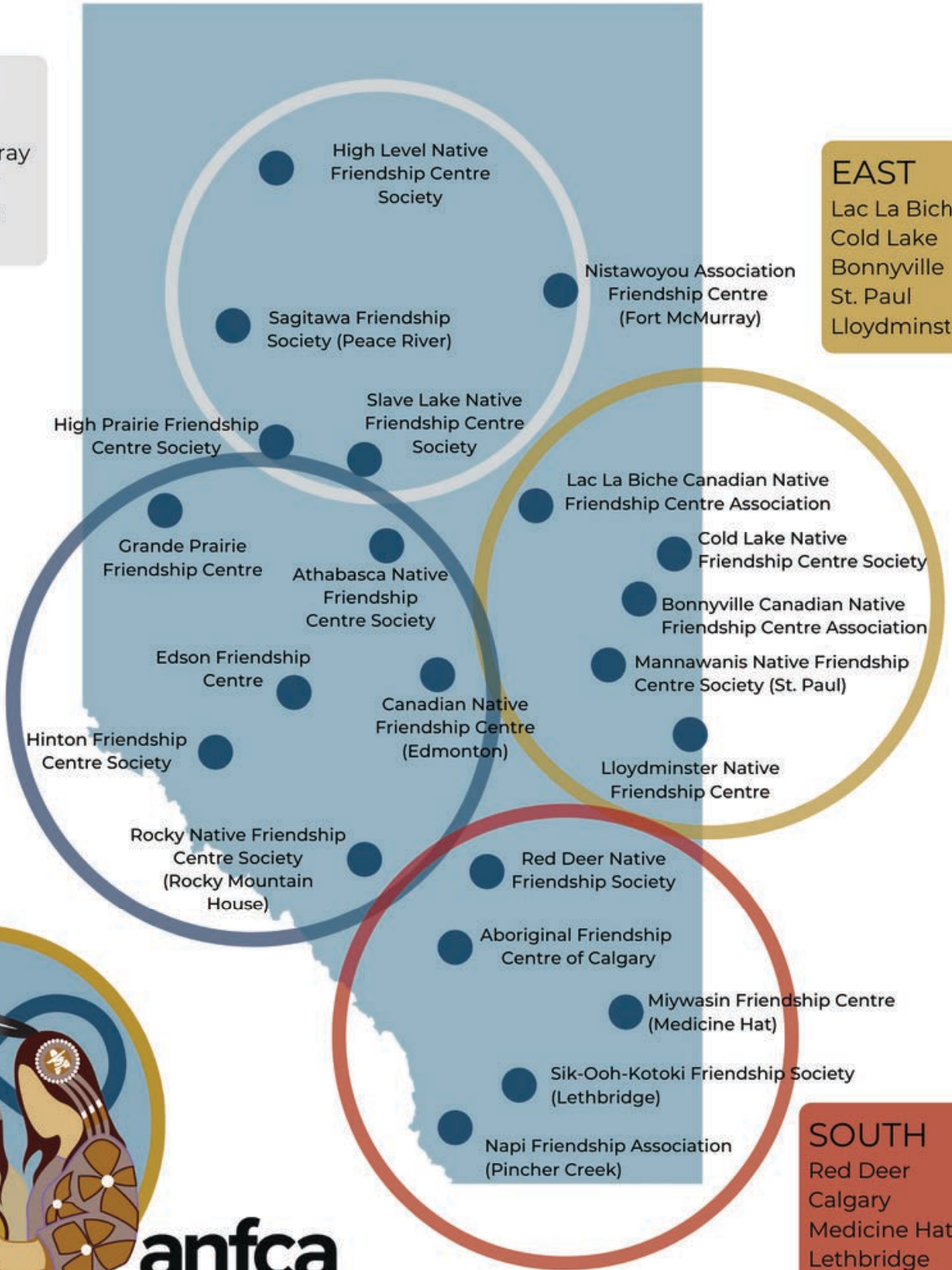
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ANFCA Member Friendship Centres Regional Geographic Map

NORTH
 High Level
 Fort McMurray
 Peace River
 High Prairie
 Slave Lake

EAST
 Lac La Biche
 Cold Lake
 Bonnyville
 St. Paul
 Lloydminster

WEST
 Grande Prairie
 Athabasca
 Hinton
 Edson
 Edmonton
 Rocky
 Mountain
 House



SOUTH
 Red Deer
 Calgary
 Medicine Hat
 Lethbridge
 Pincher Creek



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 centres association

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We all share responsibility for our children's education; are you doing your part?



ANFCA JULY 2021