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# Indigenous Mental Health Wellness Program

## Feasibility Study



### Light the Fire Project

Isaruit Inuit Arts Roundtable Event

*First Nations, Inuit & Metis*

*Catch the Wave*

**Light the Fire Project** has been made possible through the generosity of



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# Light the Fire Project

## Introduction

Indigenous peoples in Canada face barriers to healthcare, mental health services and urban outreach programs. Disparities in mental health between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada stem from systemic colonial practices.

With funding from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), this project supports the outcomes of creating economic growth and capacity and promoting greater access to wellness and mental health services for Indigenous rural and urban populations.

Light the Fire Project is about:

- building relationships with communities
- understanding the need for an increase in front line mental health workers, and
- Working together to build capacity and co-develop a curriculum informed by experts - including Indigenous Elders and Healers - in mental wellness and substance use treatment services for Indigenous communities.

For more information, refer to Introduction/Invitation Document: [Intro/Invitation to Light the Fire Project](#)

## Isaruit Inuit Arts

### Origin of the logo<sup>1</sup>

The Isaruit Logo was first conceived as a composite digital drawing by Marie Lee Signorie Trempe, a talented young Inuit artist who grew up in the Ottawa area. While taking a parka-making course at Isaruit in February, 2020, Marie Lee learned to appreciate the meaning behind the name “Isaruit” (in English, wings) of the Inuit Women’s Sewing Group in Ottawa.

One thing she learned at the parka making course was how the wings of geese were used as saniutik or brooms to clean the floors of tents and iglus. Thinking about this, and the great significance of sewing and making things in the Inuit way as giving ‘lift’ to life, Marie Lee began to explore the shape of wings, and how they might be incorporated into a logo.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://isaruit.ca/our-logo/>



Figure 1: Isaruit Inuit Arts logo  
Image source: <https://isaruit.ca/our-logo/>

She also noticed how an ulu knife has wing-like blades on either side, and that the handle, if held downward could look like geese feet. Isaruit's founding Board members tasked Marie-Lee to finish her digital drawing, and unanimously approved its final version as the logo for the organization.

Professional artists working for Beat Studios refined Marie Lee's original drawing and colour palette to give it the professional style it presently has. Note that the smaller, solid brown wing at the bottom can be seen to represent Inuit Elders who ground the knowledge of Isaruit artists. The red wing second from the bottom can be seen as representing the men whose arts of tool making help bring the women's sewing arts into being, represented by the wing that is of a deeper plum colour; and the largest wing on top represents the children and the youth who will eventually take flight as a result of the arts of the adults supporting them.

## History of Isaruit Inuit Arts<sup>2</sup>

ISARUIT began as the vision of Aigah Attagutsiaq, Martha Flaherty, Malachi Kigutak, and Simona Arnatsiaq. By 2017 this collective of women was having drop ins for any Inuit women in Ottawa who wanted to join them, because they knew that learning and using traditional Inuit sewing patterns and techniques, skin preparation skills and other crafts is life-giving because it is arts-enlivening. ISARUIT means 'wings' in Inuktitut. Our ISARUIT Inuit Women's Sewing Centre was founded to give wings to Inuit living in the Ottawa area. By 2018, Isaruit Inuit Women's Sewing Group had registered as a Not-for-Profit corporation with Industry Canada and began to make their vision for an Inuit style arts centre come alive.

The group was successful in obtaining a Canada Council of the Arts Creating, Knowing and Sharing grant in 2019 to launch its Sewing Project. After offering just three parka making sessions to Inuit in the Ottawa area, the Covid lockdown meant that Isaruit had to change its way of supporting sewing and other Inuit artists in the Ottawa area. With the help of a Canada Council of the Arts Covid Relief grant, Isaruit met this challenge by

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://isaruit.ca/our-history/>

providing care packages of sewing materials to many women, and men, who needed materials to continue to make art at home. It was at this time that the Isaruit founders and staff began to realize the potential connecting power of virtual meetings both for the instruction and the support of Inuit artists, as much as people had access to devices and the Internet.

Isaruit began working with the Community Arts and Social Engagement program of the City of Ottawa, as well as with the Vanier Cultural Association in 2020, and conducted a virtual and face to face Elders' Gathering of Inuit elders in the Ottawa area that was both well attended and well received, despite health protocols and restrictions. This event was pivotal in allowing Inuit in Ottawa to have a voice and to explore the potential of digital connections.

At the AGM In January 2021 the group of Isaruit founders turned the direction of the group over to a new Board of Directors led by Natasha Latreille. It was decided by the new leadership to extend the original mandate of Isaruit to include not only women, but men as well, and to fulfill the great need for an organization that would connect and support Inuit visual artists virtually across all Inuit communities, including sewing groups such as the Inuit women's sewing group in Ottawa. A new working name, Isaruit Inuit Arts: Pijunnarnivut was discovered while the new Board worked on a comprehensive Strategic Plan.

## Preparing Roundtable Event with Isaruit Inuit Arts

TeKnoWave met up with Isaruit Inuit Arts program coordinator and program lead, and discussed the following factors:

### Language

We agreed to translate the survey and consent form into Inuktitut, and to have a translator/interpreter present during the roundtable event.

### Inuit Societal Value - Consensus

[Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit](#) (IQ) "is a guiding principle of public government. IQ embodies Inuit traditional knowledge and values, and guides the government in framing decisions, policies and laws that reflect the key philosophies, attitudes and practices of Nunavut's Inuit majority."<sup>3</sup>

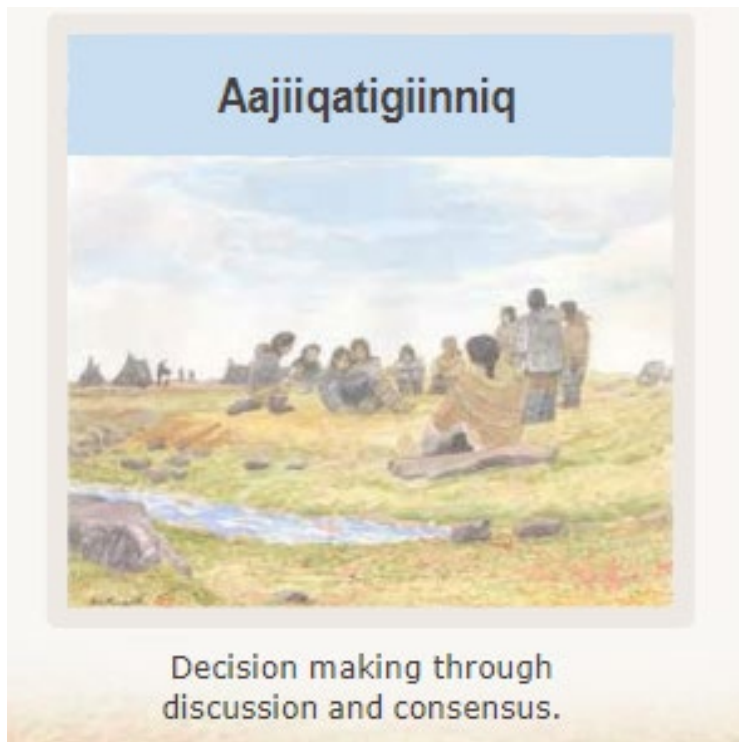
One of the key principles recommended to frame the roundtable event is Aajiiqatigiinniq, which means decision making through discussion and consensus.

TeKnoWave facilitators shared a general survey as one method of collecting information/receiving feedback. Ben Illauq, Shop Program Coordinator with Isaruit Inuit Arts, shared that Inuit value group consensus and are oral based.

Participants may feel trapped when they put their thoughts into writing, and they may not want to write answers before the group reaches consensus.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Government of Nunavut - <http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/about/cg.pdf> Feb. 14, 07



While it was agreed to have surveys translated into Inuktitut and shared with participants, it was also understood that roundtable discussion, and asking an open question, such as “What is the beginning for you?” would align with Aajiiqatigiinniq.

Figure 2: IQ Principle Aajiiqatigiinniq.

Image source: [https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/iq\\_brochure\\_draft\\_1.pdf](https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/iq_brochure_draft_1.pdf)

## Roundtable Methodology

When facilitators arrived at Isaruit Inuit Arts, we learned that it took the translator from Wednesday to Sunday to complete the translations of the survey and consent form from English to Inuktitut. The Inuk translator found it to be a very ‘mind-bending’ and traumatizing process due to the cultural and conceptual differences, as well as the questions and content uprooting the colonial causes of mental health and addictions amongst Inuit. Participants received the survey and consent forms (provided in English and Inuktitut). As Ben had anticipated, many participants were resistant to answer the questions laid out in the survey. Before the roundtable officially started, several participants shared their perspectives about the ontological differences between Inuit and Western knowledge and way of being.

The roundtable event included sharing stories and perspectives on the topics of wellbeing, roots of trauma, mental health and addictions, frontline services, and addressing urban Inuit community needs. A subsequent discussion took place to review and build on the draft roundtable report.

The information that follows is based on notes transcribed from both discussions, as well as data collected from consent forms and surveys that were completed.

# Participant Demographics / Identity Markers

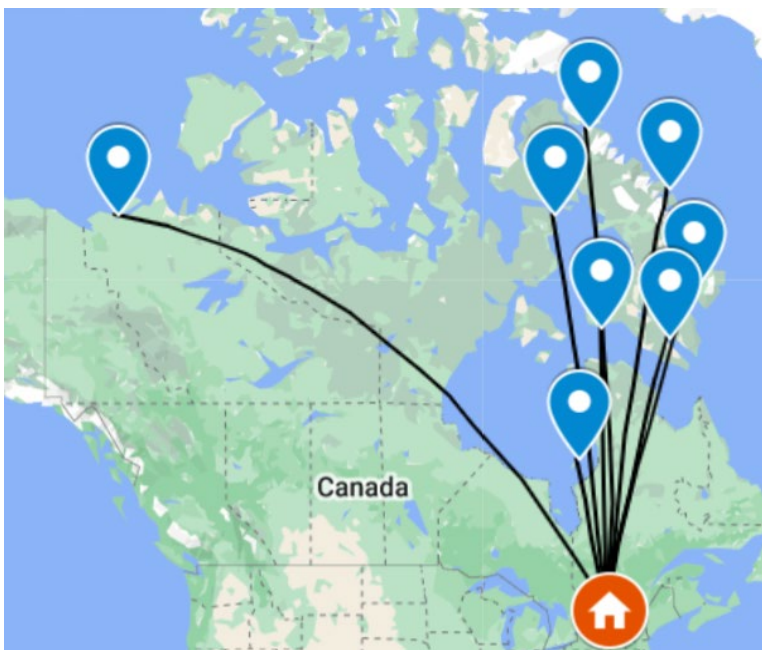
Throughout the roundtable, there were between 9-15 participants. There were about 60% female and 40% male participants, between the ages of 25 to 72 years of age. Approximately half of the participants identified English as their primary language, while two participants identified their first language as Inuktitut and three participants identified Inuktitut as their primary language. One participant had the role of translator/interpreter during the roundtable event.

Two participants included the following physical, emotional, development (dis)ability markers: use walker, back problem. Three participants included additional aspects of their identity:

- Star tattoo on wrist
- Human being
- Artist

## Isaruit Inuit Arts - Home/Connected Communities

Based on 14 participants completing a sign-in sheet and consent form, we have a map of home-connected communities. The common link between all participants is the urban Inuit hub: Isaruit Inuit Arts, located at 815 St. Laurent Blvd. in Ottawa, Ontario.



Home communities are between 1261 km (Sanikiluaq, Nunavut) to 4106 km (Tuktoyaktuk, Nunavut), away.

- Five participants identified Clyde River (2814 km away) as their home/connected community.
- Two participants identified Pond Inlet (3043 km away) as their home/ connected community.
- Two participants identified Cape Dorset (2119 km away) as their home/connected community.

Figure 3: Isaruit Inuit Arts Connected Communities Google

Map

Image source: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1cKntgojec-pV5rjcDwm-IFfiqtxNtX4&usp=sharing>

## Family/Roles

The word cloud generated below are the family/roles shared by participants - the larger size indicates the most frequently used identity markers.

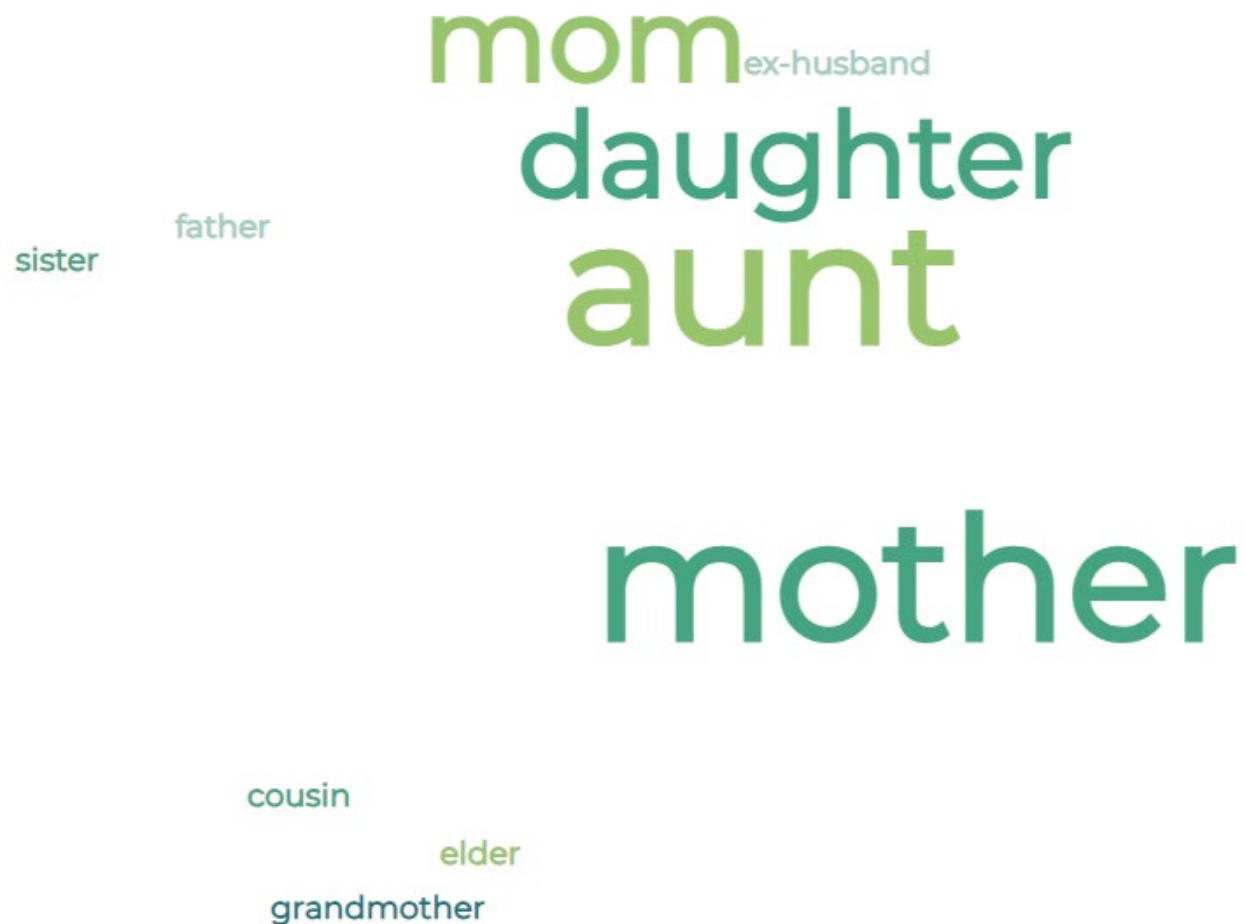


Figure 4: Word Cloud of Urban Inuit family/roles  
Image source: <https://monkeylearn.com/word-cloud/>

## Inuit Ontology

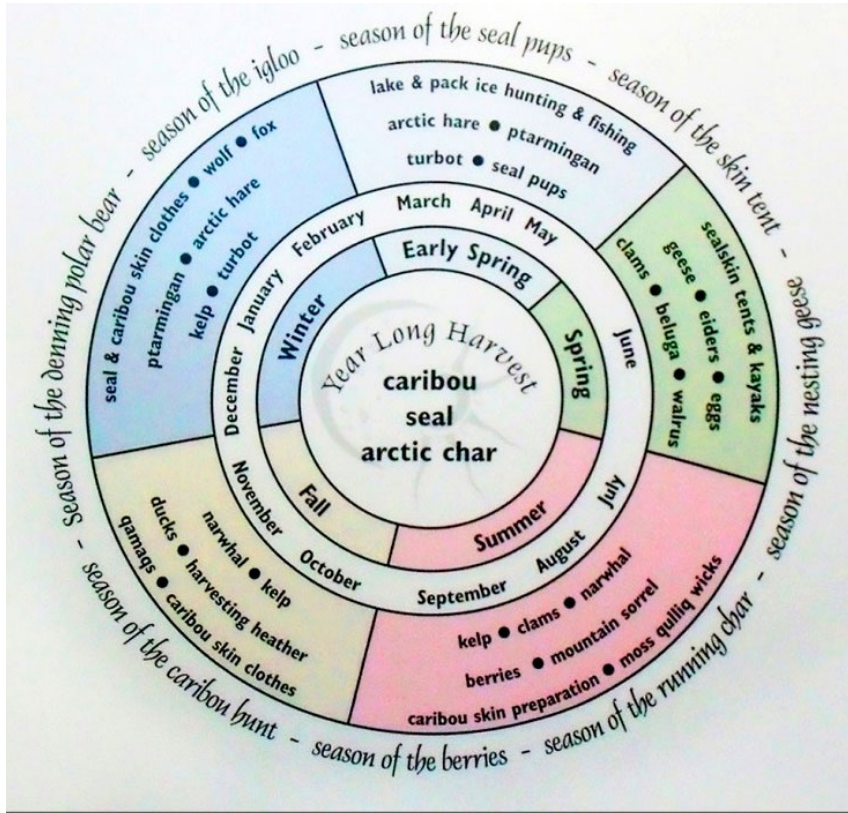
Ontology refers to “a fundamental set of understandings about how the world is: what kinds of beings, processes, and qualities could potentially exist and how these relate to each other” (Harris and Robb 2012:668).

Essentially, ontology is the understanding that reality can vary depending on how an individual person, or culture, experiences the world.

There are significant differences between Inuit and Western ontology that are crucial to understanding how Inuit conceptualize wellness and mental health and addictions. The following differences were noted by July and Ben.



## Seasons



There are more than four seasons, and the seasons are aligned with hunting and harvesting practices.

Across the North, there are between 5 to 8 seasons, and as many as 13 calendar months.

During the second roundtable discussion, July described 8 seasons, as follows:

- Winter
- Starting to thaw
- Warming up
- spring
- Summer
- Starting to get cold
- fall/autumn
- Starting to become winter

Figure 5: Inuit Seasons

Image source: <https://csegregrecorder.com/columns/view/science-break-20181001>

## Spirituality / Faith

Shamanism was mainly practiced - there were evil shamans and healers (luuktaa) and an apprentice of the healer would care for the sick.

## Social Structure

Inuit were organized in small communities and would gather together seasonally to play Inuit games.

There was a hierarchical family structure - July noted that wealth was determined by birthright.

Inuit had Elders Tribunals that mentored young apprentices. The Elders Tribunal would collectively decide how to deal with individual and social issues.

Men and women would not be able to marry without first gaining basic skills - men had to know how to build an igloo and women had to know how to sew.

## Naming

Traditional naming practices provided children with multiple names, often one name is given to a child of a family member who has passed away. Other names are given throughout one's life and signify relationships (like father, brother, older brother). While Inuit were given multiple names, they would be referred to by one name at a time.

## Oral Tradition

Writing was introduced around 1855 by two Wesleyan missionaries, John Horden and Edwin A. Watkins, who transcribed Inuktitut into the syllabic writing system that James Evans had invented in the 1830s- to transcribe Ojibwe and Cree (two languages of the Algonquian family).

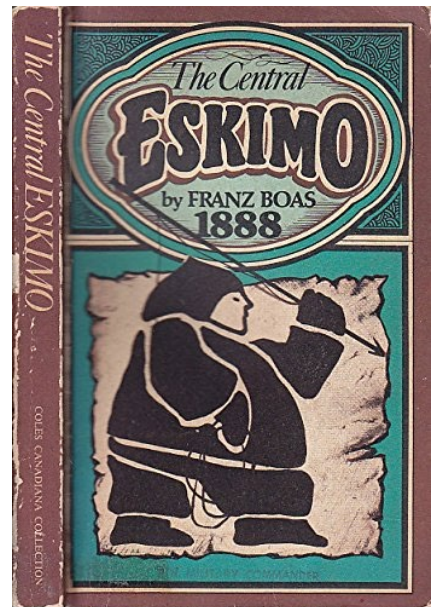


Figure 6: July recommended “The Central Eskimo” by Franz Boas to gain a thorough understanding of Inuit ontology  
Image source: <https://www.amazon.ca/Central-Eskimo-Franz-Boas/dp/B0007AFECC>

## Healing and Wellness

- **ᐃᓂᑲᑦᑎᒋᔭᐱᓪ—Inuuqatigiitsiarniq:** Respecting others, relationships, and caring for people.
- **ᑐᕗᕈᕙᓪ—Tunnganarniq:** Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming, and inclusive.
- **ᐱᓯᓴᓪ—Pijitsirniq:** Serving and providing for family and/or community.
- **ᐸᓵᑲᑦᑎᓄᓪ—Aajiiqatigiinniq:** Decision-making through discussion and consensus.
- **ᐱᓚᓇᓶᓰᓪ—Pilimmaksarniq:** Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.
- **ᐃᑲᓴᑲᑦᑎᓄᓪ—Ikajuqtigiinniq:** Working together for a common cause.
- **ᖁᓂᓪᑐᓪ—Qanuqtuurniq:** Being innovative and resourceful.
- **ᐸᓇᑎᓚᓆᓄᓪ ᑲᓚᓴᐱᓪ—Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq:** Respect and care for the land, animals, and the environment.

- When it is starting to get dark and hunting is harder, it was expected that Inuit would experience depression.

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- When it is summer, even during 24 hrs of sunlight, hunting is harder and people were hungry, it was expected that Inuit would experience depression.

Traditionally, wellness directly aligned with Inuit relations with land/animals and climate/seasons. Inuit life aligned with hunting and harvesting practices. Inuit adapted their lives and cultural practices with the changing seasons. Ben distinguished Inuit hunting practices - instead of searching/hunting directly for the target animal (ex: fox), Inuit knowledge of the migration pattern of the animal and the animal's main food source would place Inuit within the animal's environment.

Similar to placing themselves in the right environment for hunting/harvesting, Inuit would place youth in environments to learn and grow - mentorship and land-based practices were foundational to intergenerational wellness.

Healing practices are embedded in cultural traditions. During the roundtable discussions, two key healing/wellness principles were shared:

1. Being in relation:
  - a. Inuit wisdom believes that you do not keep your thoughts inside, expressing and sharing thoughts with Elders, family members, friends, and participating in groups, such as sewing circles, drum circles...etc.
  - b. Inuit wisdom believes in communal wellness - through hunting, harvesting food/medicinal plants. One important practice is to provide elders with tender meat (caribou calf, seal pup) and [urumiit](#) (ptarmigan droppings with seal oil) that has healing/medicinal properties.
2. Being active in community: Inuit wisdom believes that you do not remain idle/still - sitting around is unhealthy and leads to illness, so it is important to keep busy - be involved in sports, physical/mental games.

## Participants' Stories

At the beginning of the roundtable, each participant had the opportunity to introduce and share something about themselves. Two participants briefly shared their name and role with Isaruit Inuit Arts, while other participants shared more personal stories in relation to trauma, healing and wellness. All participants consented to an audio recording of their introductions. Here is a brief overview of some participants' stories:

- Karol said she is diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD) and meets others online with BPD and can relate with them and talk with them. She noted the difficulty of receiving consistent counseling, as she has been assigned three counselors at Wabano and has lost all three of them. She currently does not have a counselor and says it is really hard to get any help.
- Hayden is a youth program coordinator and tech support with Isaruit Inuit Arts.
  - He was born in Inuvik and grew up in Tuktoyaktuk, then moved to Ottawa to attend school and chose to stay here.
  - He shared that Isaruit Inuit Arts has saved his life, it is a home away from home and trauma is easier to deal with when amongst others at Isaruit.
- July is an Elder, artist, translator and interpreter with Isaruit Inuit Arts. July said he was given the name July even though he was not born in July - his given name is from a person who died.
  - On the day he was born, a storm came, and the community was dealing with starvation and hunger. A shaman wanted to kill him as an infant and his two cousins, so his head became

infected and swollen. A healer operated on him, and he survived. At the same time, all dogs were infected by rabies by the shaman and only one female dog was saved by a healer. July didn't start walking until he was 5 years of age.

- There were two whaling points in Cumberland Sound - Inuit that traded with whalers didn't have immunity and as many as 5000 died due to contracting disease from the whalers.
  - July was considered a half-breed, and his family were seen as outsiders, with his grandmother being Cree and also being related to a Scottish Whaler.
  - It took a long time to get respect from the community and it was hard to find jobs.
  - His father taught him to be an interpreter and artist /carver-making Inukshuks.
    - July's artwork has been exploited - Mexican women took his Inukshuk and used it as a logo for the 2010 Olympics.
  - July was a special needs teacher, outdoor guide, and took courses in mental health/suicide prevention.
  - July worked for Parks Canada rescue team - jumping out of helicopters.
  - July played a lot of sports and was on a volleyball team at the Canada Games.
  - The worst job experience of July's life was working for Indian Affairs (when Chretien was Prime Minister) as an Inuit Arts Curator where he experienced racism.
  - To elevate Inuit art, he sold an Inukshuk to the Louvre Museum in Paris; he was eventually fired.
  - Due to this experience, July said he started drinking.
  - July noted that working as a teacher and losing students to suicide was traumatizing.
  - July shared how his father was traumatized by working for the government and being ordered to shoot and kill the hunting dogs. His father started drinking and became abusive. He talked with Elders and stopped being abusive. July respects his father's strength; he did not give in/give up.
  - July said his grandmother was Cree and a traditional healer - he noted that she prevented Inuit men from revolting against RCMP by leading Inuit women to sing healing songs along the shore. His grandmother played a pivotal role in the formation of the International Aboriginal Coalition for Traditional Medicine that still exists today.
  - July shared that his grandfather was a French voyageur and blacksmith who did a lot of metal work - Pendleton homes are tied down with cables due to his grandfather and the metal on skidoos was his grandfather's innovation.
  - July expressed that Isaruit Inuit Arts has given him a sense of worthiness as he is able to share and show his knowledge: "we get stronger helping others".
  - July relies on Creator to keep going.
- 
- Ben is a Shop Program Coordinator with Isaruit Inuit Arts and is a bridge between Inuit (North) and Western (South). He described that his father calls him "grandfather" and uncle calls him "brother" and how the impact of the Surname Project caused trauma due to loss of acknowledging culture.
  - Ben was raised on the land and tries to implement lifestyles from up North here in Ottawa, to show there is a home away from home, especially honouring Elders knowledge and wisdom.
  - Beverly is a Program Coordinator with Isaruit Inuit Arts, and a mother and grandmother of Inuit children and holds a degree in English, Music and Education, along with certifications in trauma, Reality Therapy, counseling, addictions, as well as a Ministry diploma from St. Francis.

- She worked with Cree in Quebec and went up North in 1978 as a teacher, though she remembers connecting with Inuit culture as early as four years of age, being at Donald Marsh<sup>5</sup>'s place and awestruck by a walrus head and polar bear.
  - She wanted to go up North but her best friend passed away when she was 16 years of age and so she didn't go up North until 1978.
  - When working with Inuit, Beverly said she liked being part of the community and felt more connected than being among her settler community.
  - Beverly returned to Ottawa in 1978 and became a counselor/tutor for urban Inuit starting the Inuit House and went back up North in 1983 where she learned to speak Inuktitut.
  - In 1995, Beverly worked alongside Aunts and Uncles to form Guides and Outfitters business, and she observed that travelers would view Inuit as exotic 'subjects' rather than people.
  - With the increasing rate of suicide by the mid-1990s, Beverly facilitated the development of grassroots early childhood education run by Inuit.
  - Beverly went through 15 years of training and therapy to support her healing journey and trauma recovery.
  - Isaruit Inuit Arts started when Grandmothers connected to talk and eat and express an interest in sewing together, coming together level on level/person to person/ as human beings.
- Gwen is a mother of two children, now 21 years and 25 years of age. She has lived in Ottawa for the past 30 years. She says how important it is for her to wake up and try to be more positive. She says it is easier to be negative these days, but she tells herself, again and again "I deserve to be happy. I deserve to be healthy."
- Jeannie is an interpreter and translator with Isaruit Inuit Arts. She was born in a house her father built in Cape Dorset. She is half white - her father worked at Hudson's Bay Company.
- She had exposure to English in kindergarten and picked up the English language really fast, becoming the teacher's pet. She was bullied by her cousins.
  - Her mother passed away when she was 12-13 years of age and she lost her connection to her mother's Inuit family and faced further bullying because she was semi-orphaned.
  - Soon after her mom passed away, her stepmother walked through the door and was abusive.
  - She went to residential school, and it was a 'place of bad experiences' where she started drinking.
  - She disconnected from her siblings and felt like the 'forgotten child'.
  - She made poor choices and in 2001 experienced her biggest trauma that she does not want to share.
  - Jeannie says she is still healing, and through the grace of God, church, she has journeyed through healing and no longer drinks or does drugs.
  - She used to be very judgmental before, but she's learned from her older sister (who passed in 2019) empathy/compassion.
  - When a woman attacked someone, her sister explained "she's been hurt so she hurts others."
  - Jeannie noted that the first time she was asked to translate/interpret was age 8, when the Principal called her to the office to act as interpreter between him and Inuit janitors.
  - Jeannie has a Diploma in Interpretation and Translation from Nunavut Arctic College.
- Abby is from Clyde River and is living in Ottawa and on the path of sobriety.

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Marsh is known as the Bishop of the Arctic from 1950 to 1973 who built Eskimo Point (now Arviat)

- Ashley said her parents broke up and she's been moving up North and back to South (Ottawa). She planned to live in Iqaluit, but it didn't work out for her mental health, so she moved back to Ottawa.
  - Ashley disclosed that she is going through trauma now and that working and being at Isaruit Inuit Arts is helpful.
- Nick is from Clyde River and identified Beverly and Ben as great instructors who took him away from sadness.
  - He has gone over the world by Harper, being paraded and exploited for his climate change adaptation plan.
  - He's been a Fire Chief up North.
  - He attended University of Toronto, trained in IT.
  - What's given him the most PTSD is his experiences as a Fire Chief, EMS, working in the military, and his family.
  - He loves helping people and does outreach.

## Conceptualizing Trauma

Beverly notes that Inuit have three levels of trauma that many experience at the same time:

- Primary Trauma - experienced directly by the individual (e.g. being physically abused)
- Secondary Trauma - experienced indirectly from trauma experienced by close family members, friends (e.g. death of mother).
- Tertiary Trauma - experienced indirectly from trauma experienced by community (e.g. loss of a community member from suicide).

When Beverly was a counselor, she worked with other Inuit counselors, and they identified 16 collective traumas shared across all Inuit communities. For example, mothers have to leave one month before their baby is born to go to a regional hospital. Lodgings aren't provided, so mothers have to sleep in cramped quarters, on floors, with up to five others.

## Roots of Trauma

All participants referenced the impacts of colonization and past and present colonial policies and practices with present day trauma experienced by Inuit. Trauma is associated with mental illnesses and addictions. Colonial practices that were referenced include:

- forced displacement of families from homes, and children removed to day schools/residential schools
- loss of Inuktitut language - as early as childcare, day care, kindergarten
- the loss of traditional naming practices and the imposition of 'dog tags' and surnames
- the loss of social structures and banning of traditional practices (Inuit games, throat singing)
- the slaughter of dogs that were Inuit's 'survival tool'
- physical and sexual abuse experienced at day/residential schools, and also experienced by Inuit women from RCMP officers (when husbands were away hunting)
- pandemics - mass deaths from measles and tuberculosis and diseases, including loss of dogs from distemper, and
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).



# Impacts of Trauma / Colonization

## Ongoing MMIWG

Inuit women, girls, as well as men and boys continue to be murdered or go missing. Several current deaths were discussed during the roundtable discussion, including one graduate of [Nunavut Sivuniksavut](#) (NS), who got accepted into Algonquin College. In order to attend college, this young Inuk woman went online and found an affordable room to rent in an apartment. She was subsequently murdered by her roommate.

## Ongoing Structural Colonialism

Systems and structures are still being shaped by western/settler ontologies - whereby policies and practices force people into a western/colonial mold.

Ben describes how this molding process continues in the education system and begins as early as kindergarten - when Inuit children are expected to learn and speak and read English, self-regulate and pray. Beverly described the experience of several Inuit students at Carleton university, attending the pre-university year tailored to Indigenous students. It was expected that Inuit students would fit into the Indigenous (primarily First Nations) mold.

The healthcare system is molded with Western practices that frame mental illness as an individual pathology with often individualized treatments. Multiple Inuit participants shared their experience of going to counseling and not fitting into the counselor's mold for treatment.

The justice system and child welfare system continue to impose colonial practices that forces Inuit to comply with policies and regulations that fit the western mold. Chrissy described her traumatic experiences with these two systems - how an officer immediately judged her defensive act as a violation/assault and rather than understand the cause of her behaviour and the social environment and other factors at play. The officer molded the situation within the western lens that identifies a 'perpetrator' and 'victim' and punishes the perpetrator.

Non-profit organizations are molded by all levels of government through colonial funding models that reinforce hierarchical power relations and promote competition. Organizations that fit the western mold and comply with funding policies and practices are eligible for funding. Roundtable participants have observed how non-profit Inuit organizations are fitting into the western mold and have become more competitive with each other, which distances them from serving the Inuit community.

## Ongoing Systemic Discrimination

According to the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#), the definition of discrimination is: *"any form of unequal treatment based on a Code ground, whether imposing extra burdens or denying benefits. It may be intentional or unintentional."*

Multiple urban Inuit participants have expressed experiencing discrimination across multiple systems, such as education, healthcare, social services/assistance, and justice. Across systems, urban Inuit community members have engaged with workers who have no knowledge or awareness of their cultural identity (as distinct from First Nations, Metis), which has resulted in unequal treatment/provision of their rights.

When arriving in Ottawa, one participant said that she never heard of the word “Aboriginal” or “Native” before, and when she called herself “Inuk,” a social services worker didn’t understand. When the participant said their home community is close to the North Pole, the worker called her “Eskimo”.

## Intergenerational Trauma

Simply defined, “Intergenerational trauma when trauma is passed down through families” ([Canadian Encyclopaedia](#)). Many residential school/day home survivors have faced trauma all their lives: *“As a result, they have a difficult time raising children themselves. Some effects of this are high rates of family violence and domestic abuse. In a sense, the survivors model behaviour they learned in residential school. A tragic result of this situation is the large number of Indigenous children who are taken by child welfare services. About 54 percent of all children in child welfare are Indigenous. This only serves to continue intergenerational trauma”*. (Intergenerational Trauma and Residential Schools, Canadian Encyclopedia, pgh.5).

During both roundtable discussions, Inuit mothers, fathers, daughters and sons have described intergenerational trauma, and the painful consequences to healing/ wellness. During the second roundtable, Chrissy, an Isaruit Inuit Arts staff and urban Inuit mother expressed how she now experiences triggers that her mom had when growing up. Chrissy explained how domestic violence caused her to make the hard decision to remain in Ottawa when her infant child had to be flown to Ottawa for treatment. Chrissy explained how she is currently involved with the justice system after defending herself from an abusive partner and has to fight to regain custody.

## Homelessness

Dispossession of land and displacement to urban settings (often forced - due to lack of health services in home communities) have caused a high rate of homelessness. Roundtable participants have explained urban Inuit experiencing homelessness in Ottawa as “those who currently have no foundation to turn to - and lack a grounding situation”.

## Suicide

Inuit have the highest rate of suicide, from 6x to 25x the national rate. Beverly stated that when she speaks of this, people do not want to hear or face the harsh reality. In fact, one priest accused her of ‘over-exaggerating’ when she shared that 72 Inuit youth from her community in Clyde River have died by suicide.

## Addictions

During the roundtable discussion, participants who shared their stories either had direct lived experience of addictions or spoke of a family member with addictions. All participants connected addictions with trauma.

Participants who completed the survey were provided with the following four definitions of addictions:

- A) Any behaviour that gives a person temporary relief and pleasure, but also has negative consequences, and to which the individual will return time and again. ([Gabor Mate](#))
- B) A condition that leads to a compulsive engagement with a stimuli, despite negative consequences. This can lead to physical and/or psychological dependence. ([CMHA Ontario](#))
- C) The problematic use of a substance. The harms of substance use can range from mild (e.g., feeling hungover, being late for work) to severe (e.g., homelessness, disease). ([CAMH](#))



- D) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report highlights that substance use in Indigenous communities can be a result of trying to cope with traumatic experiences. This can lead to health and social problems that can span across generations. ([Indigenous Perspectives of Trauma and Substance Use](#))

Two participants selected all of the definitions of addictions, while one participant chose A) only, one participant chose B) only and one participant chose D) only. Another participant provided their own definition of addictions: "A socially constructed and corporately funded disease."

## History of Trauma Treatment/Recovery

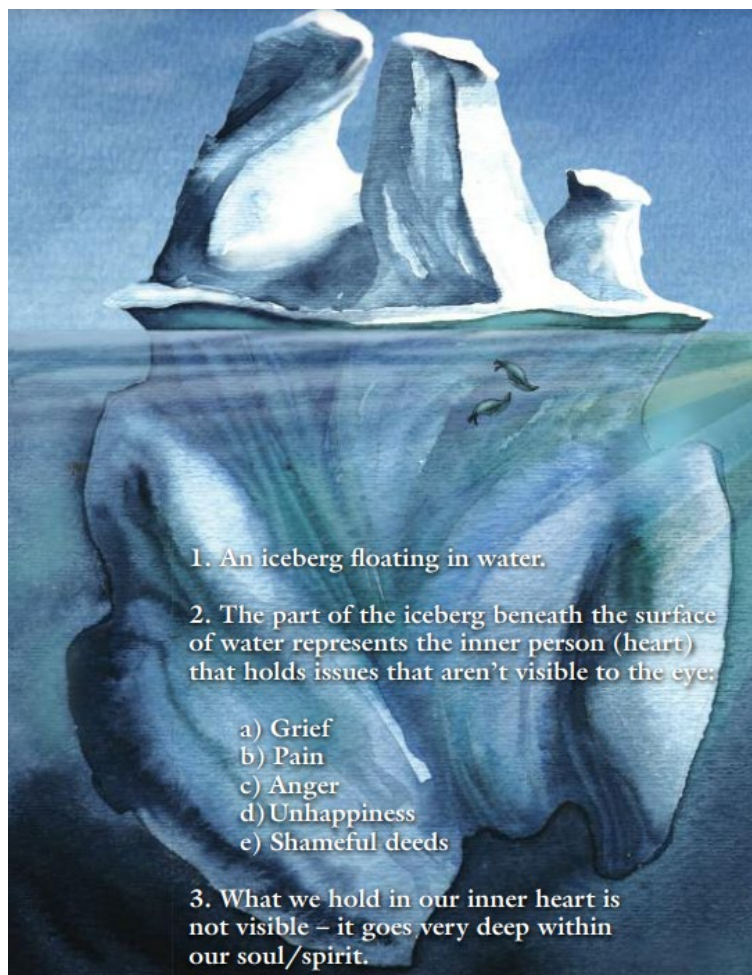
Beverly noted that treatment for trauma in Canada was only offered to military veterans in the 1990s. Beverly referenced the following works as significant contributions to trauma treatment/recovery:

- The 1992 book by Judith Herman entitled "Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror."
- the second (or third) edition of "The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse" by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis in mid 1990s.
- "Trust After Trauma: A Guide to Relationships for Survivors and Those Who Love Them", by Aphrodite Matsakis, published in 1998.

In Beverly's personal experience, the only mainstream service providing trauma treatment to civilians in the early 2000s was in Vancouver; however, they were not equipped to treat multiple levels of trauma and referred Beverly to military services.

During the second roundtable discussion, Beverly referenced [The Iceberg Healing Manual](#), written by Meeka Arnakaq, an Inuk healer. Arnakaq is from Pangnirtung and holds an honorary Master of Education Leadership degree from the University of P.E.I. and was named a "wise woman" by the Northwest Territories Status of Women Council in 1994.

Arnakaq's approach to healing was captured in a series of booklets produced by the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse and Tungasuvvingat Inuit, which formed The Iceberg Healing Manual published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in 2010.



Arnakaq describes the iceberg floating in the water as a person, and the part of the iceberg beneath the surface of the water represents the inner person, the issues that aren't visible to the eye, such as grief, pain, anger, unhappiness and shameful deeds.

What we hold in our inner heart is not visible, she says, and it goes very deep within our spirit. To heal, the iceberg needs to be broken. "Even if it's big, it will break. The only way it can get fixed is if you talk. We have to break the iceberg into pieces. Then things will come out. After the iceberg has crumbled, there's a cleansing of the body". ([Nunatsiaq News, 2010, para.11](#)).

Figure 7: [The Iceberg Healing Manual](#), 2010, p.8.

## Conceptualizing Urban Inuit Wellness and Healing

During the roundtable discussion, when speaking of wellness, participants highlighted the importance of relationships, and the crucial role of elders in sharing knowledge and wisdom with youth. Hayden reinforced that while growing up in the south and north in the modern way, he was taught the traditional wellness principle of keeping busy/being active.

Participants who completed the survey, reviewed the Indigenous Wellness Framework by Thunderbird Partnership, and shared the following:

- *"Wellness should feel like you want to learn and should sound like elders teaching. It should smell like traditional food and get back to no adding soups. I feel safe and well and brave when I am with my kids. I do not take any events and I don't ask for help".*
- *"Connection between emotional, physical, mental and spiritual wellness is the benefit for the mind and body".*
- *"Wellness to me: 1. Safe and secure environment. 2. Proper nutrition. 3. Transportation to get to places for help/healing (not just one way)".*

During the second roundtable discussion, Beverly referenced Meeka Arnakaq's [The Iceberg Healing Manual](#).

Meeka Arnakaq identifies 25 broken pieces that represent a person whose life has 'broken apart':

1. Crying/weeping
2. No one to help
3. Come... come just the way you are... broken
4. Not knowing anymore where to belong/fit in
5. Crying/weeping
6. Lost something
7. There is no God
8. How..?
9. It won't happen
10. Grief
11. Yes
12. Where to..?
13. I'm lost
14. There is no help for what I'm searching for
15. Afraid/fear
16. I was wrong
17. I'm embarrassed/shy
18. I've given up
19. Unhappiness
20. Yes, but how..?
21. Don't know anymore
22. Not the same anymore
23. What to scream from deep within
24. How can I become invisible?
25. Broke apart because it touched the bottom



Figure 8: The Iceberg Healing Model, 2010, p.9



Meeka Arnakaq describe healing as a dynamic process, with 13 broken pieces of iceberg (aspects of self/person) floating in the water (see figure 9 below):

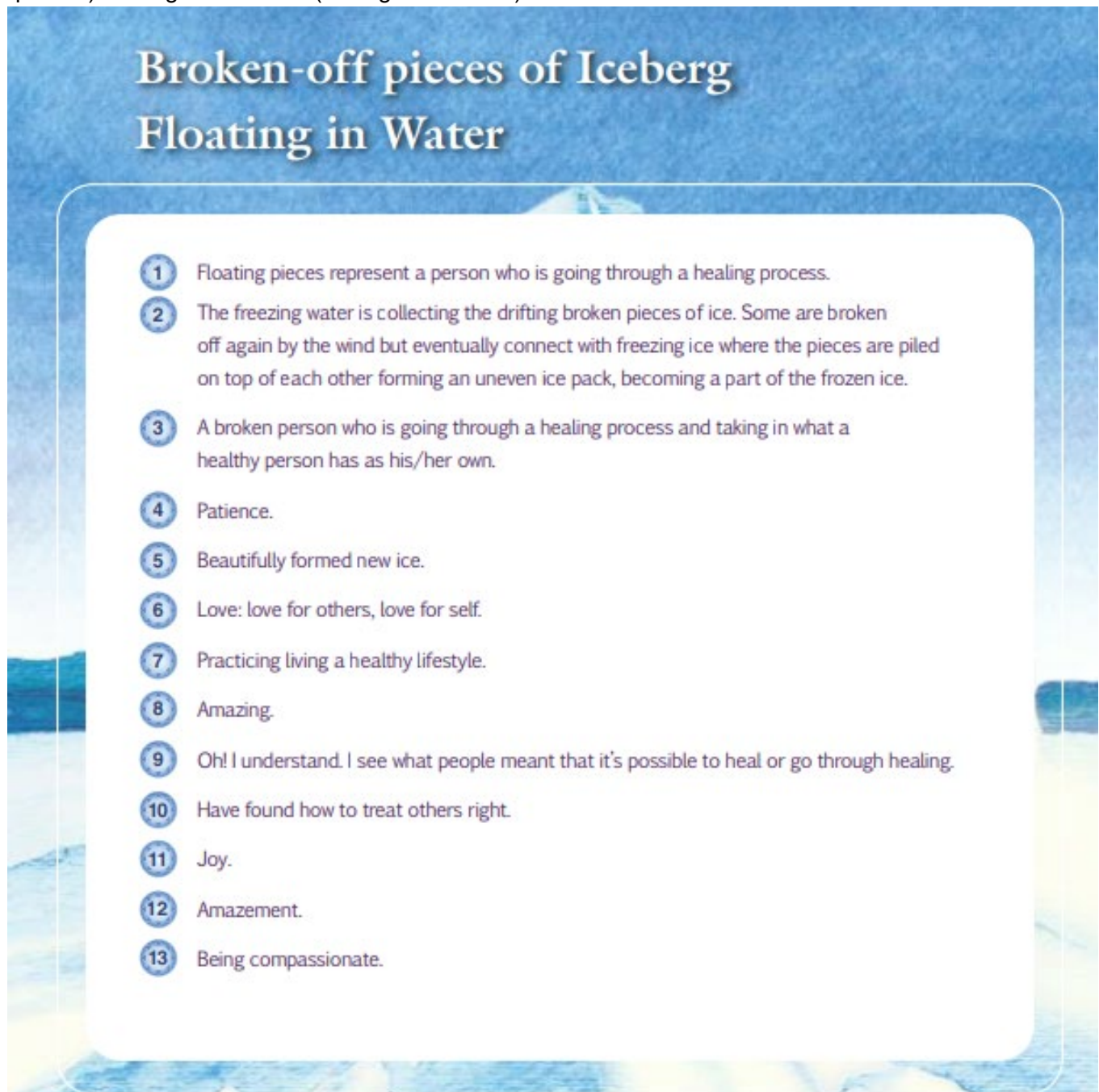


Figure 9: The Iceberg Healing Model, 2010, p.12

As the healing process takes place, the person takes on a new shape, with 10 components (figure 10):



1. Iceberg represents the person who has gone through healing from trauma and hurts.
2. Physical body.
3. Has taken the new, healthy lifestyle/ways; will continue growing the kind of person that was already there.
4. Wonderment.
5. Love.
6. Health
  - Patience
  - Peace
  - Compassion
  - Love
  - Joy and happiness
  - Comfortable
  - Sympathy
  - Forgiveness
  - Gratitude and thankfulness
  - Healthy lifestyle
  - Protecting self
  - Understanding and awareness
  - Looking at people and things in a healthy way
7. Inner person.
8. Letting things go.
9. Healthy deep inside.
10. Our heart/soul/spirit.

Figure 10: The Iceberg Healing Model, 2010, p.13

During the first roundtable discussion, wellness was framed in terms of access to cultural spaces, traditional food, and activities - everyone identified Isaruit Inuit Arts as a place for wellness and healing. During the second roundtable discussion, urban Inuit community members described Isaruit Inuit Arts as a communal space where they are able to begin or continue their healing journey and experience wellness through engaging in healing arts (sewing, beading, knitting, carving). Hayden explained how traditional ways of healing are applied at Isaruit Inuit Arts - through a welcoming, communal environment where talking/expression is encouraged by doing/being active in various cultural arts/activities. Through engaging in traditional ways of wellness, Hayden describes a deep spiritual healing.

Not only did urban Inuit participants discuss the importance of accessing a safe space to heal, they also described Isaruit Inuit Arts as a space to share knowledge/skills and to acquire knowledge, learn skills, and discover each other's gifts and strengths. Beverly noted that each Isaruit Inuit Arts staff have job descriptions that align with their gifts/strengths and builds/strengthens personal and collective economy. According to urban Inuit participants, community and economic development is related to personal and collective healing and wellness. Isaruit Inuit Arts provides urban Inuit community members with access to resources (craft/art supplies, tools) and teachers/mentors, so more Inuit community members can learn,

develop their skills, and create products/crafts/artwork that they can sell, which improves their personal economy. July commented on how teaching and sharing his knowledge has strengthened his sense of purpose and helped him heal and experience wellness. Another participant observed how two youth learning and developing their skills have created a safe space for them to express themselves and begin healing.

Urban Inuit participants expressed the importance of collaborating with other local Inuit organizations to heal from trauma and build community wellness. Unfortunately, Inuit organizations often compete for funding and work in silos due to colonial molding. Wellness involves challenging hierarchical funding structures and applying IQ principles, such as Aajiiqatigiinni:q: decision-making through discussion and consensus.

Urban Inuit participants said healing and wellness will improve with acts of reconciliation. Reconciliation begins with 'truth' and requires learning. Workers need to learn beyond their not knowing and this happens through engaging in training. One participant, a father, described that his family moved to an urban area, where his Inuk son attended a new school. He noticed his son's behaviour was changing and he didn't want to go to school. Reaching out to the schoolteacher, the father discovered his son was being bullied at school. The father went to the school and taught students in his son's classroom about Inuit culture. He showed how his son could write their names in Inuktitut (syllabics). The father continued to go to school to share knowledge and increase students' awareness and understanding of Inuit culture, which in turn reduced bullying and improved his son's wellness. Reconciliation is associated with community wellness, as learning can increase awareness, influence a change in behaviour, and promote systemic changes to policies and practices.

Reconciliation was also associated with inclusiveness, Beverly explains "Isaruit believes firmly in reconciliation. Inuit are human beings." Beverly spoke of a Nigerian woman who came to Isaruit to sew and believed she may not be able to join the sewing circle because she isn't Inuit. She was welcomed to join because she is a human being.

## Factors That Influence Mental Health and Wellness

Participants were provided with the following list of fourteen (14) factors that influence mental health and wellness:

- Income and social status	- Access to health services
- Employment and working conditions	- Biology and Genetics
- Education and literacy	- Gender
- Childhood experiences	- Culture
- Physical environments	- Race / Racism
- Social/community supports and coping skills	- Intergenerational/Historical Trauma
- Healthy behaviours	- Supportive relationships with family, friends

100% of participants identified supportive relationships with family and friends as well as employment and working conditions as the key factors that influence mental health and wellness. 66% selected income and social status, childhood experiences, and healthy behaviours as factors that influence mental health and wellness. One participant shared their perspective on the intersectional impact of poverty on mental health and

wellness: *“poverty leads to depression, poverty is rooted in racist policy, depression is activated by genetics. The ball continues to roll.”*

## “Present Services”

During the roundtable discussion, Ben identified the survey question that ranks “present services” can be perceived as ‘dissing’ Inuit cultural ways of approaching wellness with white (southern or Western) ways. Ben can distinguish between the services due to his experience of living up north and south (Ottawa). This question goes back to the issue of Western ways of labeling and taking away from Inuit traditional ways and approaches, and the foundational belief that it takes a community to raise a child, and the ‘child’ may be 50 years old, while a 9–10-year-old can be considered an adult based on their role and knowledge they hold in the community. The survey question does not respect or take into consideration Inuit ontology.

## Present Services Meeting Community Needs

Inuit participants who completed the survey ranked present mental health and addiction services reaching the needs of their home/connected communities as low as 2 -minimally reaching, and as high as 8 - reaching the needs well. Identified services include the following:

- Social workers, homeless helper, youth group, counselors
- [510 Rideau](#) -Drop-in Centre
- [Tungasuvvingat Inuit](#) (TI)
- [Alluriarniq](#) Smart Recovery 8-week program by TI
- Social services, welfare office, RCMP, school counselors, friends and family
- *“Help from the staff to go see a doctor anytime I feel like I need to see one”*

Two participants noted present services and limitations:

- *“Currently as far as Inuit organizations, I know only of one: TI that helps with addictions. As far as mental health, I think that TI is only able to make references to other organizations like Royal Ottawa,”*
- *“If someone is having a mental health episode (i.e. psychosis), the only option is to ferry them to the south (which often leads to participants being abandoned as they fall through the cracks , far away from home, often to end up homeless, due to their mental state and lack of community). Where they perish.”*

## Different Service Needs for Different Groups

Participants who completed the survey were asked: “Are there different service needs for different groups? (for youth, men, women, 2SLGBTQQIA)? Can you describe any? If so, what are they?” While some participants did not provide a response, several participants responded with the following answers:

- *“The LGBTQ has to be banned - they are teaching wrong,”*
- Funding for more equipment, more tools and materials,
- Inuktitut Women’s / Men’s Group
- Childcare, shelters, rehab
- *“Yes, but it’s better to have integrated community activities. Remember to have that along with individualized activities.”*

## Home / Connected Community Needs

Based on survey results and roundtable discussion, the following needs were identified:

- Acknowledgement of urban Inuit community member needs across all national Inuit organizations
- Fair distribution of funding
- More Inuit teachers and learn how to hunt and sew from Inuit



- More connection with Elders
- Inuit men's/women's shelter
- Fitness gym
- Need for transportation for urban Inuit community members to access programming and supports,
- Inuit taxi service that also provides mobile counseling support
- A welcoming program that greets Inuit who newly arrived to Ottawa, so they are immediately connected to urban Inuit community resources and supports  
(Participants noted that [Makivvik](#) has this type of programming setup in Montreal).
- Safe gender specific housing, e.g. women's shelters, shelter for women with children or just affordable housing in a safe environment
- Workers who are able to make regular visits to the client's house to see the environment the clients live
- More Inuit/country food
- Rehab, A.A. treatment
- Retirement residence
- Group home for 18+yrs
  - Some Inuit children are put into group homes/foster care and then become homeless when they turn 18 years of age and don't qualify for CAS funding
- More counselors
- During the roundtable discussion, several participants stressed the need for consistency, as they have had multiple counselors due to counselors leaving or changing jobs and it is very hard to repeat and share traumatic stories
- Participants stressed the need for Inuit counselors who can speak Inuktitut and who have gone through their own healing journey so they can encourage others not to give up
- One participant mentioned that western counseling/therapy forces Inuit to think in a Western way, and this can create a disconnect and division with family and community
- Aftercare - ongoing support and programming after 'treatment' or completing a therapeutic program
- Advocacy - speak to all Inuit organizations
  - One participant wrote: *"The Inuit organizations are like Apple and Android. They don't communicate with each other or more importantly to the community. So many times, I've only received information after the fact. For example, gift cards which were only given with a limited time offer. My question is: if these cards are to help the Inuit community why have a time limit? Which organizations I feel safe and secure is Wabano- which is not an Inuit organization. My definition of zero tolerance is not the same as those that work at TI. The staff, whom are not Inuit are timid or not trained to deal with aggressive/intoxicated people and ignore them or let them be. This is not acceptable to me, but it apparently is to most Inuit organizations."*
- Cultural Education across systems (education, child welfare, healthcare)

## Inuit Frontline Worker Training

Participants said that the most important training for Inuit frontline workers and for the urban Inuit population is from their connection from Inuit Elders, who require full recognition for their knowledge and wisdom and should not have to show any certifications.

## Standard Training/Certifications

100% of participants who completed the survey selected the following standard training/certifications:

- Mental Health First Aid
- Trauma-Informed care



- Suicide Intervention Training

86% of participants believe that Inuit trauma and addictions workers should have cultural sensitivity training, and 71% also chose the following standard training/certifications:

- First Aid/CPR
- Concurrent Disorders Training (CMHA)
- Crisis Intervention
- Land-based training

During the roundtable discussion, Beverly identified Reality therapy (Willam Glasser) and Choice theory as effective counseling practices that work for Inuit. This training was provided to Inuit up north (Clyde River) in the late 1990s, play therapy was also taught in both English and Inuktitut (Jeannie provided translation/interpretation services).

Participants recalled an Inuit speaker who provided an excellent speech/teaching on trauma, using rocks. He would line up rocks and explain that when people go through trauma, your rocks are rough, and through counseling and healing, rocks become smoother. During the second session, Beverly identified [The Iceberg Healing Manual](#) as a relevant resource for urban Inuit healing.

## Existing Mental Health and Addictions Training

Participants who completed the survey were asked: “What existing mental health and addictions training do you know of that are available to support Indigenous front-line workers in your community?” Participants responded:

- *“They need to talk to elders and take it seriously”*
- Talking with friends/family, counseling, women’s sewing program
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit (604 Laurier Ave, W.), Alluriamiq
- Inuit community support workers
- [Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team](#),
- [Wabano Centre](#)
- [CMHA](#)

## Online Training

Only two participants responded to the survey question: “Have you personally attended any online training sessions?” and wrote:

- “I have not attended any training sessions but I completed a course for health safety awareness”
- “2-year program with TI” [Tungasuvvingat Inuit]

## Critical Topics for Indigenous Frontline Workers to Know About / Learn

Sixteen topics were shared with participants, 86% of participants selected all topics as being critical, these topics are:

- Indigenous Wellness Framework - Life Promotion
- Cultural / Ceremonial Practices
- Traditional Healing Methods and Medicine
- Indigenous Harm Reduction
- Trauma-informed Care
- Indigenous Law

- Mental Health Across the Lifespan
- Interviewing and Helping Skills
- Historical Context of Trauma (residential schools, 60's scoop, Inuit tags...)
- Land-based learning/healing approaches
- Prevention, Harm Reduction, Relapse and Recovery Management
- Pharmacology for Mental Health and Addictions
- Kinship Custody and Guardianship
- Ancestral Trauma Healing
- Ethics, Legislation and Social Policy in Mental Health and Addictions
- Workplace Communications and Accountability

When asked to identify the top five critical topics, few participants responded to the question, and one explained the possible reason with their answer: *"All of the above - I do not believe in eliminating any of these topics"*.

Additional recommended topics for Inuit frontline workers to know about and learn include:

- Mandatory Inuit lead sensitivity training, which distinguishes Inuit from First Nations and Metis.
- Inuit - First hiring practices

One participant emphasized the importance of training frontline workers to acknowledge the role of fathers in caring for children and for wellness, *"Dad should start having their babies because dads are better at care"*.

## Roundtable Feedback

Participants expressed that they are optimistic, hopeful, and also skeptical - there have been so many surveys done that scratch the surface. Jeannie expressed that so many surveys have left scratches that there is now a gaping hole, *"let this not be a scratch and let us be the beginning of a healing path we walk together"*.

## Calls to Action

### Relational Accountability

- Government workers and academic researchers have come, and Inuit have answered so many questionnaires and surveys, then it seems that all the research and information gets shelved. Urban Inuit are not just another number and not another 'First Nation', and not a checkmark to write off on a checklist.
- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for relational accountability amongst organizational partners to continue to learn beyond their not knowing to work with and be part of ongoing action to build capacity and meet the needs of the urban Inuit community.
  - City of Ottawa address systemic issues that deny urban Inuit from receiving social assistance/benefits
  - 'Be it resolved that Inuit who access OW and ODSP never have amount deducted from their part-time pay cheques'
  - Inuit have access to Equipass
  - every frontline worker (across systems - justice, social services, education) has Inuit-specific cultural awareness training (ex: be aware of "N" number)

- [Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada](#) is supposed to include all Inuit women, including urban Inuit women, while they have engaged with Isaruit Inuit Arts, they have not offered any funding or support
- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for relational accountability across board governance - to have Inuktitut speakers on political boards - ensuring that not all boards are English-speakers with Western perspectives.

## Inuit Elder Recognition and Investment in Inuit Traditional Teachings

- Inuit Elders are the key source for Inuit wellness and healing. Isaruit Inuit Arts will reach out to Elder groups, Elders councils and Nunavut Arctic College to raise awareness to this important Light the Fire Project initiative. Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for:
  - Funding to care for and connect with the urban Inuit Elders in Ottawa
  - Funding for The Roots Project, that will bring Inuit Elders from the North to Ottawa for the purpose of counseling/helping urban Inuit
  - Funding for elders to teach youth to build a traditional Qammaq
  - Funding to produce multiple copies of trauma training stories/narratives/visual sessions to share the knowledge and teachings of well-respected Inuit elders and other teachers for Inuit frontline worker training
  - Funding for Elders to work together with urban Inuit community to produce an urban Inuit Reconciliation Toolkit for those interested to work together with Inuit

## Urban Inuit Recognition and Urban Inuit Governance

- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for clarification of Inuit as a distinct population, and for there to be mandatory authentic Inuit orientation given by Inuit and awareness training for all service providers serving Inuit.
- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for funding to publish brochures and pamphlets /Inuit-specific resource book (of Inuit services and supports) for Inuit newly arriving in the Ottawa area to be placed at Larga Baffin and all Canadian North ticket counters.
- Isaruit Inuit Arts is led by and for urban Inuit community members and must be recognized as an urban Inuit community hub for teaching, healing, and wellness.
- Rather than providing direct funding only to National Inuit Organizations, the Federal Government must recognize and fund urban Inuit grassroots community groups, that are led by and for urban Inuit community members.
- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for national Inuit organizations, such as Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Pauktuutit, Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI) to hear and acknowledge what is being said by urban Inuit community members and advocate for direct funding to grassroots community groups.

## Sustainable Funding

- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for sustainable core funding from the Federal Government and National Inuit Organizations, to ensure urban Inuit have a place to learn and heal together.
- Core funding:
  - for Inuit Health and Wellbeing -especially recovery from trauma in an Inuit way in an Inuit atmosphere
  - to support Inuit transportation solutions
- Isaruit Inuit Arts calls for TeKnoWave to stand with Isaruit Inuit Arts and meet with Indigenous Services Canada to sign a 10-year sustainable funding agreement.

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