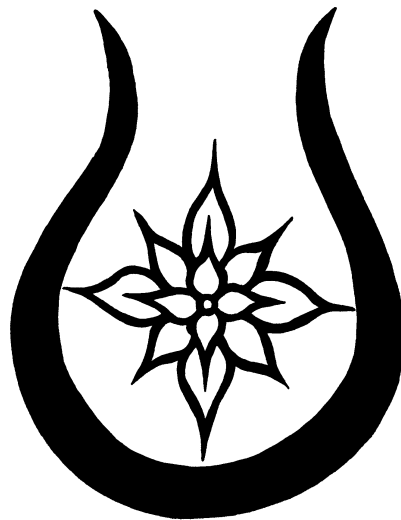


RESPONDING TO A SUDDEN DEATH IN THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

SESSION 2



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with this note on the back of the cover page.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darien Thira is a registered psychologist (CPBC #2040) who has served as a community development/mental health consultant for many Aboriginal communities across Canada for over 20 years. He offers training workshops and clinical consultation related to trauma, suicide, “addictions,” and personal and community wellness. He is also an adjunct faculty member at the Adler School of Professional Psychology. His doctoral dissertation related to Aboriginal suicide resilience and social activism he was involved in further resilience research at the University of British Columbia. He has previously served as a clinician with suicidal youth at Child and Youth Mental Health and with adults at an Aboriginal Healing Centre, and as the Director of Community Education and Professional Development at the Vancouver Crisis Centre. His “Through the Pain”, a culturally driven community-based suicide prevention program has been used in over 40 Aboriginal communities across the country and as a national program in Australia. His “Opening the Circle” program assists communities to develop their own Crisis Response Team. “Choices”, his youth suicide awareness education video & seminar was used by more than 250 suicide prevention programs world-wide and he has collaborated on the production of a new version called “Reaching Out”. Darien has presented workshops at many local, provincial, national conferences, and international conferences in: Canada, the United States, and Australia.

Training Programs:

Thira Consulting offers training workshops building on the material in this handbook and others, designed for First nations communities. An interactive approach--including practice-circles, small and large-group discussions, questionnaires, role-plays and other exercises--encourages the participants to share their experience and skills with one-another. For more information, Darien Thira can be reached at the number, email address, and website noted on the front of this handbook.

The material in this manual may bring up emotions and memories that are difficult for you. Please be sure that you have someone to talk to if you need support.

TRAUMA

In psychological terms, the impact of colonization can be understood as trauma. At its most basic level, “trauma” means the painful result of a previous injury; in fact, the “emergency ward” in the hospital is also called the “trauma ward.” In psychological terms, this injury can be either physical or emotional, or both.

Trauma is sometimes called being “lost in time”—that is, living as if the traumatizing event were happening right now. This is not a result of weakness, rather it is a biological consequence of the brain being unable to integrate the terrifying experience. We never have the same memory twice. Normal memories are broken up in the brain (with information from each of the five senses being stored in separate regions of the brain, and thoughts elsewhere again). We can imagine that the vision part of our memory is stored in the occipital lobes that control vision (located at the back of the brain), the sound part of the memory is stored in the temporal lobes (next to the ears), the emotional part of the memory is stored in the midbrain (which is essential to emotions), and the thought part of the memory is in the cerebral cortex (the front of the brain) which facilitates thinking and impulse control (known as “executive functioning”). Thus, the act of remembering is actually a re-construction of the past event taking fragments of the experience from different parts of the brain, which is then glued together by a person’s current understanding of the event, their current mood and, most importantly, their view expectations of the future.¹

Because normal memories are broken down and reconstructed, they are not as intense as the original experience. The body doesn’t react with the same intensity to a memory as it did when the event took place. In the case of a traumatic event, however, the brain does not “break down” the experience into manageable pieces (due to the level of cortisol and adrenaline flooding the brain); instead, the memory is stored as it was experienced—with the same intensity. As a result, when these “trauma nuggets” are triggered, the mind cannot tell them apart from current experience, as it can easily do with normal memories. Just as many dreams feel as “real” as waking experience while we are dreaming, so traumatic memories are experienced as real. (These are sometimes called “flashbacks” or trauma nightmares.) The body and mind react as if the event was happening “now,” at this moment. This is because those instinctive responses are controlled by the “primitive” base of the brain responsible for survival and it reacts to the triggers instinctively, with a flight, freeze, or fight response, before the information that triggered it reaches the “thinking” part of the brain (the top front portion called the cerebral cortex) which can realize that the triggering event is from the past. As a result, the body reacts “faster than thought,” before the mind can recognize that the event is not current.

¹ It is our anticipation of the future that shapes our memories. That is, if we think things will go well on a second date, we remember the details of the first date positively. On the other hand, if we are not enjoying ourselves, that will shape our memory of the previous visit. The recognition that memory is not consistent has led to the devaluation of so-called “eye-witness” testimony by courtroom witnesses. We now look to forensic science, because it is less likely to change, depending on the witness’s expectation of the court cases’ outcome.

Trauma Braid

However, it is important to note that the effects of psychological trauma can be as profound, or even more painful, than biological trauma. The only difference is that the person who is struggling with psychological trauma is not likely to suffer from re-experiencing flashbacks. However, in both types of trauma, the reactions can be understood to be “too much of a good thing”: this is, a survival instinct is unnecessarily triggered, when there is no actual threat.

The key to our survival in the face of imminent danger is our instinct for 'flight' (to escape from the threat), to 'freeze' (to hide—through the use of camouflage) or to 'fight' (to attack—using offence as a defence). For those struggling with trauma, one is repeatedly triggered into a trauma reaction or the reaction is constantly in place and these instinctive reactions do not diminish. In physiological terms, it means that the SNS (the accelerator) is over-reactive and/or that the PNS (the decelerator) is not sufficiently active. This “post-traumatic stress” (repeated re-triggering of a terror reaction) can lead to three of the most common so-called mental disorders (so-called, because they are actually trauma reactions):

(1) Anxiety: Anxiety is the ongoing feeling of intense worry. In terms of trauma, it is the psychological reaction to the constant readiness for “flight” (to escape) when the event is long past, so there is nothing to be escaped.

I have worked with many adults who, when they were children, had to carefully watch their parents to know when they might fly into a rage and become physically or emotionally violent. They describe themselves as “socially anxious” and when we work together, they often realize that they now approach every social situation prepared for “flight”, with the fear that it might “explode” into violence. They are struggling with trauma and experience it as “anxiety”.

(2) Depression: Depression is a feeling of ongoing helplessness and hopelessness. In terms of trauma, it is the psychological reaction to the constant readiness to “freeze” (to hide or remain unnoticed), a when the threat is long past, so there is nothing from which to hide.

Many of the women and men with whom I have worked who are violently mistreated by their partners, are often diagnosed as depressed. They are living in under a constant potential threat and one which often becomes an actual one. And because of previous trauma(s), they are triggered into a “freeze” reaction, which over time is experienced as “depression”.

(3) Rage: Rage is an extreme level of anger in which the body is prepared to fight and complex/rational thought is reduced to avoid distraction. In terms of trauma, it is the psychological reaction to the constant readiness to “fight” for one’s life (due to a constant need to “counter-attack” the now absent threat).

When someone experiences a “red-out” or “blind rage”, it suggests a possible trauma reaction. It is possible that many of the violent attacks in the sports context are actually triggered by historical trauma; the result is that the athlete may actually be attacking a previous adversary, someone who hurt them in the past.

While the link between trauma reactions and the most common so-called mental disorders is true for both the Indigenous and the non-native population; the tragic number of traumatic events resulting from colonial violations, accounts for the significantly greater

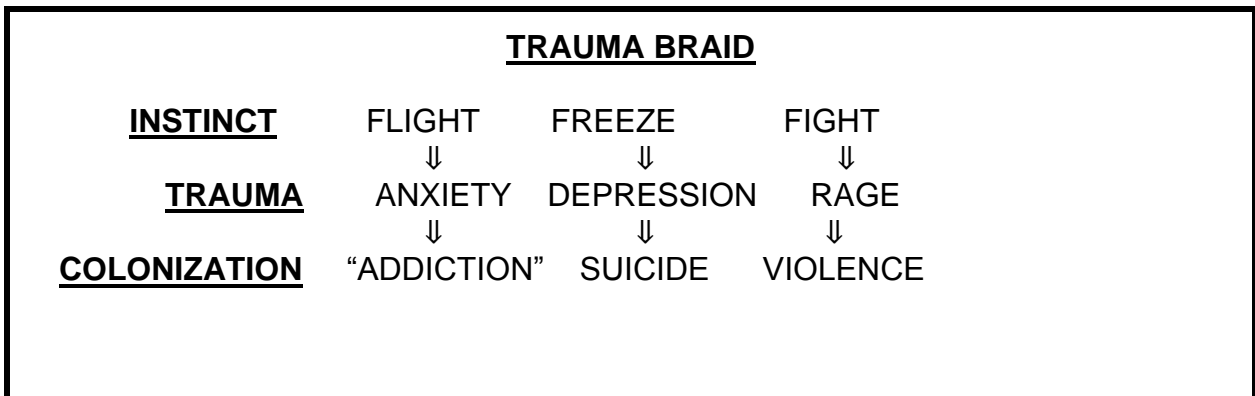
rate of the three most common “mental health” problems in many Aboriginal communities. Put another way, there is no “mental health crisis” in the Indigenous community, there is a “colonization crisis.” And in the face of ongoing colonization, each trauma impact has an additional social consequence, creating the three most common social problems in indigenous communities.

(1) Alcohol/Drug Misuse: Many Indigenous people who struggle with intense anxiety, anxiety which may either be the result of trauma reactions or may be realistic under the circumstances (due to the ongoing impacts of colonization on the community), will self-medicate with substances (such as alcohol and drugs); this is often called “addiction” and has resulted in devastating impacts on the community.

(2) Suicide: It has been suggested that that depression leads to suicide (about 50% of the time). However, the purpose of suicide is always the same, to stop unbearable pain; suicide is a (tragically fatal) solution that is turned to when depression (an attempt to stay hidden) no longer works to keep a person feeling safe from pain. And communities violated by colonization hold a disproportionate amount of pain within them. According to the Royal Commission on Indigenous Suicide in Canada, 1995, pointed out that,

(3) Violence: While not all violence in the community is rooted in rage, there is no question that rage may lead to psychological, physical or sexual violence. In a colonized community, whoever to whom it is directed (other adult community members, intimate partners, children, workplace colleagues or any others), is lateral violence, in almost every case, because it is directed toward people who are nearby rather than those who perpetuate(d) the colonial violence in the first place.

These three social issues—addiction/substance misuse, suicide, and violence are three of the most serious social issues plaguing Aboriginal communities. As a result, it is not overstating the point to say that trauma is one of the greatest challenges facing Aboriginal communities today.



WELLNESS

Colonization has had a profound impact on the wellness of the community, and its families and individuals. But wellness that has always been in our communities and it is still there today.

What is wellness? Many of us spend a great deal of time focusing on what is not working well in our lives or the lives of others; this is how we have been trained to think by the social services and mental health wave of colonization. To step out of the colonial box, we need to shift our focus to wellness and consider how to enhance what is working. But, for all the talk about wellness, many of us do not know what it is, what it “looks like” to be well. And if we do not know what wellness looks like, how can we embrace it or encourage others to do so? Wellness is not the opposite of illness, as has been argued previously. To begin with, wellness is not something you “have” but something you “do”—it is something you live—wellness is “living in a good way”. Wellness is *living in a way that is valuable to ourselves and the world*. Wellness is a gift we receive from living our lives based on our values—everything else flows from there.

***Wellness is...
living in a way
that is valuable
to ourselves and
the world.***

A Note on Resilience

What is resilience—is it the same as wellness? It is nearly impossible to discuss wellness in Indigenous communities without using the term “resilience”. And considering the impacts of colonization, there is a good reason for this. Resilience is the ability to overcome difficult circumstances—such as an illness, a personal or family crisis, or childhood wounds or trauma—and to return to wellness. For some, resilience may allow us to take what we learned in the difficult situation (sometimes called an “adverse event”) to lead us toward greater wellness than before the event; this is called “post-traumatic growth”. From this perspective, the crisis of the event became an opportunity to develop. Colonization and its impacts have created many adverse events in the community. When this was raised in a workshop, a participant shared, *“Every one of us is resilient—we have proved we are resilient because we’re still here!”*

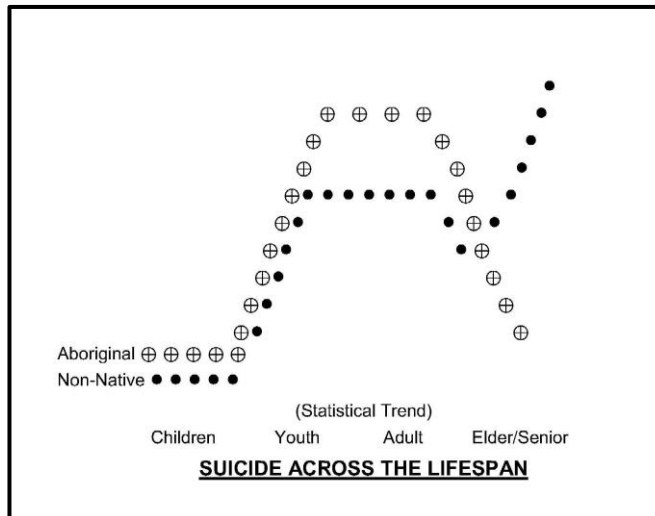
***“Every one of
us is resilient—
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still here!”***

Values are Stronger than Colonization

The problems with which communities are struggling (such as alcohol and drug misuse, suicide, violence, parenting issues, corruption, etc.) do not come from their traditional values. They come from people not living their values. The problems are the result of colonization’s theft of traditional values from the lives of individuals, families and communities. But values are stronger than colonization. And it through living cultural values that we can be stronger than colonization—all of its history and its current violence!

Elders and the Four “Wellness Values”

It is well-known that Indigenous youth have a significantly higher suicide rate compared to non-native youth. This is a tragic and understandable impact of colonization. However, it is less well-known that, up until recently, older Indigenous people have had a significantly lower suicide rate compared to non-native “senior citizens”. The suicide rate among non-native “senior citizens” (particularly men) increases as they age; it is much higher than that of Indigenous youth!



However, the opposite has been true for older Indigenous people; their suicide rate *decreases* as they age.² What makes them different is not their age, which is the same, but their role in the community. To begin with, they are named differently; non-native older people are usually called “senior citizens” whereas Indigenous older people are often called “Elders”.³ This difference in name is not trivial, it points to a profound difference in how they are treated and what is expected from them. The question that I had to ask myself and the question that I now ask the groups with whom I work with is

Values are stronger than colonization.

this, “*what explains the enormous difference in suicide rates between Elders and senior citizens—what is it that Elders give and receive that senior citizens do not?*” No matter with which Indigenous culture I am working, the answer is the same—the four “wellness values”.

Four wellness values have protected Elders from colonization and its impacts—Elders have traditionally lived by these values and their families and communities treated the Elders according to these values.

- (1) Traditionally, Elders have been *cared* for by their family and community. Whereas Euro-Canadian seniors (that is those who live in Canada and have a European ethnic heritage) are often sent to “old age homes” (some of which are like warehouses) and many suffer from neglect as their families ignore them—many seniors are not *cared for*.
- (2) Traditionally, Elders are given *respect* for their contributions and the wisdom they offer. In feminist terms, they have a “voice” in the community—when they speak, people listen. Elders are often interviewed by Indigenous media and frequently

² Unfortunately, these statistics are now “out of date”, as the suicide rate of Elders has been dramatically increasing in the last 15 years, because colonization has impacted the wellness of Elders, particularly their relationship with their families and community. As a result, more Elders are living like senior citizens. (This is discussed later in the text.)

³ There Indigenous people who are uncomfortable with the term Elder, pointing out that it is a term taken from that given to spiritual and cultural guides within certain Christian denominations. However, while the concern is valid, it is revealing. Indigenous “Elders” are traditionally the community’s spiritual and cultural guides. The term is meant to imply respectful recognition for their essential role.

appear on the cover of magazines and other publications. Whereas seniors are nearly invisible in community activities and non-Indigenous media—many seniors are not given *respect*.

(3) Traditionally, Elders actively contribute to the community (teaching language and culture, sitting on advisory committees, leading ceremony, caring for family, etc.). Whereas seniors retire and spend months away “down south” as “snowbirds” (if they can afford it), because no one cares what they do or where they go—many seniors are not considered/asked to contribute.

(4) Traditionally, Elders offer guidance and teachings that encourage us to live in a cultural and spiritually meaningful way. They are valued for their wisdom and looked to as role models, as the embodiment of the community’s *cultural and spiritual vision*.

Whereas seniors are seen as “old-fashioned” and “out of touch” with current knowledge and attitudes; youthful media stars or academics are looked to for guidance Euro-North American culture—many seniors are not teachers or role models of mainstream culture/spirit.

Four values—care, respect, a contributing role and a culture/spiritual vision—are the roots of wellness.

Values are the root of living in wellness and the four values identified above clearly contribute to the wellness of Elders. In fact, they are important for the wellness of all of us; without them, we cannot live well (as will be demonstrated throughout the text). To clarify, they are:

- *care* (the desire for somebody to be happy healthy and safe);
- *respect* (the belief that someone is capable and has something valuable to offer);
- *contribution* (serving others in a way that improves their life);
- *culture/spirit* (living in a way that is consistent with one’s understanding of the universe and one’s place in it).

Values Offer Gifts

All values offer gifts when we live them. Wellness gifts are the thoughts and feelings we have when we know we are “living in a good way”. They tell us that we are valuable and that we are of a value of the world. The wellness gifts encourage us to continue to walk the path of wellness.

When we live our values, we receive gifts of wellness.

The Four Wellness Gifts from the Four Wellness Values

Values are the root of the wellness tree and wellness gifts are its strong trunk.

Four wellness gifts appear consistently in resilience and wellness research and clinical work. Coming from each of the four wellness values, these gifts are:

- *care* gives the gift of *connection*;
- *respect* gives the gift *empowerment*;
- *contribution* gives the gift *purpose* (the experience of responsibility and being a contributor to others);
- *culture and Spirit* give the gift *Wisdom* (the experience that life makes sense and that there is a proper way to live in the world).

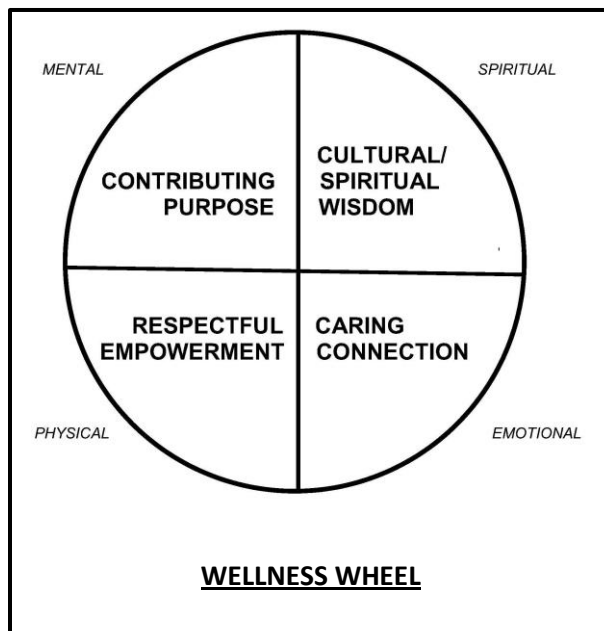
Summary

Values are the root of wellness for individuals, families and the whole community. Living our values is the “cure” for the social and historical “disease” that is colonization. In the face of colonization, the four wellness values and gifts are not just important for Elders, they reveal the four roots of wellness for all of us.

CULTURE IS THE CURE

Culture has guided the community for as long as people have been on the land and water. Culture is a foundation of wellness that leads communities to support the families and individuals within its circle. Colonization intended to strip culture from the community—to “take the Indian out of the Indian”.⁴

A person who lives in wellness will become an Elder and a family living in wellness will raise Elders, because the task of an Elder is to live their culture.



Embracing and enriching cultural knowledge and practices is an antidote for colonization—culture is the cure! In this text, wellness will be described as living one’s values. To put it another way, a person who lives in wellness will become an Elder and a family living in wellness will raise Elders, because the task of an Elder is to live their culture.⁵

The Four Cultural Branches of Wellness

Wellness is like a tree. The wellness values of care, respect, contribution, and culture/spiritual vision are its roots. They grow into wellness gifts of connection,

empowerment, purpose, and wisdom, which is the trunk. Integrating the values with the experiences, result in four branches of *cultural wellness*. They are:

⁴ Sir John A. Macdonald—first Prime Minister of Canada (1867–1873 and 1878–1891).

⁵ The vision of wellness offered here does not come from Western textbooks or academics, does not come from research with nonnative people that is assumed to be true for Indigenous people. It comes from traditional teachings, from Indigenous community workers and writers, from Elders and children, colleagues and other adults, clients and workshop participants with whom I have had the privilege to work; all of whom have shared their wisdom in the name of wellness.

- (1) *Branch 1—**Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom***: the value of culture/spirit leads to the gift of wisdom and together they become *Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom*;
- (2) *Branch 2—**Caring-Connection***: the value of care leads to the gift of connection and together they become *Caring-Connection*;
- (3) *Branch 3—**Respectful-Empowerment***: the value of respect leads to the gift of empowerment and together they become *Respectful-Empowerment*;
- (4) *Branch 4—**Contributing-Purpose***: the value of contribution leads to the gift of purpose and together they become a *Contributing-Purpose*.

But this is more than psychology. The values identified as the foundation of wellness are Traditional values; they are rooted in culture. That means that living in wellness means living culturally and that wellness gifts are cultural gifts. And these four wellness branches can be understood to be an expression of the cultural and spiritual vision of the *Four Directions* or *Medicine Wheel*. And, living our cultural values is the “cure” for the social and historical “disease” that is colonization.

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While there are many different *Medicine Wheels*, the one that I am most commonly requested to use by individual clients and communities has four divisions, representing the four directions, stages of life’s journey, seasons, and more. From this perspective, Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom is a spiritual concern; Caring-Connection is an emotional concern; Respectful-Empowerment is a physical concern;

and Contributing-Purpose is a mental concern. At the same time, the four are understood to represent a holistic unity—it is a *wellness wheel*.

All Indigenous traditions that utilize the *Wheel* recognize that wellness comes from following its guidance and seeking balance in one’s relationship to its aspects. Balance is important both within us and in our relations.⁶ The four branches of wellness are a model of cultural wellness framed by the medicine wheel and guided by the importance of balance. The following sections explore each of the four branches of wellness.

Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom

Cultural/spiritual wisdom offers us our view of the world (the universe) and our place within it is a gift of the values and teachings that emerge from *culture* and *Spirit*. Culture serves to hold our spiritual experience on a community level—together they offer us Wisdom. *Culture and Spirit* guides us toward living a wise life. Our Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom guides our behaviour in the world and helps us to make sense of our experience. And it prioritizes our values—offering us a “moral compass”, without which we have no consistent way to guide

Culture serves to hold our spiritual experience on a community level — together they offer us Meaning.

⁶ Our relations include where we live (such as the four directions, the land, waters, seasons and plants), those beings with whom we live (including people (our families and community), animals, birds, fish, and others) and culture and Spirit (however understood). These are called our *relations*.

our choices. If our life makes sense and we know how to conduct ourselves within it, we can live a wisely.

The Root Value of Culture/Spirit

With the value of having a *cultural and spiritual vision* allows us to make sense of the world and to know how to live in it wisely; it guides our choices. While we are ultimately form our own vision, its elements are drawn from two sources: our culture (which we draw from the people (and places) around us) and Spirit (which we encounter within and around us).

The value of culture/spirit offers the gift of meaning.

Culture is the lens through which we see the world and the guide for how we live. Culture is what shapes our experience—we cannot “see” without looking thorough it. However, we may identify ourselves with a specific culture—a culture that is expressed in a specific place and with people from whom we’ve learned that culture. Culture is not about the past, it is expressed in how we live, today. When we live our values, we are living our culture—we bring traditional Culture into our daily lives. The way that we live is the teachings that we pass on to those near to us, so it matters how we choose to live. However, each person makes sense of their Culture in a unique way; no two people will describe their understanding of their Culture in the same way. This does not deny the importance of a group’s Culture, it is the soil in which a person’s root values grow.

Spirit is the ground from which culture grows; it is the deepest experience of self (sometimes called soul, spirit, Higher Self, Heart, etc.) and/or the sense that there is more to the universe than just “me” (sometimes called Creator, God, Ancestors, Great Spirit, the Great Mystery, the Universe, etc.). Wisdom comes from a deep connection to Spirit or from cultural teachings that comes from spirit. Spiritual engagement does not require religion (although it can), only a deeply experienced sense of “self-transcendence,” an interconnection that allows one to experience that there is a Whole that is greater than oneself and that its value is greater than any individual. Spirit provides opportunities for wellness.

Research on what makes Healing Centres effective repeatedly make the same findings: it is not the psycho-education or therapy that is most important factor, the most powerful force of healing is engagement in culture and spirituality. Even now, when spirituality has been shown to be an essential part of wellness, the fourth so-called social service wave of colonization often ignores the power of spirituality. Whether it is time spent with Elders or ceremony, culture and Spirit are stronger than colonization’s impacts and the dependencies on problematic substances and behaviour that people use to deal with them. Culture serves to make sense of spiritual experience on a community level. The goal of colonization was to annihilate Indigenous people in Canada, if not physically, then culturally and spiritually—culture is the cure and spirit is its “active ingredient”.

Culture and Spirit’s Gift of Wisdom

Wisdom is our experience of who we are within the universe and how we are meant to live our lives. Emerging from our *cultural/spiritual vision*, *wisdom* may be offered by

belonging to a cultural group or personal engagement with what we call our core self or “spirit.” It offers a moral guiding system, freeing us from being a “puppet” of immediate internal and external demands. In terms of wellness, when we feel that our life is meaningful, we can overcome so much more than if we feel no clarity or guiding direction in our life (i.e., if we feel lost).

Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom

Living with Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom is best understood by thinking of a respected Elder. In some communities called a Knowledge Keeper, an Elder is not just an older person, but one who lives “in a good way”. They are the living expression of Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom. Felicity shared, that Elders,

have played a big role in my health and balance, restoring the balance. Because you need guidance from those who are wise and can ground you. That’s what they’ve done, a lot for me, is, is ground me and help have me look at things in a different way.

The qualities that make an Elder an Elder is their embodiment of Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom. They hold the culture and show us how we are meant to live. Rooted in culture/spirit, workshop participants have told me that the qualities of and Elder include:

- loving, caring, kind, and gentle;
- generous, contributing to community;
- helping/healing others;
- teaching, listening and learning;
- humble, spiritual and wise;
- patient, genuine, truly present, non-judgmental, forgiving
- funny and creative;
- possessing traditional knowledge, engages in ceremony and other traditional practices;
- honest, “walks the talk”/has integrity;
- strong, resilient, and self-sufficient.

Beyond the Problem: Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom helps us to know where we are going, without it, there is a tendency to focus at the current problem or past suffering. Many people describe themselves in terms of their problems, or the negative labels that they have been given to them (e.g., “I am an... addict, abuser, depressed, etc.”). When they look in the mirror, this is who they see. But despite this view of themselves and the behaviour that often goes with such labels, these same people have demonstrated many Elder qualities, they are already walking the Elders’ path, one that will lead them to become an Elder. I have worked with men and women who have lived on the street for years and they have shown all the qualities of an Elder while they were there. They can be funny (even if the humour is rude), they can be generous (even if it is sharing their alcohol or other drugs), they can be creative (there is almost no one more resourceful than someone trying to get their next “hit” without any money in their pocket) and they have been kind, helpful, wise, loving, and genuine, as well. This means that they are already well on their way to becoming an Elder (rather than being an addict, abuser, depressed, etc.). They already knew how to pursue a worthwhile life—to live like an Elder—it was only matter of doing it more of the time and the problematic behaviour less of the time!

Healing and Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom: As a clinician, I am not interested in trauma, suicide, or substance misuse for their own sake. I am only interested in how I can help a person overcome the obstacle to their becoming an Elder. The qualities that make an Elder do not include being overwhelmed by trauma, suicide or substance misuse, so the issue must be dealt with. The focus of healing is always to assist the person as they strive to walk the Elders' path, one that will lead them to become the Elder that they are meant to be—that colonization has attempted to steal from the community.

The focus of healing is always to assist the person as they strive to walk the Elders' path, one that will lead them to become the Elder that they are meant to be and that the community so desperately needs.

Caring-Connection

The value of *care* offers the gift of *connection*. *Caring-Connection* is the recognition that we exist relationally—that we are all *interconnected* with each other, the land/water, and animals—and it is our place to give and receive for ourselves and all relations. It is Caring-Connection that offers the support for a person to change their life. The belief that an “intervention”, the threat that Caring-Connection will be taken away, will help a person to change is both incorrect and dangerous. In fact, the opposite is true, being cared for and offering care in return is essential for wellness.

The value of care offers the gift of connection.

The Root Value of Care

Care is the value that encourages the desire we have for another person, family or the community to be healthy, happy, and safe. It offers the gift of *connection*. Connection is what we need from others for our health, happiness and safety. Care is what brings most caregivers to their work. And care is what we offer a baby. It protects a child; without care, they'll never grow up, because they won't survive. And as we grow up, we still need to feel cared for and we have the opportunity to give back, to care for others.

Care is the desire we have for another person, family or the community to be healthy, happy, and safe.

Care's Gift of Connection

We exist in relation to everyone and everything—we are not alone. We are relational beings and we are always connected to our *relations*. An experience of connection might come from any of our relations, including:

- *people* (such as family (most important), friends, workers, or a group/team);
- *nature/animals* (such as trees, the Land/Water, a pet or wild creature);
- *a place* (such as a location on the land, a community building, a home or room, or a ceremonial place);

- *an object* (such as a photograph or ring or a blanket) or experience (such as music or baking cookies);
- *culture* (such as a traditional identity or practice) and/or *spirit* (such as the Creator, God, Ancestors, the Universe, Sacred Energies, etc.).

The gift of *connection* with our relations offers an experience of belonging with and being loved by them. We do not exist except in relation to them. And, of course, connection also a gift we receive in our relationship with ourselves.

Caring-Connection

Caring-Connection is an experience of relationship and belonging—that you are accepted and that you are valued. Harold exemplified Caring-Connection as he described an important ceremonial moment.

Caring-Connection and Relationships: In relationships, *care* is the desire we have for another person, family or the community be healthy, happy, and safe—it is what brings most caregivers to the work that we do. *Care* is best exemplified by the relationship of a parent to their infant. In terms of *self-worth*, *care* offers *connection*. The first step in therapeutic relationship is establishing “rapport”, which could also be called a relationship of Caring-Connection. This is also the first step in parenting, where they call it “bonding”, in friendships and in relationships. Felicity looked back to her childhood to describe the community that provided her with a foundational sense of Caring-Connection.

In terms of wellness, when we feel loved and that we belong, we can overcome so much more than when we feel alone or rejected. In relationships, *connection* comes from giving or receiving *care*. The greater the connection, the greater the care. And the greater the care, the greater the connection. Care and connection flow both ways.

Respectful-Empowerment

The value of *respect* offers the gift of *empowerment*. With the experience of *Respectful-Empowerment* we recognize that we can respond effectively to our life. *Respectful-Empowerment* also offers us a “voice”; that is, the experience that we have something to say that is valuable to their family and community or that we are capable of doing something to serve their family and community.

The value of respect offers the gift of empowerment.

The Root Value of Respect

The value of *respect* honours the value and capacity of a person (or place or thing). With people, it leads us to recognize their capacity to care for and take responsibility themselves to offer gifts to others. But I have been in communities where I have heard adults say to the children, “wait until the adults have taken their food, show them respect”. This is not traditional culture, this is the Indian School System brought back to the community. Traditionally, if anyone had to go hungry, it would be the adults; the elders and the children are treasures to be protected and respected. It gives a person, family or the community the opportunity for *empowerment*—to be powerful, together.

The Gift of Empowerment

The value of *respect* offers the gift of *empowerment*. Empowerment is the experience of having power—not over others, but *within* one’s self and *with* others; it is based on

interdependence, rather than dependence *on* others or independence *from* others. Empowerment offers us courage and belief in our capacity to respond to the demands of our lives. Empowerment is the ability to respond effectively to life and to use available resources to overcome our problems.

Note: An experience of empowerment must come from accomplishments or qualities that are important to the person, family or community. For instance, a youth might be an excellent artist, but if they believe that being a successful athlete is more important than drawing, they will not experience the gift of empowerment.

Respectful-Empowerment

Respectful-Empowerment is an experience of ability and voice—that you are capable and that you are worthy of being heard.

Respectful and Empowering Relationships: In relationships, *respect* is the belief that another person is separate from you—that they have the right to make their own decisions (even if you wish they'd make a different choice), the capacity to respond to their own problems, and perspectives and values that are valid for them (even if they are different from your own). True *respect* means that you treat a person as an equal. It gives a person, family or the community as a whole the chance to take charge of their own destiny. In relationships, empowerment comes from giving or receiving *respect*.

Contributing-Purpose

Living the value of contribution offers the gift of *purpose*.

Contributing-Purpose is the sense that we have something valuable to offer to the world—it leads us to realize that our life matters. It is only by serving those around us (by taking on the roles of protector, provider or teacher) that the value of contribution can offer us the gift of purpose.

Living the value of contribution offers the gift of purpose.

The Root Value of Contribution

Contribution to our family and community (all of our relations) is an essential value. If we are not living in a way that contributes, we feel useless and our lives feel aimless; contribution offers us a “reason to live”; it gives our lives purpose.

The Three Traditional Contributing Roles

Many activities may offer empowerment, others may offer connection, and some offer wisdom; but any activity that does not contribute, one will not feel the gift of Contributing-Purpose. Traditionally, there have been three contributing roles that people have played, starting from a very young age:

- *protectors* (as warriors, nurturers, or healers);
- *providers* (by providing food/housing, entertainment, or ceremony); and
- *teachers* (as instructors/mentors, role models, or ambassadors).

And we still fulfil these roles in a way that is valuable to their family and community—they are living a worthwhile life. We do not have to convince children to take on these roles, they take on all three contributing roles naturally—It’s “in their blood”, it’s who we are. We may not be very good at it, when we are just learning, but we try.

Protectors: Today, people are *protectors* through parenting, advocating/protesting, caring for Elders, informal conflict mediation/breaking up fights, standing up in one’s family to challenge abuse/neglect, serving on a Community Response Team (i.e., crisis intervention) or as a First Responder, front-line worker, etc.

Providers: Today people are *providers* through hunting/fishing, earning money or using welfare for useful shopping, food gathering/preparing, entertaining friends/family, offering ceremony, building homes/ playgrounds/walking paths, developing/creating a community event, administrative work, developing programs/youth centres, etc.

Teachers: Today people are *teachers* through role modelling wellness, training cultural practices or workplace skills, tutoring or instructing school-related knowledge. representing the community on a sports team, etc.

Contribution’s Gift of Purpose

Purpose means having a practical impact guided by the intention to benefit others—it makes one’s actions worthwhile. More important than financial or popular “success”, the gift of *purpose* comes from contributing positively to our relations (one’s family, community, or the larger world). Coming from our *contribution*, purposeful living is the opposite of aimless living. In terms of wellness, when we feel that our life is purposeful, we can overcome so much more than if we feel aimless and unimportant, like an invalid. In relationships, purpose comes from contribution to the wellness of others.

Contribution and Purpose

Purpose is the recognition that we have something to offer the world—that we contribute as protectors, providers and teachers. Many people confuse entertainment with lifestyle. Whether through watching television, surfing the internet, playing games, sports, etc., entertainment is only a vacation. It is what one does as a temporary break from pursuing a contributing role. However, the colonization has convinced many that only jobs are purposeful. This is particularly destructive since the economy of many communities have been stolen by the colonizer. The result is that many people in the community are doing nothing of use to themselves, their families or their community—they have no contributing role. Equally destructive personal, family, and community wellness are those that seek financial success or power in the community for themselves, without fulfilling a contributing role. They become the embodiment of colonization—exploitation without contribution.

Contributing to the community offers us a contributing role.

DECOLONIZING OURSELVES AND THE COMMUNITY

The fourth wave of colonization identifies the community as sick and dysfunctional; that is, needing outside services to survive/heal because it is unable to take care of itself. This has led communities to feel helpless in the face of community, family, and personal problems; they have come to believe that only outside experts can help them. For the community to reclaim its wellness, it must decolonize itself; that is to see itself as capable to heal itself. The community took care of itself for millennia before contact with the European settlers and it can do so now.

Decolonization is the intentional un-twisting of colonization in the heart, mind, body, and spirit of colonized individuals, families, and communities.

Colonization is the intentional twisting of a people's heart, mind, body, and spirit for the benefit of the colonizer. Decolonization is the intentional un-twisting of colonization in the heart, mind, body, and spirit of colonized individuals, families, and communities. It requires not only reclaiming of power on a social level, but disentangling colonial twists in our approach to ourselves, others, and all to which we are connected.

Out of the Box and Into the Circle

Traditionally, Indigenous communities and families were founded upon *circles*. The circle of the seasons; the circle of birth, growth, and death; the circle of relational inter-connection; the circle that holds the four directions, etc. Indigenous ceremonies often involve moving or dancing in a circle (such as in Potlatch or Sundance or Tea Dance), sitting in a circle (such as a Sweat Lodge or healing Circle), or passing a sacred object in a circle (such as, a pipe or feather).

Colonization and the settler system are based on *boxes*. The box of the Indian Act, the box of the Reserve System, the box of the Indian School System, the box of the prison system, etc. Government departments divide wellness into separate boxes (sometimes called silos), so that health services are separated from so-called "mental health" services which are separated from so-called "addiction" services which are separated from family services, which are separated from employment and educational services—as if they weren't all essential parts of wellness.

School has told us to stay in the box, most of our training has told us to stay in the box and navigating the government system has told us to stay in the box. That is colonial brainwashing. And if we believe in the colonial boxes, such as diagnosis, if we view ourselves or others from the point of view of the colonial identities, we become colonizers ourselves. If we are not careful, we do the "dirty work" for the colonizer! If we want to decolonize our practice and ourselves, we must step out of the colonial box and back into the circle of the community.

The Three Steps to Decolonize ourselves and Our Practice

However, to recognize and benefit from the wisdom and strength of the community, it is necessary to step outside the limited view of the community and its resources that have been the foundation of the fourth wave of colonization. We must decolonize ourselves (including our expectations) and decolonize our practice with others or we run the risk of colonizing ourselves and others, by accident. And there are 3 steps that we can take to avoid colonizing ourselves and those we care for:

- (1) *first step*: to stop “pathologizing” and “medicalizing” ourselves and those we care for by viewing them in terms of their problems, but instead to identify and work with their opportunities for wellness;
- (2) *second step*: to stop “individualizing” our view of a person and seeing them as isolated beings, but instead view ourselves and others as an interconnected and essential part of their community; and
- (3) *third step*: to stop viewing resources in terms of government programs that disempower the community, but instead to understand the community as a rich source of wellness resources.⁷

DECOLONIZE YOURSELF AND YOUR PRACTICE

Shift Focus:

- (1) Shift from problems to opportunities for enhanced wellness
- (2) Shift from the individual to the community as the source of identity and wellness
- (3) Shift from government sanctioned to community/cultural resources

While there are certainly many other possible steps, these three have proven useful and are offered as a starting point as a starting point.

(1) Shifting the Focus From Problem to Opportunity

We are often encouraged to think about a person’s family’s or community’s problems when we seek to help them. After all, their problems are the reason that they come to us for help or that we offer our assistance. However, if we focus on their problems, we see them in terms of their problems—we explore their problems and not their solutions. And as we explore it with them, they become experts about their problems.

⁷ For those “keeping score” ... Shifting away from a focus on problems undoes the fourth wave colonial trick of “pathologizing”. Shifting away from a focus on the individual as separate from their family and community undoes the colonial trick of “individualizing”. Viewing resources as community-based and culturally rooted undoes the colonial trick of “medicalizing”.

In the community, people seem to talk about the problems all the time: “this person is a problem”, “that family is a problem”, “the community is overwhelmed by this or that problem...” This is speaking in the language of the colonizer. A problem focus emphasizes “weaknesses” rather than strengths; and it takes strength to make changes. A colonial emphasis on the problems within an individual, their family, or community hides the reality that the real problem is colonization itself. The real problem is the way we think of individuals, families, and the community in terms of problems. We need to become experts at solutions, not problems. Only if we focus on solutions, will we be able to contribute to an opportunity to change.

If we focus on problems with a person, they become experts about their problems, but if we focus on solutions, they have an opportunity to change.

The key to promoting wellness is to focus on the *opportunity* that lies within or is revealed by a problem or crisis. If we focus on the opportunity, wellness can be enhanced. Every person who seeks help with a problem is stronger than that problem. It is our task to build on that strength as they pursue opportunities for wellness.⁸

Shifting our focus from problem to opportunities to pursue wellness is the first step away from the colonial identity of sick and dysfunctional in which each person, family or community is seen as having a problem or being a problem. The next step is reclaiming community by shifting our view of a person from an isolated individual to a network of relations.

(2) Shifting the Focus From the Individual to the Community

Not only do we live in our community, our community exists within us—the community is who we are. For example, if someone close to us leaves or dies, where do we feel the pain; is

Since crisis impacts the whole community, the whole community can respond to a crisis.

it on the outside world or in your heart? It is inside us because they are inside us, as much as they were outside of us. It’s just the same when someone tells you they love you—you feel their love inside you, you feel them inside you. And if someone you care about experiences a great success, you will feel the pride, even though you didn’t do it (in the outside world). We are each a “self-community life world”, a term which suggests that just as we cannot understand a tree independent of the forest in which it grows (let alone the land and water, regional climate, etc.), a person cannot be understood or understand themselves outside of their community. Significantly, this

Not only do we live in our community, our community exists within us—the community is who we are.

⁸ **Note:** You cannot help someone to heal from a problem that they do not think they have. The only problems and opportunities that you put on a list like this are the ones identified by the person who owns this list; that is, no one else can make the list for another person unless they are a child, or they are mentally/physically challenged or ill; otherwise it is disrespectful, and the person is very unlikely to pursue change no matter how much you care about them.

interconnection is essential even if one's identity is based on absence, that is on alienation from the community. Put another way, you cannot "not belong" to the community, because you are inside the community and the community is inside you—the whole community! Since a problem or crisis in one of its individuals, families, or the impacts the whole community, the whole community can respond to a problem or crisis in one of its individuals, families, or the community at large. The capacity to respond was there before contact and it's there now.

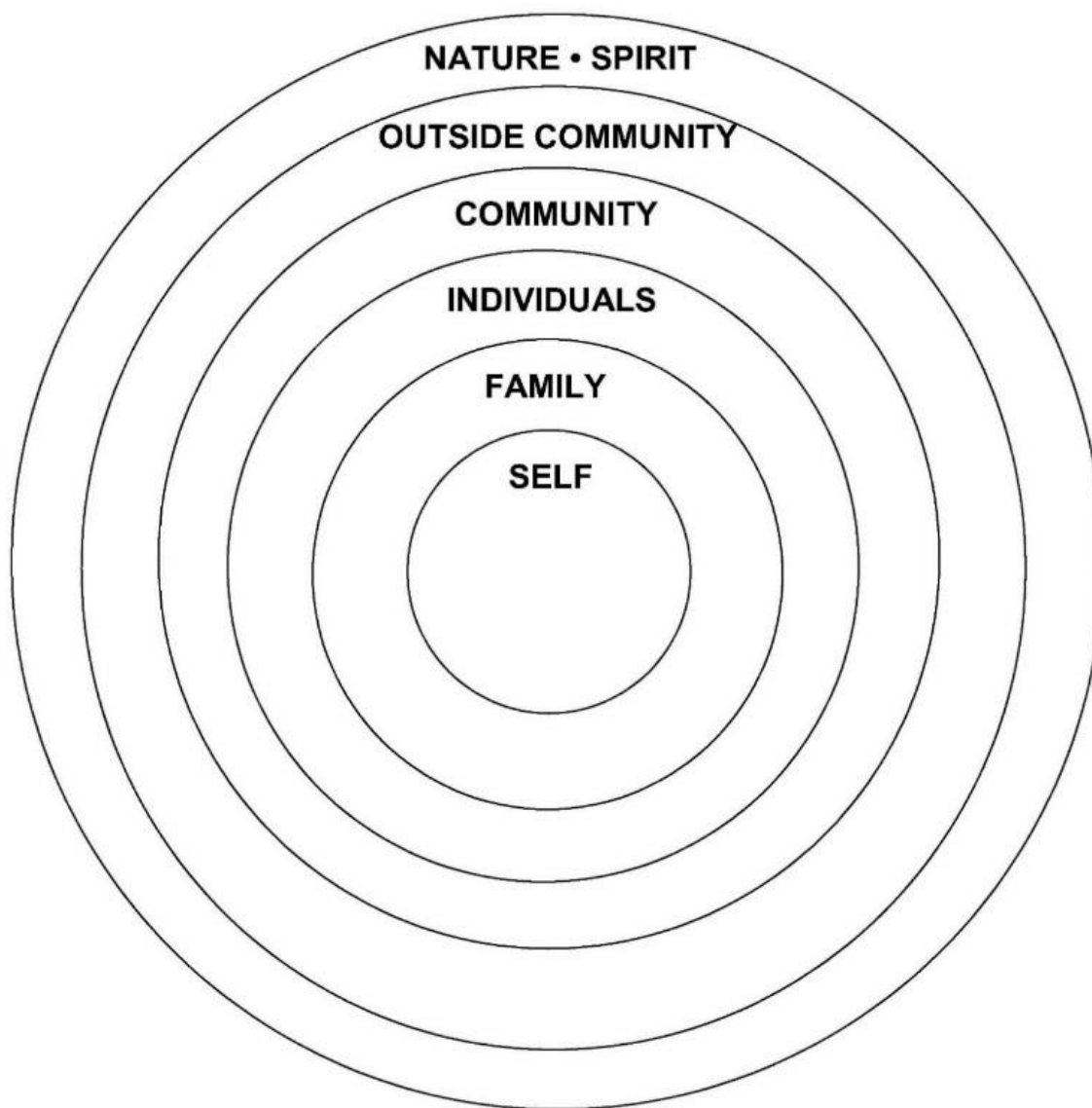
The Six Parts of the Community

In order to explore the range of resources available to a person, it is essential to consider the whole *community*. Surrounding a person, a community can be understood to be made up of six inter-dependent parts:

- **Self:** who we are we are by ourselves;
- **Family (or Clan):** who we consider to be our family members; they may be family of origin (those with whom we are related by blood), family by relationship (our "in-laws" or "in-common-laws" or relatives of a particularly close friend), or family by choice (those that we have adopted (formally or informally) as members of our family);
- **Individuals:** specific people we know by name or recognize as familiar in our lives, whether they are children youth, adults or Elders (these include friends, community caregivers, professionals/workers, colleagues or clients, etc.);
- **Community:** the collection of families and groups that are larger than individuals and will carry on even if individual members of the group may change (this includes cultural/spiritual groups and support groups and sports teams and agencies/services and governance and institutions);
- **Outside Community:** individuals and groups outside the community, (including neighbouring indigenous communities and urban centres), as well as media (books, movies, Internet, etc.) that comes from outside;
- **Nature/Spirit:** Spirit (however it is understood) and the beings and places that we call natural world—these include the two, four, six, eight and the many-legged; those with wings and fins and those that slither or wriggle; plants and other growing things; the waters and the land—all are profoundly important for well-being.

All of this is the community. And we do not just live in the community, it lives within us—it is who we are and where we live.

COMMUNITY MAP



(3) Shifting the Focus From Government Sanctioned Problem Resources To Community-Based Wellness Resources

The third step in decolonizing ourselves and our practice is to shift from government dependency to community empowerment. Government sanctioned resources tend to focus on problems, see the person as having the problem rather than recognizing it as a community issue that the person and their family are experiencing personally. As a result, the services use clinical labels to create a sick and dysfunctional identity, isolate a person from their family and community by viewing them as an individual alone. Ultimately, this

allows them to identify themselves as the experts in helping and healing or problem-solving, which identifies the community as incapable of dealing with its own issues. For this reason, they should only be used to support community resources or as a last resort.

Every time we utilize a government sanctioned resource to assist an individual, family or the whole community, we are stealing from the community, we are stealing its opportunity to take care of itself, its opportunity to form a stronger support system, the opportunity for

community members to contribute, and often a cultural or spiritual path to wellness.⁹ For example, people take their children to the nurse, when an Auntie could easily take care of the problem. People seek out youth workers for their children, one is surrounded by relatives who've raised their children well.

Every time we utilize a government sanctioned resource to assist an individual, family or the whole community, we are stealing its opportunity to take care of itself, so they should only be used to support community resources or as a last resort.

THE COMMUNITY IS THE MEDICINE

It is the task of the community to take care of its wellness—it always has been. But colonization has tried to steal this role from the community, fostering conflict and promoting helpless dependence on government services. Unfortunately, despite this, many people in the community have been convinced that the community is helpless. They tend to focus on problems instead of opportunities, to think of individuals separate from their family and community, and to look to government resources rather than to use those found in the community. In short, they are looking at the community through the colonizer's eyes they would benefit from decolonizing themselves and their practice (as discussed in part one).

Wellness Resources

The term *resource* is commonly used in the helping professions to identify a person place or activity that can be used to support someone who has a problem. In most cases, resources tend to be other helping professionals or agencies or programs that have some expertise related to that problem.

Problem Resource

Due to colonization, most of the time when people think the purpose of a resource is to help to deal with a problem. For example, people will seek resources to deal with so-called addiction. Not only does this focus on the problem, leading a person to define themselves as an "addict", but there are very few resources available at most communities that focus on the problem of "addiction" (usually only an AA group or an A&D counsellor). And it should not be a surprise that problem resources are almost always

⁹ As mentioned previously, in no way is this deny the value of the gift givers who are working within the government sanctioned system, this is a recognition of the colonial violence inherent within the system itself.

government sanctioned. After all, they support the idea that Indigenous people are “sick and dysfunctional”. So, problem resources lead to a problem focus and identity, are hard to find in most communities, and tend to be controlled by the government and often have a colonizing viewpoint that individualizes, pathologizes, and medicalizes. The opposite of a problem resource is a wellness resource.

Wellness Resource

A wellness resource is any available source of *self-worth* or opportunity for a *worthwhile life*. It may be a professional (such as counsellor), a community member (such as an Elder), a family member, time on the Land or in Ceremony or prayer, a positive activity, and, very importantly, an opportunity to contribute. Any of these will contribute to self-worth or a worthwhile life and, therefore, will enhance wellness (which will reduce the impacts of a problem and may even resolve it).

A wellness resource is any available source of self-worth or opportunity for a worthwhile life.

Decolonization and Community-Based Wellness Resources

Not only does the use of community-based wellness resources support the individual, family or community as it struggles, it works to decolonize the community! This is because

Not only does the use of community-based wellness resources support the individual, family or community as it struggles, it decolonizes the community at the same time.

engaging the community as a wellness resource enhances the community’s awareness of its capacity to respond to the needs of its families and individuals. Each time a community wellness resource is utilized, the community is one step further down the path of:

- *Caring-Connection* because it has offered service to those in need;
- *Respectful-Empowerment* because it proved itself capable of offering that service;
- *Contributing-Purpose* because it contributed to wellness as a protector or provider or teacher; and
- *Culture/spiritual-Wisdom* because the wellness came from the community itself and was grounded in its values and vision.

Supporting greater wellness for the community by the community promotes wellness for the whole community. This means that the more people in the community who have problems, the more possible opportunities for wellness are available to be pursued. And the more opportunities available to pursue, the more wellness resources there are to draw upon. And the more cultural/community resources that are drawn upon, the more opportunities a community has to take charge of its wellness. So, the more problems a community has the more opportunities it has to be the “medicine” for its own healing. Before contact the community took care of its own and now the community can reclaim itself, one “problem” at a time!

The more people in the community who have problems: the more opportunities for wellness there are & the more wellness resources there are & the more opportunities a community has to take charge of its wellness.

(to learn what it is to live in a good way), the use of a drug and alcohol counsellor could be balanced by time on the land, fishing or hunting (for the person to take the opportunity to become a “provider”), or participation in a ceremony (to engage with a “higher power”), etc.

To Sum Up: By viewing problems as opportunities for wellness we are guided toward wellness resources instead of problem resources. And not only are there are far more wellness resources than problem resources in any community but the more isolated the community, the more wellness resources are available. Finally, the more problems a person has, the more opportunities they have, the more resources are available.

Avoiding Dependency on Colonial Resources: Relying on government sanctioned resources disempowers the community by denying the value of its own capacity to care for its individuals and families. So, whenever possible, it is important to avoid reliance on government-sanctioned resources in order to enhance personal, family and community healing and wellness.

One way to do this is to *ensure that for every resource that is financially supported or sanctioned by the government that is used, at least one resource that is community-based and, ideally culturally rooted is used to balance it.* For example, in the case of somebody pursuing a different relationship with substances, the use of a treatment centre can be balanced by engagement with an Elder

Ensure that for every resource that is financially supported or sanctioned by the government, you use at least one resource that is community-based and culturally rooted is used to balance it.

Wellness Resources and The Community Resource Map

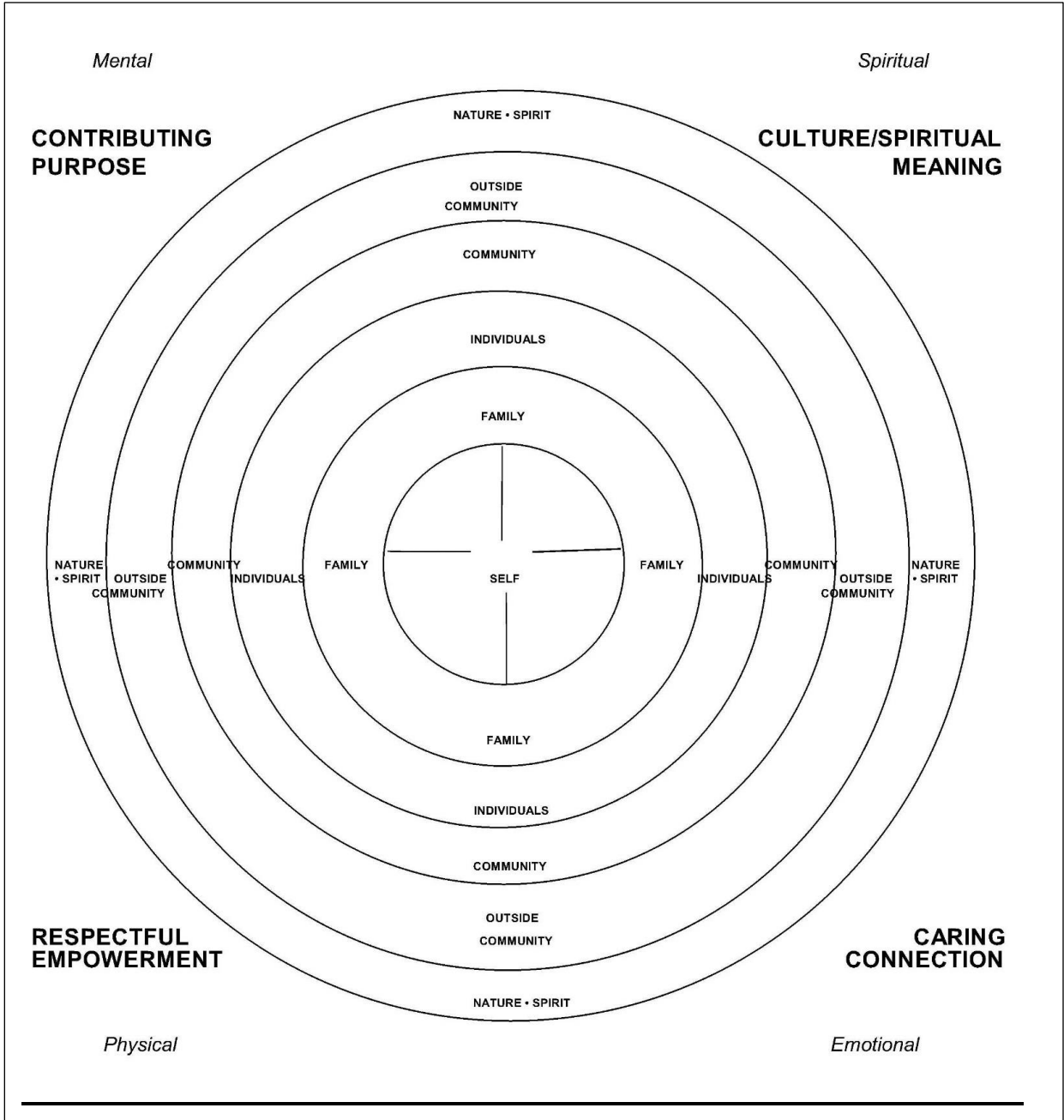
The community can offer resources that enhance wellness. The *Community Resource Map* is a tool that engages the three steps of decolonization. That is, it supports a response that enhances wellness through:

- (1) focusing on opportunities for wellness rather than on the problem;
- (2) recognizing that we are always in relationship with our family and community in a way that profoundly influences one another; and
- (3) offering guidance for the identification of resources that are community-based.

The *Community Resource Map* uses the *six-part self and community model* (explored in Part 1); namely one’s:

- (1) *self*;
- (2) *family* (whether it is my origin, relationship, or choice);
- (3) *individuals* (adults or children that one knows by name);
- (4) *community* services programs and agencies;
- (5) *outside community* (indigenous or non-native); and
- (6) *culture and Spirit* (however defined) to identify possible resources.

It is also rooted in a cultural approach that is guided by the *four branches wellness* (explored in Part 2); namely: (1) Caring-Connection; (2) Respectful-Empowerment; (3) Contributing-Purpose; and (4) Culture/Spiritual-Wisdom.



COMMUNITY RESOURCE MAP

Examples	CONNECTION	EMPOWER-MENT	PURPOSE	WISDOM
SELF	belief in one's self, hope, creativity, self-care, self-acceptance,	self-discipline, previous resilience, courage, manage anger, strength, responsibility, etc.	pursue healthy lifestyle, self as self-protector (self-care), self-provider, self-teacher (learner)	worthiness, self-compassion, meditation, faith, study, etc.
FAMILY and/or CLAN	share love and support with family members, give gifts, participate in family counselling, etc.	participate in family events/ activities, get to know extended family members, write a letter to removed children, develop family-related skills, etc.	learn family history, take on positive family roles, enhance view of family and its role by the rest of community through contribution.	learn and live according to Traditional family/clan stories, learn and perform family's traditional songs/dances/ ceremonies, etc.
INDIVIDUAL Youth	connect with young friends, peer-helpers, friend's children, youth in need, etc.	volunteer time with youth/children; participate in sports/ activities/clubs;	teach/role model, team member/ protector, provider mentor, helper/worker, etc.	learn/teach/perform Traditional songs/dances/ ceremonies, etc.
INDIVIDUAL Adults	connect with adult friends, Elder, teacher, counsellor, social worker, doctor, sponsor, coach, mentor, etc.	volunteer to help Elders, learn a skill, develop a resume, develop skills, ACT as friend, client, colleague, patient, etc.	help friends, prepare & share food, teach a community member, support an Elder, etc.	Seek assistance from a spiritual guide/Elder
COMMUNITY	social/human services, support/self-help groups, community programs, school-based support, school, community centre programs, healing workshops, teen centres, etc.	volunteer, get a haircut, seek return to schooling, practice learning from support groups and workshops, apply for work, etc.	volunteer, contribute to community events, help youth to complete a project, cook for Elder's centre, etc.	participate in song/drum/dance groups, participate in community ceremonies, spiritual role in the community, etc.
OUTSIDE COMMUNITY	treatment centre, programs, crisis-line, internet chat rooms, national organizations, positive music/books/shows, long-distance friends and family, etc	go for treatment, go to school (academic or trade), political/social activism, inter-community activity (e.g., sports exchanges), mental health assessment, detox programs, etc.	develop National/tribal Indigenous identity, (world-wide Indigenous peoples' exchanges), large-scale activism, represent your community, etc.	inter-tribal ceremonies (e.g., Powwows, Sundance, etc.), go to Sacred places (e.g., on the land or churches), etc.
NATURE/ SPIRIT	go into nature, pray to Spirit, meditate, etc.	develop fishing, hiking, hunting, skills, learn ceremony, enhance fitness, eat well, etc.	participate in ceremony or traditional practices, exercise, engage in nature conservation, etc.	prayer, ceremonies, spirit quest, walk around the boundary of Traditional territory, sit with animals and plants, etc.

Together, this creates a map of possible wellness resources. As a result, the *Map* can be used to assist individuals, families and the whole community to enhance and reclaim wellness for themselves and the community simultaneously. The following pages offer the Community Resource *Map* and some examples of possible wellness resources.

Wellness Opportunities

The best wellness resources engage all four branches of wellness.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY WELLNESS ACTIVITY			
Problem:		Opportunity:	
Activity:			
Self-Worth ↑ ↑		Worthwhile Life ↑ ↑	
Caring Connection (Support, Teaching, Fun)	Respectful-Empowerment (Knowledge/Skill Development)	Contributing Purpose (Protector, Provider, Teacher)	Culture/Spiritual Wisdom (Becoming an Elder)
Required Wellness Resources:			

Summary: The Community is the Medicine

The distress experienced within each Indigenous community is a natural response to their history and ongoing colonial interventions. But these problems do not have to be in the community anymore. Indigenous communities were strong and healthy in the past and they still hold that strength. Otherwise, they would not still be here.

Before contact the community took care of its own and now the community can reclaim itself, one “problem” at a time!

Community wellness can be promoted through confronting and reducing problems that are a result of ongoing colonization. Communities will heal through their service to their families and individual members, just as individuals and families heal through service to one another and their community. The community is who we are—it is there for us and we are responsible for it.

When we are living in wellness:

- we offer *Caring-Connection* to those in our community and we can seek it from them;
- we have opportunities for *Respectful-Empowerment* in our community and we offer opportunities to others;
- we make a *Contributing-Purpose* to the community and we offer the same opportunity to others; and
- the community is the cultural source of our *wisdom* and we are part of the community’s culture (as guided by Spirit).

Just as the whole community is a wellness resource for us, we are a wellness resource for everyone in the community. **The community is the medicine!**



Just as the whole community is a wellness resource for us, we are a wellness resource for everyone in the community.

•

The community is the medicine!



The result is a post-colonial, culturally rooted, strength-based, values-driven approach to enhance wellness in Indigenous individuals, families, professionals, and the community as a whole.