



Urban Aboriginal Wellbeing, Wellness and Justice: A Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre Needs Assessment Study for Creating a Collaborative Indigenous Mental Resiliency, Addictions and Justice Strategy

KEY FINDINGS

- Urban Indigenous experiences of wellness, wellbeing and justice are complex, gendered and diverse;
- Friendship Centre serves critical kinship functions by providing a “safe” and “healing” place;
- Service gaps are exacerbated by compartmentalized approaches to healing;
- Significant need for education programs and experiential learning opportunities to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
- Holistic trauma and post residential school supports are lacking;
- Culturally relevant assessment / mapping tools are critical to building effective navigation support services;
- The MNFC is a site of reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples through its cultural exchange and healing programs and these programs need ongoing support.

INTRODUCTION

The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre undertook a capacity building research project to assess its roles in the social development determinants of mental resilience and well being for the urban Indigenous populations in Halifax.

This project examined the themes of Indigenous traditional knowledge and wellness, cultural healing and service provision, encounters with Canadian criminal justice and mental health systems, and promising practices for reintegration and supporting resilience within families. This research moves away from a deficit model by framing urban Indigenous experiences as progressive rather than insufficient and by focusing on aspirations of the people engaged in this project.

Goal:

The main goal of this project was to facilitate and promote community-driven approaches to wellbeing, wellness and justice through collaborative cultural empowerment of urban Indigenous populations and to foster the capacity building prevention, intervention and reintegration services of the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre.

PARTNERSHIPS

Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre

METHODOLOGY

The research process engaged front line service providers and clients of the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre in Halifax Regionally Municipality in a series of focus groups, sharing circles and pathway building exercises examining the topic of wellbeing, resilience and wellness needs and priorities. The themes discussed were Indigenous traditional knowledge and wellness, cultural healing and service provision and encounters with the criminal justice and mental health systems. A series of ethnographic and semi-structured interviews took place with people identified as knowledge carriers in the community.

MAIN FINDINGS

The diverse composition of urban Indigenous communities and limited resources make the delivery of culturally appropriate services challenging for organizations. Research indicates that urban Indigenous communities prefer to access health and social services at Friendship Centres and are hesitant to access mainstream services due to negative experiences.

- Urban Indigenous experiences of wellness, wellbeing and justice are complex, gendered and diverse;
- Kinship is important for wellbeing in the city;
- Friendship Centre serves critical kinship functions by providing a “safe” and “healing” place;
- Friendship Centre is both bridge and anchor, roots and limbs;
- Service gaps are exacerbated by compartmentalized approaches to healing;
- Problem of access to culturally meaningful services in the city;
- Single parent residences and wellness rooms will assist family wellbeing;
- Service providers are not connected with Indigenous communities;
- Services providers want to connect but do not know how;
- Trust takes time;
- Significant need for education programs and experiential learning opportunities to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
- Holistic trauma and post residential school supports are lacking;
- Culturally relevant assessment / mapping tools are critical to building effective navigation support services;

- Insufficient funding and poor long-term inclusion planning are detrimental to the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in urban centres;
- People crave culture, spirituality, elder advice and the basic need for human kindness and support;
- Accessing mental health services difficult without a family doctor, long wait times, heavy reliance on Emergency access;
- Systemic discrimination, racism, stereotypes and stigma are prevalent in justice and health services;
- Collaborative, comprehensive assistance is urgently needed to address lack of basic necessities of life (food, shelter, safety);
- Indigenous peoples want their rights and identities respected and reflected in the city;
- The MNFC is a site of reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples through its cultural exchange and healing programs and these programs need ongoing support;
- Dire need for Indigenous services providers and long term Indigenous – centered facilities for substance misuse and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION / POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address Indigenous alienation from health care and wellbeing services, cultural competency and safety training are needed in the western approach to health care so that service providers are receptive and understanding of cultural contexts of Indigenous peoples. Participants in this UAKN research agreed that service providing environments free of racism and stereotypes, that are inclusive of Indigenous spirituality and populated with Indigenous health care providers, are urgently needed.

The findings enhance the MNFC's ability to deliver vital navigational tools for beneficiaries of mental resilience, wellness and addictions programs and help build the cultural competency and safety capacity for non-Indigenous service providers assisting Indigenous clients in Halifax Regional Municipality.

The findings suggest that the MNFC central site for cultural reconciliation and for building alliances to break down the systemic discriminatory barriers that interfere with opportunities for and experiences of wellbeing among urban Indigenous populations.

Through this research the participants identified the Friendship Centre staff and programs offering significant sources of hope, healing and belonging essential to their well-being and self determination. Recent trends in Aboriginal wellbeing research indicate a need for community-driven approaches with a high demand for culturally relevant services.

For more information on this project visit:

<http://uakn.org/research-project/urban-aboriginal-wellbeing-wellness-and-justice-a-micmac-friendship-centre-needs-assessment-study-for-creating-a-collaborative-indigenous-mental-resiliency-addictions-and-justice-strategy/>

ABOUT US:

Authors and Affiliations: L. Jane McMillan, PhD StFX University and Pamela Glode-Desrochers Executive Director of Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre Halifax, Nova Scotia With research assistance from Janelle Young and Killa Atencio



The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org



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