

Indigenous Services Report: Central Region



UAKN
Urban Aboriginal
Knowledge Network



**REGROUPEMENT
DES CENTRES D'AMITIÉ
AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC**



OFIFC
Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres



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Executive Summary

Over the last half century, an urban Indigenous service delivery landscape has emerged in response to identified urban Indigenous needs including language and culture, economic development, education, art, and health. As the Urban Indigenous Knowledge Network (UAKN) notes, “...the growth of this infrastructure has been organic—driven by community needs and desires, the availability of funding from governments, and local capacity for organizational development and management” (2014). Because of this organic and multi-faceted growth and diversity in urban Indigenous communities, the face of urban Indigenous service delivery is not readily defined. To better understand this new landscape, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Regroupement des centres d’amitié autochtones du Québec (RCCAQ) conducted the regional phase of a larger study concerning Indigenous service delivery in collaboration with the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN).

This project included two phases, a national phase and a regional phase. The national phase, conducted by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN) Secretariat, consisted of developing a national inventory of urban Aboriginal organisations. The regional phase, conducted by each of the four research centres of the UAKN in collaboration with local Indigenous organisations, explored community perspectives in terms of service delivery. These two phases will be consolidated in order to provide a national overview of the landscape while identifying the gaps and the opportunities for more programs/services as well as for research at the local, regional and national levels.

The project’s main goals were to:

1. Examine the invisible infrastructure of urban Indigenous service delivery organizations by developing an inventory of organizations and their service areas with a view toward identifying gaps for increased service improvement;
2. Examine organizations that facilitate urban Indigenous people’s participation in the economy;
3. Explore improvement options for urban Indigenous economic participation, for enhanced services in underserved areas and enriched relationships between urban Indigenous organizations, non - Indigenous organizations and First Nations, Métis, Inuit organizations;
4. Highlight services that enhance participation in the economy, innovative partnerships, and positive relationships between various stakeholders.

The reports of Ontario and Québec provide a picture of the current realities of the Friendship Centres in the Central region. Both reports tell stories of the centrality of relationships with external organizations to the everyday life of Friendship Centres and describe the benefits, challenges, and strategies that surround pursuing and maintaining these relationships.

Introduction

This report examines the Friendship Centre network in Québec and Ontario. The Friendship Centre network is now a major urban service delivery vehicle for Indigenous people and a natural starting place to learn more about, and build an understanding of, the urban Indigenous service delivery landscape. However, even a quick glimpse at the operations and programs of a Friendship Centre underscores the need to carefully re-conceptualize notions of “service delivery” and Friendship Centres as “social service delivery” mechanisms. Typically, social services are understood as services including affordable housing, income support, child and family services. While Friendship Centre activities may include these traditional services, they also provide different culture-based social programs that challenge the mainstream conceptualization of social services, such as sharing circles, drumming groups, community potlucks, Status Card support, and crisis response.

Today, there are a variety of social support programs and services that promote language, culture, economic development, education, health, the arts, and much more. One Friendship Centre alone may have the responsibility for the delivery and reporting of over thirty programs which serve multiple and diverse communities, representing dozens of languages and cultures while impacting thousands of lives per year. In addition, the Centres also deliver services in partnership with local Indigenous communities and other community organizations, extending their reach even farther. With each Centre typically operating with an executive director, administrative support staff, and program staff responsible for the delivery of key services, the circumstances surrounding the development and delivery of services—while meeting all of the administrative and reporting responsibilities—are multi-layered and challenging.

The growth of the urban Indigenous service delivery landscape through Friendship Centres is influenced by a local community’s historical context, as well as varying organizational factors. There are also intersections among issues and trends within the broader policy, funding, and service delivery sector on regional, provincial, federal, and global levels. Beyond all of these, however, are the visions and voices of the Indigenous people whom they serve.

To that end, the regional phase of this project involved interviews with Friendship Centre employees undertaken in both Ontario and Québec. Both of these provinces have developed Indigenous service delivery which reflect their particular needs and contexts. Conducted in 2015, this research is indicative of those different contexts. For both the Ontario and the Québec research, the Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, and Inter-relationality (USAI) Research Ethics Framework (2012) of the OFIFC was followed and approval from the Trent University ethics board was received.

In Ontario, the OFIFC has twenty-eight Friendship Centres located throughout the province and regularly undertakes community-driven research. For this project, the OFIFC hired an independent consultant who conducted nineteen interviews in the Central Ontario Region of the UAKN. The OFIFC chose a number of different Friendship Centres, in order to gain a regional sampling of the participants. The research participants were people who worked in and with Friendship Centres at four Ontario sites: Timmins, North Bay, Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie. This research was conducted in May and June of 2015.

In Québec, the RCCAQ oversees nine Friendship Centres and also undertakes community-driven research. For this project, eight interviews were conducted by RCCAQ with either a management

employee or an experienced professional from eight of the nine Friendship Centres. These semi-structured interviews were conducted by either telephone or webcam in May of 2015. A preliminary analysis was conducted by a RCAAQ researcher and the participants had the opportunity to approve these findings through a conference call held in June 2015.

The common thread that has woven through both of these research outcomes is the importance of relationships. In both Ontario and Québec, the term “relationships” is used broadly to refer to those connections with community members, as well as those alliances with non-Indigenous service organizations and funders. Many of the relationships with external funders and partner organizations are firmly situated in Indigenous and Western protocols. However, according to both the Quebec and the Ontario reports, though protocols are important, these relationships are cemented through actions.

Friendship Centres routinely encounter a myriad of challenges and are influenced by a variety of different factors. The Québec report highlighted the challenges in seeking funding and partnerships with organizations with mandates and requirements that are inconsistent with the mission of the Friendship Centres. In addition, racism and discrimination, according to research participants, continue to be barriers faced by the Friendship Centres. This ignorance can adversely impact relationship building and Friendship Centre participation in mainstream events and committees. Notably, some of the research participants in Ontario shared examples of how even negative experiences can be used as opportunities to educate, build protocols and relationships.

In order to work with and for communities, Friendship Centres spend time nurturing and building relationships. Certainly in both reports, it is clear that the time and cost associated with relationship building is not something that is funded. However, Friendship Centres make these investments because strong and long-lasting relationships will be beneficial in the long run. This can involve being open to all opportunities that present themselves, as well as creating new ones. The Québec report succinctly outlines the many ways Friendship Centres create alliances in the broader mainstream community, including serving on round tables, local committees, boards of directors of other organisations and attending meetings of the municipal council. Given the complex administrative, political and economic contexts within which the Friendship Centres must operate, relationships formed with communities and other organizations are imperative. The nature of these relationships, including their challenges and benefits, are a tremendous contribution to the economics and well-being of urban centres. In this era of reconciliation, the centrality of relationships to Friendship Centres ensures the growth of inclusive urban communities.

Research Approach : Understanding the USAI Research Framework

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) created the *USAI Research Framework* (2012) to guide its research principles, ethics, and protocols. This was the ethical framework used by both the OFIFC and RCCAQ researchers in these reports. As stated in the document, “Our Research Framework, named *USAI* after the four ethical principles that govern it, Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, and Inter-relatedness, is designed to ensure the integrity of our research from the perspective of the knowledge holders and knowledge authors” (OFIFC Indigenous Research Manual, 2014).

Some of the motivations identified by the OFIFC for creating *USAI* were:

- OFIFC and Friendship Centres across Ontario wanted to work with mainstream institutions, but on our own terms and within the urban context – we wanted something specific to our context and reality;
- To create a space for communities to INITIATE research, and not just be on the receiving end of offers and research proposals coming from the mainstream;
- To establish a community-driven model where communities decide what they want to do, how they want to do it, and when and how the research will be used; and
- To support communities in inviting mainstream researchers to participate, but on the terms established, and in roles decided, by the community.

Accordingly, the *USAI Research Framework* (2012):

1. Sets out clear ethical principles for research engagement with community members;
2. Guides relationships, within an urban context, with mainstream institutions and partners;
3. Creates a space for communities to INITIATE research;
4. Moves beyond community-based, and embodies community-driven research;
5. Includes the principle of Inter-relatedness, which is especially important in the urban context where Indigeneity is often questioned as “not real enough.” This principle brings the focus back to the geo-political context of Indigenous knowledge and practice in urban communities.

QUÉBEC

Objectives

At the national level, the project aims to present an overview of the national landscape in terms of the Aboriginal organisational infrastructure in urban settings. More specifically, this component seeks to understand and identify:

- The services that are provided by Aboriginal organisations in urban areas and who they are intended for;
- How these services contribute to the participation of urban Aboriginal people in the Canadian economy;
- The priority fields of service delivery;
- The best practices in the area of service delivery that have emerged over the last decade;
- The factors that facilitate and hinder organisational sustainability.

Locally, this project aims to gain an understanding of the community perspectives in terms of service delivery. More specifically, this component seeks to understand:

- How the Native Friendship Centres work with other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations to provide services to urban Aboriginal populations;
- The innovative partnership practices developed by the Native Friendship Centres;
- The new opportunities for partnership development.

Scope of this report

This report aims to present the results of the province of Quebec only. The results revealed in this report will contribute to the joint reports of the Central Research Circle (results from the provinces of Québec and Ontario) and the UAKN Secretariat (national results).

Coordination

The UAKN Central Research Circle coordinated the project at the regional level. This Circle is composed of representatives from many Aboriginal organisations in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, including the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the *Regroupement des Centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec* (RCAAQ), in addition to various decision-makers and academics. While respecting the broad guidelines of the project that were established by the UAKN Secretariat, the Central Research Circle determined how this project would be conducted in Ontario and Québec. In particular, this project was carried out independently in Québec and Ontario in order to be in line with local realities.

Approach

This project was conducted while complying with the research framework that was developed by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC 2012). The framework entitled *USAI: Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, Inter-Relationality* summarises the principles and ethical considerations that any

research project involving urban Aboriginal communities must be in line with while advocating for community-driven research.

Methodologies

In Québec, the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) coordinated the project. This project was conducted while complying with the research framework that was developed by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC 2012). The framework entitled *USAI: Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, Inter-Relationality* summarises the principles and ethical considerations that any research project involving urban Aboriginal communities must be in line with while advocating for community-driven research.

The RCAAQ invited key informants from the Native Friendship Centres in the province of Quebec to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. A consent form was signed by all the participants. The interviews were conducted by telephone or webcam in May 2015.

A preliminary analysis of the interviews was carried out by the researcher and then presented to the participants who had the opportunity to validate these preliminary results through a conference call and follow-up over the telephone which took place in June 2015.

This project received ethical approval from Trent University in May 2015.

Participants

Eight of the nine Native Friendship Centres across the province participated in the project, thereby ensuring greater participant representation. A total of eight interviews, one per Native Friendship Centre, were conducted with a director or experienced professional from each Native Friendship Centre.

Shared knowledge

1. How do you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

"To make a difference in our environment, we must surround ourselves with partners."

All the participants emphasised the importance and the need to work in partnership. The discussions revolved around two themes: *why* and *how* they work in partnership.

The main reason given by participants to enter into partnership relationships is to ensure the realisation of the mission of the Native Friendship Centres, which consists of improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people living in urban areas. Considering the limited resources and the significant needs of the clientele, partnerships allow for optimising the actions of the Native Friendship Centres and meeting the needs of the clientele more effectively. As one participant said, "We are unable to meet all the needs, hence the importance of partners." As well, partnerships contribute to the development of services that are culturally appropriate and safe; the development of partnership relationships allows the Native Friendship Centres to share their cultural knowledge with their partners, thereby fostering the development of culturally appropriate and safe services among them.

Partnerships are composed of variable geometry. Relationships with partners are highly influenced by the partner's type of involvement: financial support, support in providing services or any other support for projects. The partners that were most often specifically mentioned by the participants are Aboriginal communities, the various levels of government (particularly the towns and municipalities), community-based organisations and businesses. Different methods are used to maintain these relationships: informal and formal collaborative endeavours, meeting places or forums (lunch meetings, special events, roundtables and issue tables, committees and boards of directors), the implementation of joint specific projects, exchanges of services, etc.

Certain participants also emphasised that they see a difference between a partner and a collaborator. They consider their relationship with a collaborator as being less developed and more punctual (for example, a collaborator will be invited to facilitate a one-time activity). Meanwhile, a relationship with a partner is more profound, sincere and endures through time; this relationship promotes the union of efforts and competencies.

2. What would you say are the main factors that help you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

A. Above all, respecting the mission of the Native Friendship Centres

"We work based on the needs. [...] That is my filter. The partners that we work with, they help us to accomplish our mission and develop services."

All the participants emphasised that respect for the mission of the Native Friendship Centres was an important principle that helped them to work with their communities and their partners. They believe that a Native Friendship Centre's mission must guide their work with the community and partners. They are of the opinion that any action taken by a Native Friendship Centre must contribute in some way to helping the clientele and promoting Aboriginal culture.

Working with partners that have complementary missions helps to achieve this. The more organisations have points in common (e.g. types of clients served), the easier it is to work in partnership and respect everyone's mission. As one participant said, it is important to "work with the similarities between our organisations and celebrate the differences." In contrast, when the mission of another organisation is too limited, some participants prefer to consider it as a guideline.

B. Mutual benefits and recognition

Mutual recognition was mentioned by many participants. Recognising the mission, expertise and strengths of each organisation promotes working in partnership as it allows everyone to be more efficient while respecting their complementary roles.

It is also important to make sure that all partners benefit from the partnership. To achieve this, the participants emphasised the importance of reciprocity or a "give and take" dynamic. Conversely, they recommended avoiding working with organisations that view the partnership as a way to gain an advantage, such as access to Aboriginal people, without contributing to a fair dynamic of genuine partnership.

C. Taking the initiative, seizing all opportunities and being recognized

“The more we talk to people, the more people get to know us and the more opportunities there are.”

Another success factor that was mentioned by participants is being proactive in order to take advantage of all the opportunities that are available to them so that they can promote the Native Friendship Centre, create linkages with the community and develop partnerships with the local organisations.

To do this, they proposed representing the Native Friendship Centre among many authorities, as long as these actions are in line with the Native Friendship Centre’s mission. The participants were serving on round tables, local committees and boards of directors of other organisations and attending meetings of the municipal council. Other examples were mentioned, such as inviting a local organisation each month to a lunch meeting at the Native Friendship Centre in order to get to know each other better.

Personal relationships were a factor that facilitated this task. As mentioned by some participants, being from the area and/or personally knowing the community members as well as those who represent other organisations lends credibility to the Native Friendship Centres. A personal relationship is an important form of recognition that makes it possible to "open doors" at the local level.

D. Being a rallying force

Participants stressed the importance that the Native Friendship Centres be “rallying” organisations. A key way to achieve this is to involve the partners from the very beginning of any collaborative action. To be more specific, joint projects belonging to all partners facilitate working in partnership because everyone is fully invested in the project's success and contributes to every stage of its development, thereby ensuring the added value and relevance of the project for each and every one.

E. Formalising and maintaining relationships with partners

For many participants, formalising relationships between organisations through a written agreement facilitates working in partnership. This formalisation can be from small to large in terms of scale, for example, from agreeing to a room loan on a regular basis or to sign a declaration of solidarity. This facilitates making partnership actions a reality beyond personal relationships and organisational changes over time.

Fuelling relationships with partners is also important. Many participants mentioned that they “take care of their relationships” and “cultivate partnerships” in many ways such as by being a rallying force, maintaining good regular communication and creating joint activities with their partners. Consultation forums and representation activities are ideal ways to cultivate partnerships. A sincere, welcoming and respectful attitude contributes to building healthy relationships.

This can have a “snowball” effect because, according to some participants, “partnership attracts partnership”, which means that a successful partnership often leads to new projects and new relationships.

F. Having a long-term vision

Many participants emphasised that working with the community and with partners is a long-term process. It is therefore necessary to first have a long-term vision, set realistic goals and give ourselves the time and resources needed to achieve them.

G. Contexts that are conducive to partnership

Local realities facilitate working with the community and partners. Some participants mentioned that their communities were “open” and that partnership was seen in a positive light and encouraged at the local level or that they benefitted from favourable political contexts such as a mayor who supports the Native Friendship Centre. Other participants noted that “small towns” foster work with the community and partners as everyone knows each other and the Native Friendship Centre therefore becomes a key player in the setting.

New funding opportunities increasingly require a committed partnership which goes beyond simple support letters. This context of “forced” partnership is a challenge but many participants emphasised the positive impacts of this such as a deepening of the relationship between existing partners and the development of new partnerships. As one participant expressed, “all types of financing require partnership, therefore we must work as part of a coalition.”

In Quebec, the current context of “austerity” has led to budget cuts and significant changes among many partner organisations of the Native Friendship Centres such as for example the merging of health and social services institutions in order to create *Centres intégrés universitaires de santé et de services sociaux* as well as the dissolution of the regional conferences of elected officials. Although this may impede partnership, some participants stressed that this context can also have a positive impact. For example, it encourages organisations to increase their efficiency through partnership and contributes to a sense of solidarity between organisations. Furthermore, organisational restructuring can promote new partnership opportunities.

H. Successful organisational practices

The participants also highlighted various organisational practices that help them to work with their community and partners. First of all, they pointed out that having qualified and competent staff in the Native Friendship Centres contributes to the credibility of the organisation and facilitates the creation and maintenance of linkages with other organisations. Moreover, it seems to be very helpful to ensure that the partnership is the responsibility of everyone rather than just the managers’ responsibility seems to be very helpful.

One participant noted that having an employee responsible for coordinating partnerships (tasked with serving on various committees, etc.) was very helpful to their Native Friendship Centre. Holding regular internal planning meetings allows for coordinating the activities of the Native Friendship Centre more effectively and therefore to better work with the community and partners. The visibility of the organisation, helped notably by means such as a website and a social media presence, was also mentioned as a facilitating factor.

Finally, support from the *Regroupement des centres d’amitié autochtones du Québec* related to developing and maintaining partnerships, particularly at the provincial and national levels, was also mentioned by the participants.

3. What would you say are the main factors that make it difficult to work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

A. The funding

“Without funding, it is difficult to do something together.”

“We make do with the funding that we have, but if we had more we could do more.”

Funding was described by all participants as being one of the biggest organisational challenges. First of all, participants noted a lack of funding among both the funding agencies and the community partners. The available funding is often for a short duration only and earmarked for projects rather than the organisation’s core mission. Some participants noted that working in partnership is time consuming and is a task that is usually associated with management; the available funding does not take this reality into account and grants an insufficient percentage for administrative costs.

The participants also emphasised that competition for funding can undermine partnership. When partners are competing for the same requests for proposals, it is necessary to operate in a complementary fashion so that everyone has a better chance of success and consequently ensure that more services are offered to the community.

The available funding sometimes is not consistent with the mission of the Native Friendship Centres. An example of this is the funding acquired from private partners, which is "a double-edged sword", as was said by one participant. Private funding is often more readily available than funding from governments; however, there are important ethical issues that must be taken into consideration. The involvement of all types of financial partners in the implementation of projects is also a challenge; certain participants mentioned the need to be vigilant to ensure that their participation does not distort the mission and actions of the organisation.

B. Lack of resources

A lack of resources at many other levels complicates the work of the Native Friendship Centres with their respective communities and partners. First of all, a lack of human resources among the Native Friendship Centres in order to meet the needs of their clientele was stressed by several participants. Others noted a lack of professionals to meet the needs of the Aboriginal clientele among other organisations.

One participant emphasised the need for tools in order to properly understand and manage the partnerships such as a compendium of best practices or a framework. This same participant also mentioned that there is a lack of data to support projects.

C. Context of austerity

“In a context that is not favourable to the development of new projects or the investment of money, how can we create? We can still do it, I am optimistic and we will continue to work together, but we are not in a context that is favourable to the development of partnerships, even though there are projects that promote partnership development.”

The current context of “austerity” in Quebec is not favourable to the development and funding of partnerships. The participants indicated that budget cuts as well as organisational mergers and dissolutions are modifying and weakening existing partnerships and hindering the creation of new partnerships. In this context of uncertainty and change, partners are reluctant to get involved in joint projects. Furthermore, organisational changes have created service gaps that have an impact on the Aboriginal clientele.

D. “Forced” partnerships and formalities

"We work in partnership because we like working in partnership, because it is relevant, because it leads to good things, because it is positive, because it helps us fulfill our mission. But when it comes with a bunch of forced formalities, it is unpleasant."

Partnership is increasingly required by the funding agencies. In addition, applicants must often demonstrate significant commitments on behalf of partners, beyond letters of support, such as financial commitments. This is a significant challenge for the Native Friendship Centres, particularly in a context of budget cuts where organisations do not have any additional resources. Participants also noted that, in smaller environments, there is a limited number of potential partners, thereby limiting the organisation’s ability to develop new partnerships. A few participants expressed frustration with respect to the different definitions of partnership depending on the funding agency, while others expressed concerns regarding the fact that partnership criteria requirements could be a way to reduce the funding provided by the government.

The resulting forced formalities are heavy for the Native Friendship Centres. As one participant mentioned, "This is all very time consuming, cumbersome, bureaucratic and inflexible". Writing and seeking signatures for partnership letters and agreements is an arduous task which often requires legal experience that many do not have access to. Consulting with partners repeatedly is a demanding task; all of these actions related to seeking and formalising partnerships take up time that could otherwise be dedicated to service delivery.

E. Lack of understanding regarding Aboriginal realities and the Native Friendship Centre Movement

Many participants reported that the lack of understanding regarding Aboriginal realities and the Native Friendship Centre Movement is a major challenge to overcome. They noted that partners tend to make generalisations with respect to Aboriginal people by putting them "all in the same boat", without taking their particularities into consideration. The partners can also lack sensitivity regarding the fact that all organisations have a role to play in the well-being of Aboriginal people rather than just the Native Friendship Centres or Aboriginal communities. Finally, the participants emphasised that some partners do not recognise the work of the Native Friendship Centres or their personnel. They have problems recognising other forms of know-how such as culturally-relevant approaches. Also, some partners give little in the way of recognition with respect to the skills and experience of the Native Friendship Centre personnel. Finally, the participants expressed a certain amount of frustration that they are not heard by their respective communities or partners despite significant communication efforts.

F. Language

Language barriers are also a major issue in Quebec. In some cities, often because of the surrounding Aboriginal English-speaking communities, there are many Aboriginal people who speak little or no

French. The Native Friendship Centres feel limited in their ability to provide support to English-speaking Aboriginal people among the French-speaking service providers.

4. How does your organisation address these challenges?

A. Being resilient

“The resilience of the Friendship Centres is a reflection of the resilience of our peoples.”

All the participants emphasised that they “continue nonetheless” and that they start all over again as needed and persevere despite the difficulties. For them, being resilient is a necessity due to the fact that carrying out the mission of the Native Friendship Centres is a long-term process. In terms of the needs of the clients and the mission of the Native Friendship Centres, being realistic, looking for innovative solutions and keeping a positive attitude helps them to continue their work despite the difficulties encountered.

B. Seizing opportunities, prioritising our actions and collaborating to achieve them

The participants said that they were trying to take advantage of all available opportunities and make the best use of existing sources of funding. However, in a context where resources are limited, it is necessary to do more with less. Establishing organisational priorities and targeting the necessary actions to achieve these priorities helps the Native Friendship Centres to be more efficient such as, for example, by selecting which local committees the staff members will participate in. Good internal collaboration facilitates joining forces and intersectorality, which increases the efficiency of the actions. Collaborations with external partners create solidarity between organisations in the field and facilitate working in a complementary fashion, thereby increasing the effectiveness of everyone's actions.

C. Raising awareness among the community and partners

Faced with a lack of understanding regarding Aboriginal realities and the Movement of Native Friendship Centres, the participants carry out awareness actions on many levels.

D. Influencing the political environment

Several participants emphasised the importance of having an influence on the political environment. In particular, they mentioned that they work proactively in order to influence decision-making by doing things such as writing briefs or participating in the drafting and review of municipal policies. The development of strategic alliances and support with decision-makers or other key stakeholders is another strategy used by certain Native Friendship Centres to improve their position within the local political arena. Another strategy is to take a position on larger issues such as the environmental struggle which allows the organisation to be known from another angle. Other participants shared that they are promoting citizen involvement in ways such as develop their clientele's awareness of the importance of voting. These actions, all of which are non-partisan in nature, all aim to promote the Native Friendship Centre as a key player in its field while contributing to the achievement of its mission which consists of improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people living in urban areas.

5. Innovative partnerships

For most participants, an "innovative partnership" is seen as collaboration that allows for bringing partners together (new or old) and creating joint actions that are innovative and have broader benefits such as the adaptation of the practices of the Native Friendship Centres as well as the practices of other organisations. The participants stressed that the Native Friendship Centres are the result of innovative partnerships and that innovation is at the heart of Aboriginal culture.

One participant reported that the term "innovative partnerships" had little meaning for her, because it's the type of language used by the funding agencies rather than by the Native Friendship Centres. The suggestion was made to speak more in terms of effective solutions to meet the needs of the clientele: "We do things that are as real as possible that are rooted in the needs. We find solutions that mesh with today's realities."

6. Working in partnership

A discussion with the participants revealed how the partnerships work, and a better understanding of their value and the evaluation methods used. Although the goal of the discussions was to exchange on the subject of innovative partnerships, the participants shared their experiences with all types of partnership, whether or not they were considered "innovative".

A. Working well in partnership

Several helpful factors, which were discussed during question two of the interview, were mentioned once again by the participants such as involving the partners from the very beginning and developing the project together. They also reiterated the importance of clarifying the expectations and roles from the start and fostering harmonious relations, namely through a written partnership agreement and good communication throughout the project. The importance of follow-up and accountability mechanisms was also highlighted by the participants.

B. The added value of partnerships

"Without the partners, the projects will not succeed."

The participants expressed that partnerships provide added value for Aboriginal people living in urban areas, the partners and society.

As one participant said, the Native Friendship Centres work in partnership "first and foremost, for the well-being of Aboriginal people – they benefit from the partnerships!" Partnerships foster the development of more opportunities and services for Aboriginal people. Some participants noted that partnership contributes to increased pride and affirmation of Aboriginal identity among people living in urban areas since the partners and resulting services recognise and respect their culture.

For the partners, working collaboratively makes it so that each organisation can be more efficient and thus accomplish more by working together than they would by working separately. It allows for successful projects that the Native Friendship Centres could not accomplish alone and promotes the sustainability of these services. Partnership contributes to project credibility and can help the community to support the project and learn more about the organisations involved.

Finally, partnership is also of great value to society. Since all partnership projects include a partner awareness component, partnership is helpful to the fight against racism and discrimination and for building bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Furthermore, partnership often allows for clarifying the service trajectories and strengthening the connections between organisations, thereby improving services that are intended for the entire population.

C. Evaluation of the partnerships

"Nothing can ever be taken for granted. There is always room for improvement in terms of partnership, we must never rest take them for granted."

The participants said that they use informal and formal methods to determine whether or not the partnerships are working. Certain Native Friendship Centres incorporate a formal assessment component into their projects, for example, by specifically assigning an employee to this task or by hiring a consultant, while others use informal assessment methods. Regardless of the methods chosen, the participants say it is necessary to evaluate the partnerships and the associated projects. During the project, they evaluate the project's progress and the interest and participation of the project's partners, for example, by noting their attendance at meetings and the communication quality. The project's success and its relevance to the community are also considered. After the project, the participants observe its impacts such as, for example, the impacts of the services for Aboriginal people, the changes in practices, the sustainability of the services and community awareness regarding Aboriginal realities. If the partners indicate that they are interested in working together again, this also shows that the partnership has been a success.

Lessons learned

This research project has helped paint a picture of how the Native Friendship Centres in the province of Quebec work with their respective communities and with other organisations in order to provide services that are intended for urban Aboriginal people. More specifically, this project explored the factors that help and hinder this work, the innovative partnerships, added value as well as the evaluation methods used by the Native Friendship Centres when they work in partnership. Two general findings have emerged from this project.

- **Working in partnership is at the heart of the actions of the Native Friendship Centres.** All the participants recognise the need for and the added value of partnership in order to help them achieve their mission which consists of improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people in urban areas. Several factors help their work with the communities and with their partners: respecting the mission of the Native Friendship Centres in all their actions, being a rallying force, taking advantage of opportunities, ensuring mutual benefit for all partners involved, formalising and

maintaining relationships with partners, having a long-term vision of the partnerships and establishing various organisational practices in addition to a favourable social context.

- **The Native Friendship Centres are faced with many challenges related to carrying out their mission and they are meeting these challenges with flying colours.** The factors that complicate their work are many: a lack of funding and other resources, the current context of "austerity" in Quebec, "forced" partnerships and formalities, a lack of understanding regarding Aboriginal realities and the Movement of Native Friendship Centres as well as the barriers related to language. The participants have developed many personal and organisational strategies to work effectively with the community and partners: being resilient, seizing opportunities, prioritising actions and working together to achieve them, raising awareness among the community and partners in addition to influencing the political environment. All of the participants strongly believe in the mission of the Native Friendship Centres and this belief helps them to overcome challenges despite contexts that are sometimes difficult.

In summary, the Native Friendship Centres are key players in their settings. The Native Friendship Centres recognise the importance of partnership in order to achieve their mission and they work with various partners. These innovative organisations develop and offer culturally appropriate and safe services that meet the needs of their clientele.

ONTARIO

Using *USAI* to guide the interview process and address issues

The people who participated in the nineteen Ontario interviews included individuals performing a range of roles within Friendship Centres--executive directors, program staff, and administrative support positions. Invitations were sent to executive directors asking them to identify staff and board members to participate. In the end, the majority of the participants were female, ranging in age from about 24 to 55.

Overall, participants were excited to participate in this process for many reasons. Some shared that participating in collaborative research like this, and sharing amongst Friendship Centre sites, will help sites learn from one another. There are also such diverse programs within any one Centre, that participants were interested in findings about their own Centre. Participants also wanted to share their Centre's wise practices with other Centres.

Participants also shared concerns about some aspects of the interview process, such as the wording of some research questions, suggesting that the wording was too formal and did not reflect Indigenous ways of communication. For example, some participants had difficulty understanding what was meant by the word "scope" and could not find translations for it. Being asked to define relationships also confused the process, as for some, extracting a moment in time from a relationship to define it ignored the wholistic nature of that relationship. These comments highlight the impact of language and worldviews, recognizing that some words or concepts cannot be directly translated into the written form or into another language.

The formal nature of the structured interview and the overall process also left some participants feeling disconnected from the project because their participation in the interview was only providing them with a glimpse of the overall project. Participants wanted more than this. At one point, one participant's mother shared concerns over the intent, suggesting that the process only serves to hide the individual nature of communities, and that this was the "white man's way of making us all the same." She also expressed concerns about how the knowledge garnered from these discussions would be used.

We take concerns raised by our participants seriously. We also note the similarity to concerns raised by others such as Coburn (2013), who suggests that "fractions of Indigenous knowledge are being integrated in a piecemeal way into for-profit research projects – sometimes as "intellectual property" – so destroying the holistic approach integral to Indigenous research and transforming Indigenous knowledge into a commodity that may be bought and sold like any other commodity" (p. 61).

We addressed challenges as they came up and used these learnings to improve the process as we went along. When there were challenges with words, we came to mutual understandings together. If a question didn't fit with the flow of the discussion, we moved through the questions in a way that made sense to participants, which at times meant altering the order and or elaborating on concepts. When there were concerns about how the information would be used, we established relationships to review

the knowledge collected and to make sure it accurately reflected what participants shared. Rather than generating chunks of information or 'piecemeal' data, this report is being written to share a whole and contextualized description of the project, interviews, and analysis with UAKN, the participating communities, and participants.

Looking ahead in this process, some participants said that they would like to review their community's report as well as the final overall project report. Regarding future projects, some participants said they would like to be asked (or for others to be asked) to offer guidance and feedback on any process and the wording of questions before it is finalized. Some also offered thoughts on how to make the process more "community-driven," suggesting similar projects they could undertake themselves such as bringing together the executive directors and staff of Friendship Centres to have these conversations more often.

Research Findings: Key Themes

A broad range of significant themes emerged from all Friendship Centre sites. Themes were often not limited to particular questions; instead they arose throughout entire discussions.

Friendship Centres Are the Voice of Urban Indigenous People, Advocating for Community and Culture

Across all of the discussions, participants described Friendship Centres as the voice of urban Indigenous community members, engaged in advocating for Indigenous people, empowering and creating change in our communities. Strengthening Indigenous presence, or at times, literally inserting an Indigenous voice and identity into events or communities (including bringing in history) is a vital role of Friendship Centres. Related to services, advocating for culturally appropriate and safe services and ensuring cultural protocols are developed and respected are key activities. Importantly, being a voice, advocating, empowering and creating change are rarely associated with common conceptions of service delivery and yet these activities are essential components of the work of Friendship Centres.

Friendship Centres Cannot Be Defined by “Programs Delivered” and “Clients Served”

Similarly, any list of funded programs and services does not accurately reflect what Friendship Centres do. Friendship Centres are businesses, community developers, spaces of cultural connections and expressions, and sites of crisis response. Figure 1: Through the Door of a Friendship Centre expands on and helps show the breadth of activities (see next section). Accordingly, Friendship Centres are:

Client based **AND** public health educators/crisis response/cultural connectors, community builders

- We need to move beyond defining Friendship Centres by the services or programs they deliver to ‘clients.’ While this reflects a portion of the services offered, they are also engaged in public health projects, outreach, education, cultural safety training, crisis response, status card applications, community gatherings (Powwows, potlucks).

Businesses **AND** community and economic development contributors

- Friendship Centres are expected to operate like “businesses” requiring “business licenses” and expected to “grow” core dollars to reach target budgets. This view about operating like a business is widely held by Friendship Centres, believing that it is expected by funders, that it helps to ensure accountability and transparency, and that it positively impacts partnership and relationship development, particularly with hard to reach prospective partners like municipalities.
- Friendship Centres are key players in community and economic development. Powwows contribute a great deal to tourism industries, operating budgets of 4 million dollars contribute significantly to communities like Timmins, and programs impact demographic trends (such as the Indigenous workforce).

Worldviews and Cultural Mandates Guide Role, Service Development and Delivery

For some Centres, working within a cultural mandate is integrated into the very fabric of the organization’s operations, through their mission, vision, mandate, and values statements. However, even the Centres that do not literally have this ‘cultural mandate’ in their mission, vision, or mandate, still operate within Indigenous worldviews and values. Participants referred to prophecies, values such as reciprocity, respect for the role of Elders and youth, teachings of the life cycle, and asking for help from those in the spirit world all help them determine programs and services, approaches to partnership

development and relationship building and day-to-day decisions and operations. Those ‘who know the old ways’, or who have grown up with their language and in their culture are identified as important resources in programs, working with partners, and in the general direction/vision of the organization.

Prophecies like the 8th Fire of Coming Together and Personal Worldviews Guide Approaches

During an interview in North Bay, a participant spoke about the *8th Fire*, an Anishinaabe prophecy that foretells of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people coming together and building the '8th Fire' of justice and harmony, built on respect for Indigenous teachings and beliefs. This concept was reflected in other discussions over the course of the project when it became apparent for some, that a relationship cannot be reduced to being described by a single word or defined by a set of circumstances. Instead, a relationship is more than the sum of its parts; its very existence is fulfilling a larger prophecy shared many years ago.

This lens or worldview colours people’s views of services, partnerships and the many other topics being discussed. Other prophecies were mentioned as well—about the role of people with mixed heritage in building bridges and relationships between mainstream and indigenous organizations, and the path that people with Indigenous heritage take back to Indigenous organizations like Friendship Centres, to learn about their roots.

Similarly, participants equated the environment they were trying to create at the Friendship Centre with the feeling of “holding grandma’s hand” or explained how there was no word for “scope” in their language, even though it was one of the words in the interview questions. Or, in response to a question about how you deal with challenges, one participant said, “We ask our grandmothers and grandfathers who have passed onto the spirit world.” Again, these comments reiterate the importance of histories, cultures, and languages, and ensuring both a process and platform that respect Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing the world.

Friendship Centres as Spaces for Exploring, Celebrating, and Coming Together

Potlucks, Powwows, time with Elders, and community celebrations often happen outside of ‘client’ lists, and offer the space to explore and celebrate Indigenous cultures and histories. These activities also play key roles in connecting to the broader Indigenous community, such as the ‘emerging Indigenous middle class’, and helping clients connect with broader supports and mentors. Essentially, these connections arise from a strengths-based and positive place, as opposed to being ‘needs-based.’ However, because these activities are often not linked to clients with specific funding, this means they are funded by core Friendship centre budgets or other sources.

Key Resources are People...‘Connectors,’ Allies, Advocates, Know the Old Ways, Able to Walk in Two Worlds

Individuals who grew up in their culture and language, or know the old ways, but can operate in mainstream are important advocates and resources in Friendship Centres. Individuals who can walk in two worlds play important roles in working with partners while still ensuring the needs of clients are met. Friendship Centre staff who have worked in mainstream organizations, or significant people in mainstream organizations who have worked closely with Indigenous organizations, are considered “key” to encouraging, promoting, and supporting healthy relationships and partnerships. These individuals are described as *connectors*, often serving as *bridges* between organizations and sectors, including “hard to partner with” organizations like child welfare.

Collaborative programs, operating within the Friendship Centre or with partners outside the Centre, provide clients (and staff) with ‘safe opportunities’ to network with other programs and staff, particularly mainstream organizations that clients would normally not visit. Seeing staff interacting with other staff (from within or from an external agency), encourages clients to seek out new services and helps them cope with breaks in Friendship Centre programming more easily, as they are already acquainted with other organizational staff.

Friendship Centres also recognize the importance of allies advocating for Indigenous people and services to be represented, and working to get them included at various tables and committees. They also benefit from working with allies who track Indigenous clients and share with others the importance of working with Friendship Centres.

Administrators Play Key and Unexpected Roles

Savvy, innovative and skilled administrators offer tremendous support to Friendship Centres dealing with many things outside the usual scope of administering funded programs and services. For example,

- Increasingly, clients and community members are asking for bus tickets to treatment, food vouchers, and status cards—all of which fall outside of budget lines. Commonly, it is the job of the executive directors, executive assistants and bookkeepers to respond to these demands.
- Administrators, such as receptionists or someone working at a front desk, are also the first point of contact in Friendship Centres. They play key roles in crisis response, setting visitors and clients at ease, and serving as connectors to programs and services within and outside the Friendship Centre. They are often the first people that both new and returning clients see when they walk in the door. They spend a great deal of time carrying out tasks that are outside of their regular duties, filling out paper work related to obtaining status and health cards, and social insurance or birth certificates. They also play key roles in tracking visitors.
- Sound financial practices offer credibility, accountability and transparency – all of which are identified as keys to developing strong and reliable relationships with community partners and tapping into new and unique (often large scale and capacity building opportunities like Trillium for example) funding opportunities. It also ensures that current funding sources can be accessed again, as deliverables are met.
- Executive directors and board members set the tone and vision both in the organization and out in the community. They put forward ‘philosophies’ that other staff support and uphold, and carry their approach and vision to meetings and into the committee work they do.

No One is Turned Away

During every interview, the statements ‘we serve anyone who walks in the door’ and ‘no one is turned away’ were heard. Friendship Centres described their ‘open door’ philosophy to those seeking services. However, funding and space impacted this philosophy. If there was limited money and space, Indigenous clients would have first priority for services or in some cases, there was only program funding for Indigenous clients. There is also a growing population of non-Indigenous clients, particularly young moms or those with similar belief systems, who are accessing Friendship Centre programs.

Centres of Crisis Response

Friendship Centres respond to people in crisis daily, despite not having crisis response programs. They

respond to people who have tried other mainstream services and don't know where to go or what to do, people who need to be connected to other services (within or outside the organization) but don't know how. As mentioned previously, front desk administrative staff often fulfil these roles.

First Point of Contact

Across all of the settings, participants described Friendship Centres as the "first point of contact." Individuals who are new to the community, whether they are walking through the door, connected to the Friendship Centre through community partners, or are personally connected to staff, often find their way to the Friendship Centre.

Space Is Important Inside and Outside Friendship Centres

'Space' affects so many aspects of Friendship Centre operations, both within and beyond the walls of the Centres. Space is a commodity, often used in bartering, particularly for healers, health-related services, and outreach (potlucks), or for mainstream organizations to use for events and activities. Cultural spaces in the city, in other organizations, or places where specific cultural activities take place, are important for solidifying partnerships, raising Indigenous profiles and voices in urban settings, and performing Indigenous cultural services like smudging.

Hubs, Committees, Events, Trainings All Play Important Roles

Service hubs, planning committees, annual events and other opportunities that bring people together on a regular basis with a common purpose increase visibility of Indigenous people and issues, foster learning and connections, and offer the means to work towards common goals.

Social and Political Movements Impact Organizational Mandates, Planning, Activities

Social and political movements have an impact on Friendship Centres and service delivery. For example, Truth and Reconciliation impacted the awareness of non-Indigenous community needs for Cultural Safety Training, increasing requests for training, and serving as a catalyst for Friendship Centre staff and partners to establish common goals and build relationships around.

Funding Builds Capacity, Motivates Partnership Development, But Still Onerous

Funding offers specific opportunities to respond to identified needs and build capacity. Funding specifically targeting partnership development, outreach, public education, and infusing Indigenous identity and voice into mainstream events was identified as the most successful. However, onerous proposals deter organizations from applying for certain opportunities and heavy reporting requirements add additional administrative burdens to already demanding roles. As well, designations affect the ability of Friendship Centres to access certain funding, for example, health service designation.

Tracking, Integrated Databases and Forms Help Clients and Staff

Tracking is seen as very helpful, however, methods and systems need to continually evolve to more accurately collect and share information about the diversity, nature, and intensity of programs, such as outreach vs client-based, etc. to support Centres in gathering accurate data and for funding and advocacy purposes. The OFIFC Integrated Database (IDB), Centre-wide consent forms, and the Nightingale Integrated Health Database¹ helps with tracking numbers and helps staff work 'on the same page' and know the 'whole story' regarding clients. The Nightingale Program helps cultural healers and

¹ Nightingale is one example of the kinds of tools being used: <http://www.nightingalemd.com/about/>

mainstream doctors work collaboratively to support clients. However, not all programs at Friendship Centres are funded by the OFIFC for example, and therefore can't make use of the database.

'Cultural Safety Continuum' Services -- From Outreach to Training to Partnership Development and Protocols

The 'Cultural Safety Continuum' is sometimes used by Indigenous people to describe activities, practices and policies ranging from "raising awareness" *about* Indigenous cultures on the one end, to "increasing safety" *for* Indigenous people on the other end. While every Friendship Centre is engaged in cultural awareness and safety activities, where each organization is located on the 'cultural safety journey' is unique to that community.

Cultural safety and awareness services and activities overwhelmingly dominated partnership development discussions. These included mainstream partner requests for training and Friendship Centres using training as a form of partnership building and outreach with hard to reach partners. Memoranda, training certificates, and cultural protocols are all seen as important 'bench marks' of successful partnerships and agreements.

Cultural awareness activities were typically described as involving: public education and outreach; offering Indigenous voice and presence at events, in organizations or within the community; offering opportunities for organizations and the broader non-Indigenous community to 'experience' Indigenous ways of being by opening up the centre, hosting activities, and inviting Indigenous and mainstream organizations to visit and participate in ceremonies. Participation in mainstream events creates opportunities to raise a Friendship Centre's profile and increase awareness of Indigenous identity.

The terms *cultural competency* and *cultural safety* were often used interchangeably during interviews, suggesting that additional training regarding research and theory in these areas would be helpful for Friendship Centre staff and their partners. Participants also expressed strong interest in sharing and exchanging best practices in this area, highlighting:

- The importance of creating opportunities for increased cultural awareness and knowledge *among* Indigenous cultures, due to the diversity of Indigenous cultures and to ensure appropriate services for diverse community members visiting each centre
- The use of cultural agreements, such as a Two Row Wampum Belt representing 'cultural partnership agreements' are becoming more prominent.
- Increased benefits that come from offering cultural safety training to community agencies (relationship and partnership development, etc.)
- How increasing need for cultural safety training and program development will help solidify Cultural Safety Training as an economic enterprise for Friendship Centres.

Walk Through the Door of a Friendship Centre ...
What do you see?

Stepping back and reflecting on the themes, we see Friendship Centres as dynamic hubs, with Indigenous people acting and advocating for urban Indigenous people.

Figure 1: Through the Door of a Friendship Centre



Indigenous Service Web

During discussions it quickly became apparent that staff and board members view their organizations as doing much more than “delivering services” to “clients.”

Consider these examples:

- A participant in Timmins spoke of their centre’s role in *bringing the “missing chapter back,”* referring to the knowledge and teachings lost because of residential school.
- Another spoke about wanting to provide a safe and secure space, *an environment that would feel like “holding a grandparent’s hand.”*
- A participant from North Bay shared how for her, the Friendship Centre was *“family,”* a place where she would go and get a hot meal every day at lunch, served up by a group of caring community grandmothers and staff.
- Hamilton participants spoke of structuring hours to help reach out to the ‘working middle class’ and/or families of clients—highlighting *connecting to “non-clients”* within the community.
- Timmins and Sault Ste. Marie participants described how the majority of their work right now falls into providing Indigenous Cultural Competency Training to services and people *outside of the Indigenous community*. None of these are services being delivered to clients.

Indeed, few participants mentioned the services and programs actually listed on websites or in annual reports. Instead, they spoke of things that initially seemed less tangible like *being the voice* or *increasing Indigenous presence* in the community or *engaging community members* or *offering cultural awareness and safety training to the public*.

When services were identified, like *responding to a crisis*, *filling out status card applications*, *translating information for a newcomer*, or *performing ceremonies*, they were rarely described as part of a program with dedicated staff, funding, tracking or deliverables. These services or activities were often not necessarily linked to a particular ‘client’ list, but instead relate more to potential clients or the broader public, including non-indigenous community members. Again, if one was to rely on typical ideas about “services” such as the ones listed in the communications materials, then many of these activities were often not included, *as if they did not exist*.

And yet, being “the voice” for the community, increasing Indigenous presence, responding to crises and offering cultural safety awareness and training were talked about at length, across all of the interviews. *Because they do exist*. How do we make sense of this?

Common notions about services, service delivery and clients don’t seem to apply. The very ‘landscape’ in which these activities are playing out also appears to influence the activities. In other words, the landscape is not a stagnant picture that can be painted, described or inventoried; it is not a compilation or sum of a multitude of programs or services. Instead, it is the very context—actually multiple contexts—we need to understand in order to better support the work. Let’s take a closer look at one example.

Cultural safety training was discussed during every site visit and yet the story behind that “service” was different—layers of contextual factors influenced planning, development and delivery. Political and social developments like Truth and Reconciliation impacted the rates at which the public requested training; community history and demographics influenced the reasons for particular protocols used;

relationships, visits to Centres and even mistakes triggered conversations that led to trainings being offered; worldviews, languages and cultures influence individual beliefs about why trainings are increasing in momentum, such as prophecies being fulfilled.

Plotting how many Friendship Centres offer cultural safety training services on a landscape obscures the story, with all of its layers and chapters. That story is better told by revealing the contexts within a web.

Beyond this, are the ‘connectors’ or threads that run across all of the contexts, linking and connecting, from the individual out to the broader social and political spheres, and back again. These connectors influence the course of the service or engagement activity, sometimes facilitating success, sometimes operating as barriers, sometimes being the service or activity itself.

Why a web? When thinking of a landscape, one pictures a scene, a snapshot of a moment in time. But this kind of image doesn’t help us learn about the story behind the picture—when and how it was formed, the foundations on which it was built, the histories, cultures and worldviews, or how it has changed or compares to others.

When we listened to the participants and reflected on the “services” that were missing from the “landscape” because they didn’t turn up on a list or fit a funder’s criteria—or the services that were more about advocacy and voice, and less about counting clients and numbers—we recognized that it was the concept of a landscape that didn’t fit. Hence, the Indigenous Service Web (see Figure 2) emerged—a culturally relevant tool that could be useful to Friendship Centres and others such as policymakers and funders. For example, the web could be used to facilitate discussions at Friendship Centres about the nature of their work, and the influences and factors shaping that work. How are the various connectors supporting, facilitating, pressuring and/or limiting goals and strategies? Which threads are stronger? Why? How can we strengthen others? What do we learn when we compare one web to that of another Centre? The web could aid in discussions with partners, funders and other decision-makers, helping them to recognize the depth and breadth of work being undertaken and where they fit in the web. Over time, various services and activities may be layered in, new connectors may be identified, but importantly, they will never be inventoried.

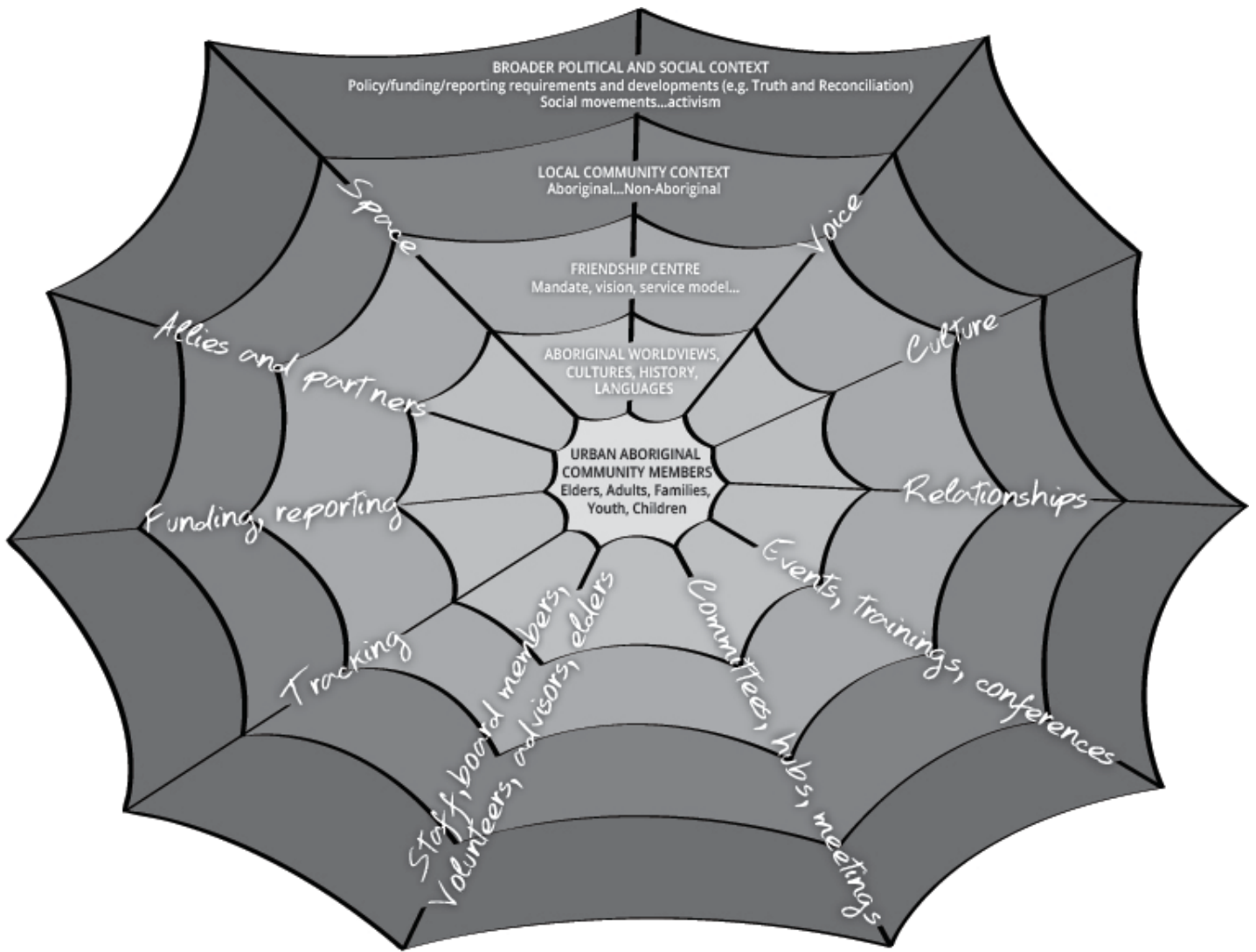


Figure 2: Indigenous Service Web

Friendship Centre Connectors

Figure 3, “Friendship Centre Connectors” describes how key connectors like Voice, Culture, Space and seven others, affect and influence service and engagement activities. Seeing how these connectors work helps us in looking beyond the familiar service landscape (focused on funding, reporting, capacity). Instead, the connectors suggest a model based on dynamic, web-like, interactions and connections between Indigenous people, non-indigenous people, and other influences such as Indigenous worldviews, cultures and languages, and local and wider social and political considerations.

<i>Voice</i>	<p>connects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • us with our community, broader community, funders, governments
<i>Culture</i>	<p>connects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • us with our community, knowledgeable and needed staff, Elders and advisors • us with our roots, history, vision, guidance • us with mainstream partners seeking experience, learning
<i>Space</i>	<p>connects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • us with each other, with culture, with partners • community members to a culturally appropriate and welcoming setting • us with non-Indigenous people wanting to get to know us, learn about us • but...still needs the right circumstances to benefit us
<i>Staff, Board, Volunteers, Advisors, Elders, Youth</i>	<p>connect us to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all stages of the life cycle • to people who know the old ways; walk in two worlds; have experienced residential school, abuse • community members (new and old) who come from the same home communities, speak the same languages, have the same relatives • experienced staff, volunteers, Elders who know the old ways and can offer wisdom, guidance • staff who have worked in mainstream and/or can work in two worlds to help build relationships, partnerships, create bridges • administrators who: lead us forward; are integral to sound financial and administrative management; go beyond their roles to offer crisis-response to clients; who make important links inside and outside the community, develop and support partnerships • board members, volunteers (of all ages, including youth) who connect and support as above
<i>Relationships</i>	<p>connect us with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new clients, new participants for projects, advisors, board members • a safe space, comfort, new connections • mainstream service providers, funders, government...
<i>Allies, Partners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who are compassionate, culturally aware and experienced, connect us to partners, new opportunities • speak up for us when we are not there • ask for cultural safety training, advice, help
<i>Events, Trainings, Conferences</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect us to each other, our cultures, community • help community members learn about and come to the Centre • help build connections with new and existing partners, allies, and others that we can learn from and share with
<i>Committees, Hubs, Meetings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer regularly scheduled times and space to connect us with our partners, opportunities • alert us to people's knowledge and views regarding Indigenous people • but...can be very time-consuming, can feel like they take away from work at the Centre

<i>Funding, Reporting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connects us with new and future opportunities • helps build capacity, motivate partnerships • helps us demonstrate credibility, transparency, accountability • can help us get certifications, designations • but...can also pressure us and/or limit us in our goals and our partnerships; can be onerous
<i>Tracking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connects us with new and future opportunities • within organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ helps us know more about our work, community ○ helps us build a case for additional resources, support, funding ○ but...can be time-consuming, cumbersome, difficult to “fit” services, contacts and “clients” into categories created by others • between organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ helps us connect with allies, new partners ○ helps us know who is serving Indigenous people; share clients

Figure 3: Friendship Centre Connectors

Conclusion

Meeting and talking with interview participants working in Friendship Centres in the communities of Timmins, North Bay, Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie enabled us to learn from some of the very people whose visions and perspectives and daily work are “creating the urban Indigenous service delivery landscape.” It was their voices, knowledge, worldviews, experiences and questions that helped make the “invisible infrastructure” visible.

While web sites and pamphlets tended to describe and emphasize the formal, funded services, it was the discussions that took us behind the scenes, delving into advocacy and voice, relationships and allies, cultural mandates and spaces, tracking and counting, bartering for services and operating like businesses, offering crisis support and cultural safety training, supporting individuals and building communities, seizing current opportunities and bringing back the missing chapter.

The project’s main goals initially were to examine the “invisible infrastructure” of the urban Indigenous service landscape by developing an inventory of organizations and service areas with a view toward identifying gaps and improving services; learning more about organizations Friendship Centres work with and the nature of these partnerships; examining, exploring and highlighting services and options for enhancing participation in the economy, innovative partnerships, and positive relationships between various stakeholders.

Using OFIFC’s *USAI Research Framework*, the participants became our guides and advisors on this journey. By responding to their questions and following their leads, we learned that the invisible infrastructure is a *web of connectors and engagement activities*, connecting Indigenous people to each other, to Indigenous ways, to allies, to new opportunities, all highly contextualized by a range of influences, from the urban Indigenous community itself, the worldviews of community members, the local service context in both the Indigenous and mainstream communities, and broader social and political policies and developments.

As such, the focus moved away from naming and counting services, to describing *how* Friendship Centres carry out their work supporting, empowering, engaging and advocating for Indigenous people within their urban communities and with their allies. The stories were less about service descriptions and numbers, and more about influences, visions, and voice.

Friendship Centres and their communities would benefit from spending time together sharing more of the wise thinking and practices that make up Indigenous Service Webs. The ideas presented in this report could be further explored and challenged so that they can be strengthened. As the participants said themselves, these discussions should happen more often.

Recommendations

Re-Conceptualize and Clearly Communicate Current “Service” Realities at Friendship Centres. When describing services, more often than not, the activities and services emphasized, were the ones that do not typically appear on Friendship Centre websites or in other communication and reporting materials. Crisis response, cultural safety training and participating in prominent mainstream cultural events were frequently mentioned and yet these activities are not defined as ‘services’ and are not strategically integrated into operations with benchmarks and/or deliverables. At times, these activities were even described by respondents as “the key role of Friendship Centres” right now. Yet, because they are not clearly defined within the service realm, they often have limited resources, no dedicated staff, or associated training, tracking, and funding, etc. Enhanced communications (including promotional materials) will also help potential partners, funders and community members increase their understanding about what Friendship Centres truly do. Resources to assist administration and staff in developing effective annual reports and strengthening other communication tools (web sites, presentations, pamphlets, etc.) that demonstrate accomplishments, transparency and credibility are needed.

Support Friendship Centres to Formalize Worldviews and Teachings Guiding Their Work. While many Friendship Centres integrate Indigenous worldviews and teachings into their work, not all Friendship Centres formally incorporate them into the wording of their missions, visions, values and mandates. Similar to how participants described integrating cultural healers and practices into services, this would involve Friendship Centres formalizing Indigenous foundations into the very fabric of their organizational identities. Supporting board and staff development to engage in conversations and decisions about this would not only help deepen and strengthen the extent to which Friendship Centres benefit from this connection and grounding, but would also more clearly communicate (as above) that connection out to the community and beyond.

Support Friendship Centres to Position Themselves as Businesses Offering Economic and Social Benefits to Broader Community. Those centres able to clearly articulate this reality were able to leverage resources and partnerships to their advantage, particularly with municipalities. This positioning also helps demonstrate accountability and transparency, once again leading to strong partnerships and access to new and innovative funding opportunities. Understanding what designations are needed for centres to achieve their goals is also needed.

Strengthen Support for First Point of Contact Staff. Executive directors and front line staff (typically referred to as “administration”) were overwhelmingly identified as ‘first points of contact’ in crisis response and in welcoming and responding to clients and first time visitors to Friendship Centres. They are often the individuals dealing with requests for help with status cards and the ones who connect clients to programs within the centre and/or out in the community. And yet, they have little organized training addressing and supporting these first point of contact realities. Strengthening support would include: providing trauma informed crisis response training, ensuring staff are comprehensively trained on methods for tracking walk-ins and contacts, ensuring maximal efficiency in assisting people with forms like status card applications, and offering opportunities to increase familiarity and develop relationships with community services.

Further Explore Innovative and Integrated Tracking Systems. The OFIFC integrated tracking system offers many benefits to Friendship Centre staff and administrators—key to obtaining accurate numbers

which then can positively impact the organization's ability to secure additional funding, expand programs and/or support clients with multiple services. However, work still needs to be done to understand how these systems can work with non-OFIFC funded programs and to support staff in exploring the full potential of the database and any tracking systems.

Increase Capacity for Securing Funding for 1. Cultural Safety Training,² 2. Relationship Building, 3. Public Education, and 4. Infusing Indigenous Voice, Presence into Mainstream Events. Executive directors spoke about how these particular opportunities are key to strengthening and building relationships between services and within the organizations. However, these funding opportunities are usually considered new or innovative which means centres have limited experience, resources and capacity to meet what may be cumbersome application and reporting requirements. Offering training, mentoring and other supportive activities to help staff increase skills, collaborate with and learn from other Friendship Centres, and identify and share successful strategies and databases for compiling useful and useable proposal templates, tips, etc. would be useful.

Develop Comprehensive Plan to Support Friendship Centre Delivery of Cultural Safety Continuum Training Services. Cultural awareness and cultural safety activities are happening in every Friendship Centre including developing and delivering public education campaigns and programs. Social and political developments like Truth and Reconciliation, mandatory partnerships required by funding agreements, and other factors are all influencing both the rate at which training and partnerships are requested, and the sheer amount of time spent by each centre offering these services. Yet each site mentioned not knowing what others were doing in this area and expressed interest in sharing information and wise practices. Given government and funder interest, the tangible benefits of increasing knowledge and safety, the potential for increasing the longevity and success of partnerships, as well as the prospect for generating revenue, it is important to approach this area with a comprehensive plan. Opportunities to learn from other Friendship Centres and to share materials regarding campaigns would be beneficial. As well, providing opportunities to explore this topic as a whole –including awareness, relevance, etc. would be useful to encouraging a unified policy platform and voice for Friendship Centres when speaking about cultural awareness and safety activities, and for funders and others pushing for mandatory collaborations and increased public awareness.

² “Cultural Safety Training,” “Cultural Safety Continuum,” and “Indigenous Cultural Competency” are some of the terms used in different sectors to generally describe training activities, practices and policies geared to increasing cultural awareness, knowledge, and/or safety in relation to Indigenous peoples.

A Closer Look at the Four Communities

Our research team met with four communities: Timmins, North Bay, Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie. To share each community's voice and story, we have included each community's report.

A. TIMMINS INDIGENOUS SERVICE WEB

“We can all relate to how good it feels to be around grandma as a little girl or boy. We feel safe, eh? That is the atmosphere we create with our programs and our Friendship Centre.”

Interview Participant, Timmins Friendship Centre

Interview and Organizational Context

The Timmins Native Friendship Centre (TNFC) was extraordinarily keen to meet and share their knowledge and wise practices about service delivery. A group interview took place in June, 2015 at the Friendship Centre. There were nine participants: the board president, the executive director, the executive assistant, and seven staff members: FASD/child nutrition coordinator, homelessness worker, Aboriginal family support coordinator, lifelong care support worker, akwe:go high risk worker, akwe:go worker/Aboriginal prenatal nutrition worker, and the apatisiwin employment counsellor. While the board president spoke about service delivery as it related to the Friendship Centre and the community, we were fortunate to also learn from his own experiences of attending residential school and his involvement with Misiway Milopemahtesewin Community Health Care Centre.

The visit began with a tour of the Timmins Friendship Centre and the interview was carried out over lunch. The comfortable and informal setting along with the variety of roles held by the participants proved invaluable as we talked. The participants' knowledge of services 'over time' offered a unique depth to the discussion. Two participants in particular could speak to the "the ways of the past" and the changes in services, titles, partnerships, language, etc. over time. With various ages and experiences represented, both men and women participating, and with the older individuals speaking of past ways, and the younger workers building on those topics, the principles and benefits of *balance* shone through.

In addition, the *knowledge* of cultural services--and importantly the *teachings* informing these services--provide a guiding foundation for service delivery at the Timmins Friendship Centre. Indigenous teachings and worldviews inform how partnerships are formed (with respect), how changes are made (together) and the very nature of services themselves (looking to the land, berry picking, etc.) When some program staff or board members experience challenges with clients or changes they are attempting to make, they ask the grandmothers and grandfathers for guidance.

Like many other Friendship Centres, the founding and growth of the Timmins Native Friendship Centre was largely motivated by the community's desire to support Indigenous people leaving their home reserves for work or education. Both the Friendship Centre's Web site and the interview highlighted the impact of the student population in particular, mentioning those coming from the surrounding coastal communities to attend both secondary and post-secondary schools. "It was generally felt by the founders of the Timmins Native Friendship Centre that these students need to be provided with a positive environment, which would reflect their academic performance in a positive way" (Timmins Native Friendship Centre Web site, 2015).

Like so many stories of the Friendship Centres, the beginnings of the Timmins Native Friendship Centre can be traced back to a "small group of dedicated people [who] came together with a dream to provide

a safe gathering place for the Native community”(Web site). The Timmins Native Friendship Centre was incorporated in 1976 and started to receive core funding in the early 1980s through the Migrating Peoples Program. Currently, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) provides core funding through a contribution agreement from Heritage Canada’s Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program (AFCP) (Web site).

Addressing the questions... the interview

1. Please describe your organization and the people that you serve

The Board and Staff are dedicated to carry out its aims and objectives, and to ensure that a healthy atmosphere be provided to the Aboriginal community. More importantly, the Centre responds with programs that support the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people and assists in their inclusion and participation in urban life. With this support we strive to improve the quality of life for urban Aboriginal people living in the Timmins area by providing intervention, direct services, advocacy, and support in the areas of health, education, culture, recreation, and social services. We are committed to providing a place of re-discovery and opportunities for learning new ways to live in a healthy way.

Timmins Native Friendship Centre Web site³

Our discussion suggests that while the organization’s formal policies and procedures provide the written vision, mission, and mandate, the heart and spirit of the organization comes through the voices, knowledge, worldviews, and experiences of the people who bring those principles to life every day. We need to recognize that, while the “service delivery landscape” emerged from identifying and addressing needs over decades, it is equally important to understand the threads that connect this ‘landscape’--the perspectives of the people interacting with the community and partners, the language they use when describing their experiences, and the paths they take to and beyond the Friendship Centre. For example, the TNFC clearly views itself, as do their partners, as a business with economic and community development opportunities and goals. These perceptions directly affect organizational operations and growth.

The conversation also highlighted the important role that the TNFC plays in public education and cultural safety training – described by some as the “biggest job” of Friendship Centres right now. However, when reviewing the formal mission vision and mandate, it appears that “public education” and “cultural safety” are secondary activities when compared to the roles and responsibilities featured in the formal material.

³ <http://www.tnfc.ca/about.html>

As well, while this material does not appear to directly reference social and political movements and events like Truth and Reconciliation or elections, or provide information about service request/delivery rates, as the emerging themes illustrate below, these movements and events have a direct impact on the work of the Friendship Centre. Given that the discussion also highlighted the impact of administrative and accountability functions like reporting on the organization’s ability to carry out its mandate, it is important to acknowledge the key, largely ‘hidden’ administrative activities that are routinely overlooked in formal organizational descriptions.

Interestingly, the many facets of organizational life discussed also reflected the many facets of partnership development. For example, operationalizing a service or program--simply getting prepared or securing service locations--become opportunities for developing or strengthening partnerships.

Creating a space for the participants to openly share their perspectives on the organization led to a more wholistic examination of concepts of service, partners, self and how they operate and inter-relate *within* the organizational life of the Friendship Centre, and *within* its community and partnerships. This suggests that it would be helpful to expand our understanding of concepts like ‘service’ and the words we use to help prompt discussion like ‘scope,’ etc.

Emerging Themes

Indigenous Ways of Knowing guide Perceptions of Self, Community, Organization, Service...

While the inset box offers the more formalized vision, mission, mandate and philosophy, the Timmins participants had ways of vibrantly describing the philosophies that enrich the work of Friendship Centre staff and board.

For example, the opening quote that refers to “being around grandma” speaks to the atmosphere the Timmins Native Friendship Centre hopes to have created. Or, as the quote below suggests, how the Centre calls on the teachings of our grandmothers and grandfathers for guidance, demonstrating an approach grounded in Indigenous worldviews.

Our teachings. If we can’t figure things out, we have to invite the grandmothers and grandfathers. That’s the difference between mainstream and the Friendship Centre, we bring that spiritual element.

Vision

Our vision is to provide a culturally safe environment that creates a sense of belonging for all Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people.

Mission

Our mission is to strive to provide positive growth and change while supporting one's spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being within a culturally diverse community. We commit to do this with understanding and dedication while respecting individual's values and beliefs.

Mandate

Our mandate is "to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people living in an urban environment".

Philosophy

Our philosophy is one that encompasses all people in the community who request assistance.

Timmins Native Friendship Centre

As the discussion continued, it was clear that personal experiences and philosophies influenced the operating principles of the Centre, including *what* services were delivered as well as *how* and with *which* partners.

That's what we are trying to do, working together with different partners, and bring the missing chapter back into our lives.

We lead our partnerships this time around, based on our learnings from the last partnerships. We found more culturally-sound activities, like berry picking, fire. Outdoor activities, more things on the land.

That is why, not because I am the board president, with all the government cutbacks, we are being forced to work together, but when you look back at history, we used to work together quite well. Different tribes would work together, we had that respect, we had those teachings.

Social and Political Movements Impact Organizational Mandate

Equally relevant, is the current impact of political developments such as elections and other social and political movements such as Truth and Reconciliation. These all influence not only how the Centre carries out its mandate, but also the rate at which related services are requested by other organizations.

We don't get enough money to do what we need to do. When I am invited out to give presentations, around community partnerships, this is my lead-in line: 'We get \$120,000 a year for TNFC. My responsibility is to grow that into 4 million. We do that through community partnerships.' And people go 'wow.' That's what has been keeping our doors open for the last 40 some years. It's not a sustainable model – it could crash anytime. Because there is an election coming up; last year, provincial. I have an infrastructure proposal sitting out there since March 2014.

Our biggest job right now is cultural safety and presentations. There are so many people asking for that, and after today [Truth & Reconciliation announcement] there are going to be so many more people asking for that.

No One is Turned Away

Like the other Friendship Centres who participated in the interviews, Timmins started the conversation off by clearly stating “We serve everyone who comes in the door.” And “We turn no one away.” The Friendship Centre offers services to anyone who walks in the door, and coined a tagline reflecting this view: “Indigenous or not, you have a spot.” During the interview, participants described who seeks services from the Centre: people living in Timmins and the surrounding area; people who live on-reserve and are just visiting Timmins for the day; people passing through; people trying to get home or get to treatment. Sometimes these individuals are not clients, and there is no program that immediately fits. However, as needed, Friendship Centre staff use this as an opportunity to case conference and work together to figure out a solution. Staff also spoke of the implications of this on “membership” and on reporting for “client”-based programs.

Increase in non-Indigenous Clients

Participants also shared about the increase in non-Indigenous clients, particularly, single moms. While there is the philosophy that “no one is turned away,” some programs only have funding for Indigenous clients, thus affecting the services available to non-Indigenous clients. One participant observed, “We

have seen a rise in prenatal, non-aboriginal, single moms. They come here to use the services, need assistance, financial . . . we don't refuse, but we only have funding for First Nations, Aboriginal."

"Public Health" versus "Client-Based" Programs affect Service Delivery, Numbers and Reporting

In addition to the 'population' served, the numbers and types of services offered and/or used are inextricably tied to the nature and types of funding received; as well, delivery, tracking and reporting are directly connected to funding structure and requirements. The executive director shared,

Rolling up numbers for AGM in a couple of weeks, I recalled doing it last year. We had close to 1100 registered clients within the Friendship Centre and close to 4,000 services that were provided, in the way of food supplements, transportation, one on one. This takes into consideration the frequency of services . . . The larger the crowd, the better, because public health agency likes high numbers.

Important to Recognize Administrative Impacts as Both a Pressure AND a Positive related to Capacity Building

The "rolling up numbers" comment touched on the administrative functions required to meet funder and community expectations and the necessity of having the capacity to complete associated tasks: "Working with provincial funders is very challenging, bureaucracy. But there's transparency, responsibility, we have that in place." Despite being recognized as an additional pressure, reporting is also noted as a benefit, as it demonstrates organizational transparency and accountability. Also mentioned was the understanding that we need to reach "administrative bodies" in other organizations, because they make decisions. This view moves beyond the concept of a Friendship Centre as a contained space where services are provided to "clients" and instead situates the Friendship Centre as an actor creating spaces and opportunities through funding and administrative avenues.

Accordingly, this discussion suggests that efforts to understand the Indigenous service delivery landscape would benefit from including ways to look into and measure the time and other factors involved in tracking and reporting on services, etc. Then we would have more data to inform the picture and draw comparisons across Friendship Centres and with other sectors. As well, the discussion suggests that efforts should also be specifically tailored to uncover and describe the positive aspects and outcomes of meeting funding requirements.

Our Organization Strengthens the Economy and the Community... We are a Business

Looking at the Friendship Centre as more than a social service delivery agent was a common theme during our conversation: participants described the organization as being a source of economic development, even as a business itself.

For example, the Executive Director shared about how the TNFC satellite office in Moosonee infuses an estimated one million dollars a year into the Moosonee economy and that this, "really has an economic impact on the community, workers pay taxes, long term community members were hired." This perspective clearly guides relationships with key partners like the Municipality: "I sent out a letter stating the economic impact on the community...they acknowledged this, and they would revise the bylaws so they [the satellite office] could stay in the two units [in a residential area]."

Participants discussed how the very process of operationalizing programs, like securing rental locations or getting by-laws changed so that the TNFC could operate in a residential area, also contributes to bridging and building partnerships with the Municipality and other partners: "We are establishing

working relationships with DSABB, we rent the homeless unit ... Works great in the community, to revitalize the community.”

Another commonly held view, by both the TNFC and the broader non-Indigenous community, was that the TNFC is not only a non-profit, it is also a business. For example, the executive director shared that “we need a business license to hang on our wall.” Throughout the conversation, the participants highlighted how this view influences everything: how they structure and expand programs; respond to funding opportunities; engage with partners (particularly the municipality); and, even where they are located. For example, the TNFC wants to apply for a family treatment centre. However, before they can do this, they need a business plan. Or, as the example above shows, a great deal of work and partnership development had to happen in order to for the by-laws to be changed to allow for the TNFC to operate in a residential area.

Designations Influence How TNFC Achieves its Mandate

Whether it is a health service provider designation, or a business licence, it is clear that “designations” affect the eligibility of the organization for certain funding, as in the case of the family treatment centre. Designations also influence “first point of contact” relationships—see the previous quote about the role of public presentations and “growing funding.” The Friendship Centre needs to demonstrate that the services they offer are “[a] fee for service... Administratively, we have to demonstrate that it is a source of revenue for us... FCs should know that they can do that. They need someone in that position that can do it.”

Concept of “Reach” is More Readily Understood than “Scope”

The question concerning scope caused some confusion during the discussion, similar to other site visits. We started by exploring what the word meant to the participants, and while the interviewer used the suggested probes, what seemed to help this time was the concept of ‘reach.’ *What is the reach of your programs?* The response was overwhelmingly “local.” “Local, predominantly local, even with all the partnering, it’s still local. . .” “Local, for sure.” Nevertheless, programs are rarely run in isolation. Instead they are viewed as being part of a local or provincial network of services and programs. “Our alcohol and drug program has a connection with 300 patient centres within Ontario. So, it depends on the program--local and provincial.”

Participants also referred to geographic areas when it comes to reach: “Catchment--Kirkland to Kap [Kapuscasing], Smooth Rock, four First Nations.”

Similarly, participants recognized and discussed how they were well networked through social media and that social media helps deliver services. “I connect clients up to Facebook groups that are international, different FASD groups. Parents of children talk about things...help each other out.”

In 2011, a report entitled, *Timmins Aboriginal Services and Programs Gap Analysis: Final Report and Recommendations*, identified the Timmins Native Friendship Centre “as the leader in Timmins for providing services/programs for the Aboriginal community. Over 1/3 of the survey participants recognized the key role the Timmins Native Friendship centre plays in the region.”

Last, participants talked about scope in relation to the breadth of issues arising in their work: “One of the prevailing things popping up--percentage of sexual abuse victims. With that comes addictions, keeps you busy. For our office, it’s about 95%. With that comes a host of other issues...”

Geography and Language are Key to Understanding Organization “Scope”

During the discussion, it became clear that geography and language continue to be key factors in who visits the centre and how the centre responds. The mandate is to, “Improve the quality of life for Indigenous people living in an urban environment, including status and non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.” However, similar to earlier times, the majority of clients continue to come from the James Bay coast. “Cree people, some Ojibway. Most clients come from James Bay coast. All Cree in one program.” A participant elaborated on this, speaking to the transition of clients, depending on how far they come from in the north, and the importance of having staff speak Indigenous languages in order to provide consistent service:

I realize we have a big target audience that we draw upon, besides James Bay. Our Centre [Misiway Milopemahtesewin Community Health Care Centre] lead healer is Ojibwa, and lead therapist is Cree, and they both are fluent in the language. So we have never come across a problem yet, where we have needed translation services for Ojibwa people. Most people who are residing in urban centres are English. Go further north, it’s the opposite. But further north you go, it is more Cree. There are a number of languages; they have a hard time with adjustment.

The emergence of the Timmins Native Friendship Centre in Moosonee readily demonstrates the impact of geography and language on service delivery. The TNFC opened a satellite office in Moosonee in response to the high percentage of people coming from the community to Timmins for services. This has resulted in: an expansion of the TNFC, newly trained staff residing in Moosonee, and partnership development with the Municipality and Mayor’s office in Moosonee. “I had an opportunity to go up and do a presentation to the mayor and council, to establish and open up those communications to what we do and why we do it, strengthen the partnerships.”

2. Please describe the service(s) or program(s) that your organization offers.

We try to fit the programs with the needs of the clients.
Interview Participant, Timmins Friendship Centre

The inset box offers only a glimpse of the number and range of services offered by the Friendship Centre. During the discussion, participants elaborated on the services and programs offered as well as commenting on the activities that never make any formal list such as helping someone—“who is not currently your client”—get to treatment. Or responding to situations that emerge based on current social or demographic realities—the Housing and Homeless program is supported through a newly created position, funded by the local DSABB, to respond to the community’s identified housing needs. Or, the continuing increasing demand for cultural safety trainings and public outreach, as a result of the June 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations and community partner requests for education and cultural safety programs.

In addition to the program list, the following activities, services and supports were mentioned. It is important to note the range and again, how some may not be typically thought of as “programs” or “services” even though they are critical to carrying out the mission and mandate of the organization.

Emerging Themes

Culturally Safe, Trauma Informed Services and Public Education are Needed

Themes of cultural awareness, competency and safety filled the conversation. As mentioned previously, one participant felt that, “Our biggest job right now is cultural safety and presentations, there are so many people asking for that.” Participants also shared that these services are driven by many factors, including

- The Timmins Native Friendship Centre offers the following programs and services:
- Aboriginal Alternative Secondary School Program (AASSP)
 - Aboriginal Combined Courtworker Program (ACCP)
 - Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Worker Program (AADWP)
 - Aboriginal Family Support and Wellness Program (AFSWP)
 - Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy Program (AHWSP)
 - Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program (AHBHC)
 - Aboriginal Prenatal Nutrition Program (APNP)
 - Academic and Career Entrance Program (ACE)
 - Adult Native Literacy & Basic Skills Program (LBS)
 - Akwe:Go Program (Akwe:go)
 - Akwe:Go High Risk Program (Akwe:go HR)
 - Apatisiwin - Employment And Training (Apatisiwin)
 - Community Career Developer (CCD)
 - Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Nutrition Program (FASD)
 - Homelessness Program (HSP)
 - Oppekehawaso Wekamik (Daycare)

requests for services, which at times are affected by factors like social movements-- “After today [release of Truth and Reconciliation recommendations], there are going to be so many more people asking for that.”

Funding rules that require mandatory partnership with Indigenous organizations also influence services provided by the TNFC. And, it is these same partnerships that require a great deal of awareness training, to ensure collaborative projects are culturally safe for clients. For example, participants shared that partner knowledge and awareness determined types of activities chosen, like berry picking, or where the service was delivered, like in a “neutral park.”

Staff also use opportunities like attending meetings or sitting on committees to offer lessons in cultural safety and awareness. One participant offered the example of “heighten[ing] people’s awareness around the real issues” when it comes to using terms like “ward of the court or ward of Canada.” Another offered an example related to a meeting about cultural safety training for child protection workers: TNFC staff noted that child protection staff were required to take CPR training every two years, whereas they only took Cultural Safety training once. The ensuing dialogue spurred the development of a policy requiring mandatory cultural safety training every two years! Similarly, participants shared how experiencing or observing non-Indigenous agencies engaging in culturally unsafe practices led TNFC to work with the executive staff of the other agencies to open up a dialogue, offer training, and support them in implementing cultural safety training and policies.

Participants also discussed what still needs to happen such as more coordinated efforts and increased collaboration in developing presentations and materials. Interestingly, they noted the importance of targeting and including decision-makers and administrative staff; the people and roles often left out of such training because it is typically delivered to front line staff or in the case of schools, directly to students. One said,

Bring those people [professionals] together, develop presentations or documents to help educate mainstream. Right now, we work with schools, and their focus is on students. But they are not providing much for teachers or administrative bodies. Because they are the ones that make the decisions for our kids in the education system. Through education we gain a lot of that insight. I think we will see racism and stereotyping come down.

On the continuum of cultural safety, trauma informed services that reflect knowledge of historical trauma, residential school experiences and the prevalence of sexual abuse are needed. Participants shared how trauma informed – or un-informed—approaches affect what and how services are delivered. For example, one participant believes that, “In mainstream, they are missing the boat on that [sexual abuse]. That is why we have a lot of people, they haven’t addressed those core issues. That is why people keep relapsing.” He then went on to say that, “Kids that were removed from parents and grandparents are now parents. They are suffering because parenting skills and discipline is all in chaos. Hook them up with behaviour programs/modifications, treatment programs/centres.”

Cultural Services and Cultural Healer Support are Highly Valued and Help with “Cultural Advocacy”

Participants talked about offering a variety of cultural services, including, “...getting your sprit name, drums and teachings, like men’s and women’s roles.” While cultural approaches permeate all aspects of program and service delivery (offering programs like berry picking and others that take place on the land), the TNFC has a healer that comes once or twice a month. This healer is also shared with two other

Friendship Centres in the region, including Cochrane and Kapus casing, as a form of cost and cultural knowledge sharing.

Cultural healers also play important advocacy roles for clients participating in cultural services and within organizations in general. For example, one participant spoke about how cultural healers often act as gate keepers, informing non-Indigenous staff or those in partnering programs of the importance of following protocols: “You talk about protocols. Even though they know the protocols, they still try to come in with the client, even on their moon time. When you look at it from a spiritual point of view, those grannies, they know they are doing something wrong, and they tell [name of person], ‘k, Stop that woman, she can’t come in.’ Where does that come from? I don’t know, but... they are right every time.” This same participant shared the belief that Elders have the ability to speak to grandmothers and grandfathers in the spirit world and that their role is to, “bring spirituality into each agency.” He added, “I am a strong believer that we have to listen to our spirit, it is our last line of defence... I think we stopped listening to our own spirit. We can bring that part into each agency. We are not bringing in religion, it’s spiritually. It’s a big difference.”

The notion of cultural advocacy means not only advocating for culturally informed and culturally-based services, but also advocating for moving beyond the western concept of written protocols, to now include cultural protocols as well.

Advocacy, Increasing Visibility

In addition to cultural advocacy, services were often described in relation to advocacy in general, implying that no matter which program or service, advocacy is a part of daily life for each staff member. For example, the cultural safety and service examples above reflect staff desire and commitment to advocating on behalf of their clients. Partnership development with non-Indigenous organizations emerged or changed course because TNFC advocated when clients were unable to fill out onerous forms, or when others displayed inaccurate perspectives about what the Friendship Centre does—the most striking example of this being a judge ordering a defendant into the custody of the Friendship Centre.

Community partners are acknowledging the strong advocacy skills of the TNFC and its staff when they send clients who have exhausted every other community resource: “A number of people in the community were contacting [name of person] to say, ‘You need to do something.’ We often get complex cases like this. ‘What are YOU going to do?’ While participants spoke of the benefits of such situations, like learning about one’s community resources, they also spoke of the pressure placed solely on the TNFC to address such issues—“We often get complex cases like this. The onus is put on us, ‘What are YOU going to do?’ Not, ‘What are WE going to do together as a community.”

Last, the quote below demonstrates the importance of advocacy in building or strengthening relationships with key partners, like the Municipality and council, and ultimately achieving the goals of the TNFC.

I had an opportunity to go up and do a presentation to the Mayor and council, to establish and open up those communications as to what we do and why we do it, strengthen the partnerships. There was a contentious issue on the table, we wanted them on board. We were viewed as breaking the by-law. I knew we were in infraction of it because we were conducting business in a residential area. They acknowledged that they would revise the bylaws so we could stay . . . This is part of the process, strengthening our presence, with community partnership.

Community and Economic Development ...We are in the Business

This topic emerged again in this portion of the discussion. When asked to describe the services offered, “exchanging services” with another agency was described as a “fee for service.” Working with community partners was described as being a part of a “community economic development” continuum which also includes pursuing opportunities for funding that support self-reliance or community-reliance as opposed to government funding-reliance.

To me that is the essence of community economic development. It is really about involving the people, and having to work with immediate resources, community resources, and not having this dependency on government, no matter what level. Not thinking that the government is going to give money to us to get things done, instead we rely on partnerships.

Last, activities like cleaning up the neighbourhood were described as activities and services initiated and provided by the community, and yet, they fall nowhere on the above list of services offered. Importantly, it is these very “services” that are said to increase pride in the neighbourhood, contribute to the betterment of the community, and increase feelings of ownership or connectedness to the initiatives. This example recognizes the importance of looking beyond familiar notions of “service delivery,” to see the threads found between services or programs, like the people involved or the outcomes achieved, completely apart from ‘clients accessing particular services.’ The quote below further highlights this unique aspect of community development,

Despite all the negative social issues that they have to contend with on a daily basis, community members who participate in these programs have much to offer. ‘Oh well, let’s clean up the neighbourhood.’ Little initiatives...brings so much pride to their neighbourhood . . . and they are in control of it.

When it comes to “services and programs,” the TNFC participants see well beyond the specific list. They offer culturally safe and trauma informed services, including public education and cultural services. They also go one step further in working to ensure that Indigenous individuals accessing services at other organizations have access to TNFC services as well. They also see themselves as a key player in the development of the community, both economically and socially. Last, in addition to offering programs and services, they see themselves, and are seen by community partners, as operating as a business, very much in the business of community, economic and cultural development.

3. How do you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

From the outset of the interview, the importance of community partners was apparent for operationalizing services (developing partnerships before starting services, like collaboratively working with partners during set up to secure space). We also heard, “Once we decipher needs, we have a large network of services, through the agencies that we work with,” suggesting that the referral process is much more than filling out forms or following pre-determined decisions. Participants discussed the importance of having a clear understanding of partners and their services and knowing the people delivering the services, in order to help guide referral decisions. During this part of the discussion, relationships were mentioned often and required little probing. (Interestingly, the interview questionnaire listed relationships as the last probe, even though they were often mentioned first).

The Friendship Centre recognizes itself as a hub or a starting point for many clients and that referrals to other services are often necessary. As one participant said, “It’s through those partners, and finding out what each agency does, that makes those referrals easier and more accurate.”

Participants spoke about *how* they worked with their community and other partners to deliver services, including how they engaged in and sustained relationships with them. Interestingly, while many practical “actions” were mentioned regarding how one physically engages in service delivery, such as hosting an event, the *how* was interpreted in terms of the cultural philosophy underpinning the actions.

Last, the discussion about partners or collaborative services also involved discussing the *who* and the *relationship*. For example, one participant described how a poorly carried out home visit sparked a collaborative protocol between the agency and the Friendship Centre and how the protocol has become a foundational element in their continued work together.

The following are examples of the wide range of factors influencing relationships, partnerships and service delivery choices. How the organization anticipates and responds to these factors is essential to understanding how these factors affect services.

Emerging Themes

Values and Teachings Guide Approaches, Decisions and Actions

Using the medicine wheel, looking to the values of the traditional clan system and seeking guidance from Elders or those that have passed on to the spirit world were mentioned. Here, the *how* refers to the values or teachings the participants use to guide their decisions. It seems as if worldviews conditioned the approach before the first step was even taken and then continued to influence the work as the service went on or as the partnership grew. For example, the philosophy of “looking at where we have been...to understand where we are going...” was brought up. Also mentioned was the desire to develop relationships “in a good way, but at the same time, address shortcomings in assessments, and stuff like this. It seems to be working really well.”

One participant shared how historical notions about working together for the benefit of the community contribute to the Friendship Centre’s current success: “You know, back in the day everybody helped each other, and I think that is the approach that [name of person] and staff and board have been focusing on. We have been operating in silos for too long and with different outlooks. That is the success of this centre, programs and different agencies working together.” He went on to say, “With all the government cutbacks, we are being forced to work together, but when you look back at history, we used to work together quite well. Different tribes would work together. We had that respect. We had those teachings.”

One participant also shared an example of how these teachings would affect services with a particular partner: “We want to bring back traditional roles and responsibilities, men, women, teenagers, all those babies. It all starts off with your spirit name. Something that we want to put together in that document. Kids in CAS, in care, we know how many kids in care there are, we see them.”

Internal and External Factors Contribute to Cultural Safety – Protocols are Common

As mentioned previously, a poorly carried out home visit sparked a collaborative protocol between the agency and the Friendship Centre; a judge releasing a man on probation into the custody of the

Friendship Centre spurred advocacy and education and the development of a program at the probation and parole office; funding offered to non-Indigenous programs requiring them to partner with Indigenous organizations had additional implications--upon starting to work with them, the Friendship Centre needed to provide additional supports such as education and cultural awareness. These examples help show how cultural safety should not solely be considered as an outcome achieved through policies and procedures or protocols. It is also helpful to consider cultural safety developing as a result of the interaction of external factors (funding, partner lack of knowledge) and internal factors (values, desire to help, co-operate and protect and support community members). This interaction may well involve developing protocols or documents to help guide relationships and understanding within and beyond the organization.

Ensuring Community Members Receive Cultural Services

Participants shared how the Friendship Centre provides important cultural services to partner (mainstream) organizations in order to help ensure Indigenous community members receive appropriate supports because “That’s what’s missing right now, the cultural part, for mainstream.” Offering cultural services internally also takes some planning. One participant spoke about their current approach, and how it respects key concepts like space, transportation and even connects Friendship Centres regionally,

The way we operate is on a bartering system. Friendship Centres don’t have traditional healers program, but they do have a space and a lot of people. What we do is exchange service for office space and people. We work with three Friendship Centres (Timmins, Cochrane and Kap). Timmins and Cochrane are the two busiest Friendship Centres with accessing the healer that comes in maybe once or twice a month...

That’s always been a problem--transportation for our people, problems for our people. That’s why we bring healers here. That’s what we worked out, a couple staff, and me. We have sites in all Friendship Centres and First Nations.

Being Ready and Tapping into Social/Political Movements

The timeliness of the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations demonstrates how events of national scope and significance have an impact on local planning. In this situation, the Friendship Centre is considering how it can assist in implementing the recommendations at a time when there may be more public receptiveness.

Recommendations being aired today at 11:00. There’s gonna be a lot of things that have to happen after that. What role will we play as a centre here, to carry that message out there? Who are those professional people who will conduct those workshops to educate mainstream? I think that is what my goal is, to bring those people together, develop presentations or documents to help educate mainstream.

In other words, how can the Friendship Centre use this opportunity and its role in the community to lead the way forward? Also, as mentioned previously, when speaking of health service designation, a participant shared how being ready, and achieving the health service designation, will take them one step closer to securing the family treatment facility funding—they will be prepared when the opportunity finally arises. Last, being ready to receive potential partners knocking on the door, wanting to fulfill funding requirements for mandatory partnerships was also mentioned. Partnerships at times are also motivated by external social and/or political factors. Accordingly, the TNFC operates using the

philosophy of “staying ahead of the game and being prepared.” The many successes of the TNFC demonstrate how being prepared means you can capitalize on opportunities.

Our Programs and Partnerships Reflect Needs of Clients *and* Staff

When speaking about the internal operations of the TNFC, participants described how the structure and flow of programs within the centre, along with case conferencing, had many positive benefits: helping determine when partners are needed; strengthening overall support for clients, and helping to ensure an holistic and comprehensive approach. This approach also helps support both the staff’s ability to deal with clients and arising challenges, prevent challenges when there is a break in service delivery and support the health, learning and development of staff. We will talk more about this in question four, when addressing the main factors that help you work with your community. One staff suggests that the teams in place is a key factor in helping work with partners, “We have four teams, education and employment, youth, children, justice...Those programs, people progress through them, it’s easy to partner, but then you have things that come together like children’s mental health symposium. You don’t miss things, but everyone fits.”

Another staff elaborated on this point, sharing how case conferencing was an important factor in “how they work” internally: “Case conferencing as well, every two weeks, where they speak about high risk clients. Instead of working by yourself, you can help clients get on the path they want to be on, everyone has an understanding of where this client is. Where these clients are going, holistic.”

Participants also acknowledged how they value and draw on knowledge, experience and skills (including cultural) within the centre and their own community and how this approach reflects their community’s history and needs. One participant shared, “I feel very fortunate that I have access to people who work with me, cultural, what these teachings mean...This is 2015, if something is lacking, let’s develop it, we have enough skills here to develop stuff. We don’t need people from Toronto or from North Bay. We have enough skill level within our population, based on the past, that is fit and right for us.”

Participants also described the benefits of external resources like OFIFC when it comes to staff development and training.

4. What would you say are the main factors that help you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

This question ended up having a great deal of overlap with other concepts in our discussion up to this point, such as internal versus external factors , cultural safety, cultural knowledge and services, etc.

During the discussion, many factors were identified as helping participants work with their community and other partners. While some of the factors may be more readily considered “internal” or “external ,” trying to categorize them separately reduced understanding of the ways and extent to which the factors inter-relate. For example, earning a good reputation and having pride in one’s work influence each other; being flexible and adaptable affects how services are run inside and outside the agency; developing expertise inside the agency means it can then be shared with partners outside the agency, etc.

Despite using the probes, the discussion still did not progress in a 'linear' fashion. People instead, jumped around and added to conversation. So as you can see, the results are structured around emerging themes, as opposed to answering each of the questions or probes.

Emerging Themes

Operating Within *and* Respecting Indigenous Worldviews!

Similar to other aspects of our discussion, operating within Indigenous worldviews was a prominent theme. At times, after trying to break apart themes, only realizing after they were all laid out that really, the connection between them was that they were all part of an Indigenous worldview, all of which involved respecting Indigenous teachings, philosophies and ways of knowing and seeing the world.

Within the organization, cultural teachings were literally integrated into the very fabric of the organization. One participant spoke about how staff wear different hats – they may be the Akwego worker, but that doesn't mean they can't chop wood! Or how some staff interact with clients and partners using a spiritual lens – literally getting up and requesting a client be left alone because they had received guidance from a grandmother to do so. As mentioned, teachings like those about traditional roles and responsibilities and spirit names were often starting points for a new and budding partnership.

When talking about lessons learned and best practices, one participant suggested that the Friendship Centre uses its unique knowledge, experience and perspective to make visible "the missing chapter" (historical/residential school/sexual abuse trauma) to community members and partners, saying, "That's what we are trying to do, working together with different partners, and bring the missing chapter back into our lives. If you can do that for the kids, I think this will be a good community to live in. It's a good community now, but it needs improvement." This implies that working within this trauma informed philosophy, with respect for and knowledge of the past, is a best practice in and of itself, echoing the philosophy of "developing relationships in a good way."

Culturally-informed funding agreements were also spoken about as a wise practice that has had a significant and positive impact. One participant shared,

It's through that contract that the ministry actually got it right because they actually gave tobacco to elders to help develop that program. They let us develop...the eastern door, and understanding the journey. I've been delivering those programs for four years now. It is unbelievable the outcome, with all the clients, especially by circle 4, because you talk about historical trauma and its impacts, connections between that and incarcerations, family issues, education, employment. All that impacted by historical trauma. And once they find out the linkages between that and what they have been through, the next thing is treatment. It's so nice to be a part of that process. By giving us that tobacco, those elders down south, they stopped that revolving door.

Additional concepts mentioned included healthy leadership and mentorship. One participant shared, "I know for a fact there are a lot of young kids that are looking at workers and saying, 'I want to be like her or him. How did she do that?'" Last, securing resources (outside of organizational programs/funding) for cultural services like tarps for a sweat lodge was also mentioned.

Earning a Good Reputation along with Transparent and Accountable Finances, Help Foster New and Ongoing Partnerships, Opportunities

The organization's reputation and accountability and transparency were mentioned often. Again, this probably emerged from their grounded stance on economic development and business perspectives. The executive/management explained that while challenging, working with funders who require a high degree of financial accountability and transparency has helped build their reputation and encouraged other funders and partners to collaborate. Past successes also promote this positive, public image, as one staff member observed, "Once you develop that [good reputation], a lot of good things come your way. Programs--we have that reputation to come back to. It is through those partnerships that got us here."

Staff also suggested that participating in events that may not be service related, like the Kayak Challenge, has helped bring more recognition to the organization, and encouraged others to contact the organization. One participant shared, "That's why we are getting phone calls now for presentations... Through the Kayak challenge--Top 100 events in Ontario--and our name is on that now. He went on to share how the organization's long-term commitment and reputation has solidified a spot for them at more prominent celebrations in the community like Canada Day celebrations: "Canada Day celebrations, they are coming to us now... it's a given that we are a part of that group. We have proven we can do the work, and move beyond..."

Positioning Organization as More than a Social Service Agency... We Contribute to the Economic and Social Development of Our Community and Will Achieve Our Goals

Again, the theme of operating as a business and as an organization that contributes significantly to the economic and social growth of the community helps the organization develop and strengthen relationships with community partners. As mentioned, during presentations with community partners, this is often the starting point of the conversation, "We don't get enough money to do what we need to do. When I am invited out to give a presentation around community partnerships, that is my lead-in line, 'We get 120 thousand a year for TNFC. My responsibility is to grow that into 4 million. We do that through community partnerships.'" Adopting this approach also helped the organization secure important changes to municipal by-laws and strengthened their relationship with the municipality.

The executive director also shared how this approach helps reduce dependency on government, and creates space for community members to contribute to the community, increasing pride and ownership – important in community development. Creating business plans and securing required designations also help the agency in the search for funding to achieve its goals.

Offering Opportunities for Clients to Be Exposed to Other Programs, in a Good Way

One main factor, both within and outside the organization, that helps the TNFC work with partners to deliver services, is exposing clients to new programs and/or staff in the safe space of the known and trusted TNFC. For example, integrating programs within and external to the organization, "like the children's mental health symposium" where numerous programs come together to offer an event, "makes it easier for staff and for clients, cause they are comfortable here, get to know staff."

As well, partnering with programs outside the organization allows clients to become acquainted with these new programs and staff in a safe space. One staff commented, "I may have a client that has never worked with other organizations cause they are non-aboriginal. They see me partner with them, it brings that client a little closer. It opens doors to agencies that they may have never heard of."

These ways of operating promote and encourage cross pollination of clients programs and services, increasing the likelihood that clients will seek out this new service in the future, or be comfortable transitioning during breaks in service delivery.

More Central Location, Outreach

Transportation was highlighted as an important factor in service delivery. One participant shared that this is one reason why they chose to bring elders to the Centre regularly, because they realized that clients did not have transportation to come and see them. One participant also shared that their new and more central location resulted in more non-Indigenous people visiting the centre: “More non-Aboriginal people are coming in, more inquisitive, because location is more central and the agency has been setting up booths.”

Committees, Mandatory Partnerships and Policies – Finding Common Goals Important

One participant offered the following caution--“Strengthening our present community partnerships and creating new ones--*provided we have common goals.*” This comment seemed to capture a key factor when talking about what helps the TNFC work with community and partners – common goals. Committees were often mentioned as a successful means for connecting around a similar topic, developing longstanding and trusting relationships, and broaching hard to tackle issues and topics, while policies and protocols were used as vehicles for clarifying goals, roles and responsibilities, and addressing important issues after relationships were well under way.

Mandatory partnerships required by certain funders also offered opportunities for the TNFC to work with traditionally hard to reach partners, like child welfare or probation, yet the level of the partner organization’s cultural awareness still played an important role in the dynamic and integrity of the relationship. During these relationships, literally finding common ground -- like a neutral park – was useful in moving forward together in a good way. Cultural awareness training and establishing policies and protocols were useful in ensuring culturally safe partnerships. One participant shared how the Ministry of Corrections started a project off in a good way by offering tobacco to Elders at its inception, and how this contributed to the ongoing health of the project and partnership from the outset.

5. What would you say are the main factors that make it difficult to work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

While many of the factors mentioned below show what makes it difficult for the Friendship Centre to work with its community and partners, some of the quotes also illustrate how the Friendship Centre responds.

Emerging Themes

Racism and Discrimination Affect Working Relationships, Partnerships, Referrals

When asked what factors make it difficult, many participants, unanimously responded, “racism” or “discrimination”, almost at the same time! It was overwhelmingly, the most prominent response. Numerous participants shared their experiences of organizations that would not work with them, or publicly “bashed” the Friendship Centre’s programs. However, as you can see, the following quotes also demonstrate perseverance and problem solving, using tools like education.

[Name of organization] – won't work with them; homeless shelter... but it's not from lack of trying. It's purely they think, 'The Indians get all the money.' That doesn't stop us from picking the phone up and sending somebody out there that needs a place to stay. As long as they have money, they will take them. If they don't, they send them back.

We still get people calling it ... 'devil program'. That's coming from our sister church down the road. A lot of education has to happen. I went to offer them some insight. 'Let's teach your congregation on this; it's all spiritual. I will come here with my group to educate your congregation.'

Mainstream Agencies Lack Cultural Understanding, Knowledge Regarding Impact of Residential Schools, Trauma

Another theme that became even more prominent in this portion of the discussion—although it ran through the entire conversation--was the lack of cultural and historical knowledge exhibited by mainstream and/or non-Indigenous organizations. Essentially, they were considered to be “trauma un-informed” and “culturally un-safe”!

One participant talked about how they were doing a gym night in collaboration with another organization and the workers [from the mainstream agency] segregated the Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients: “The other workers from the agency set up the chairs in the gym so that their white families could sit on one side, and the Aboriginal families could sit on the other side. We fixed that very quickly!”

Another participant offered the example of how one agency's procedures for filling out forms were also not culturally informed, stating, “They had brought papers to sign for their agency, but a lot of First Nations people might not understand what you are saying. ‘Well, sign here, here, and here.’ ... How it looks to First Nations people: ‘I'm going to sign this so you can go away.’ So we had to have a few conversations about First Nations approaches. ‘How does what you're doing look?’ The families being there in the first place, was a HUGE step....” While there were many challenges during program delivery, she went on to say that, over time, the partnership improved: “Towards the end of the partnership, things got better. We expressed our feelings on what they were doing. They didn't know what they were doing.”

Participants shared experiences of other, similar misunderstandings, not only with cultural awareness, but also at the organizational level. One participant recollected, “Remember when Probation came at the end of the day? The court had released a guy into the Friendship Centre's custody. Just an example of how they misunderstand the services that we offer.”

Funding: Insufficient / Lack of Sustainable Funding / Cutbacks

Insufficient funding and cutbacks were mentioned when speaking of challenges. One participant said, “We don't get enough money to do what we need to do.” While a business savvy approach contributes to the successful growth of their budget to 4 million a year, it was also acknowledged that this is, “not a sustainable model” and that, “it could crash anytime.”

Participants suggested that “with all the government cutbacks, we are being forced to work together.” They referenced specific policies, funding, and initiatives requiring mainstream organizations to work with Indigenous organizations. For example, the “Aboriginal framework on education – they have no choice but to partner. Some of the things we have to tell them, they don't like.” The relationships were

riddled with challenges. Another participant elaborated, “Through different provincial initiatives, they don’t have a choice to come and knock on our doors for help.” Another said,

One of the things that brought them to us -- they can only get funding if they partner with an Aboriginal agency. We had to constantly remind them that it’s a partnership. It’s the same program. We need to align our paper work. They would have a seven page form. Ours would be one. But that is just how they have always done things. They had never really partnered with us before.

In these examples, the language used reflects negative experiences with such partnerships, and of having to fulfill the role of being the “helper” as opposed to being an equal partner, working within a healthy collaborative relationship.

Last, participants also shared the challenges of working with provincial funders and the bureaucratic and administrative challenges of proposal writing and reporting.

How does your organization address these challenges?

Many of the ways the Friendship Centre works with the community and its partners already reflect the main factors that address these challenges. However, the following factors are noted here because they came up often.

We Ask Our Grandfathers/Mothers to Help... and Bring Back the Missing Chapter

Again, grounding solutions in cultural teachings and worldviews was mentioned often. When some staff experienced challenges, they invited grandfathers and mothers to offer guidance. Throughout the discussion, when challenges were mentioned and solutions discussed, one participant said, “it all starts with your spirit name.” Also recognizing the impact of residential school, and working within a trauma-informed lens, participants offered guidance on solutions for clients, such as appropriate types of programs: “They are suffering ‘cause parenting skills and discipline is all in chaos. Hook them up with behaviour programs/modifications, treatment programs/centres. One of the things I know is lacking here is family treatment.”

One participant suggested that when he experiences challenges working with certain partners, he ‘just goes ahead with it.’ He said, “Because of our history, there is a lot of animosity towards this place. We had a lot of unhealthy people. That prevents these partnerships from happening. How do you work with people like that? I just don’t tell them, I go ahead and do it.” Again referring to history, one participant shared how education will help: “We are trying to educate that race because of something they created. Many people are non-native and don’t know our ways. We are just trying to sort it out, so history doesn’t repeat itself.”

Making Presentations, Meeting Regularly with Mainstream Agencies, Governments ... and Doing It Together

Public education and presentations, booths, sitting on committees, capitalizing on mistakes from something gone wrong, being a part of large scale events like the Kayak Challenge and Canada, just being present, were all mentioned as solutions.

One participant also recognized that Friendship Centres “are better prepared to handle this stuff ‘cause we have staff that can do presentations and go out and do different things.” Another participant

recognized the impacts of projects like this research project because it encourages people to sit down, “at meetings like this and discuss stuff like this” and that “having all the EDs sit down and see what people are doing and what are all the gaps” helps too.

Collaborating and partnering to develop specific and whole community responses were also mentioned. For example, one participant suggested that we need to “co-present with other agencies on cultural safety—don’t become the ‘go to’ – become part of a community response.” One participant stated, we need to, “Change the question from, ‘What are YOU going to do about it, to what are WE going to do about it?’”

Participants also believe that we need to identify what roles organizations like the Friendship Centre will play and who the professionals in the community are who will collaborate in the development of public education presentations. He asked, “What role will we play as a Centre here, to carry that message [truth and reconciliation] out there? Who are those professional people who will conduct those workshops to educate mainstream?” He went on to suggest that the solution is in bringing those people together: “I think that is what my goal is; it is to bring those people together.”

Another person shared that working together is the root of the Centre’s success, “We have been operating in silos for too long and have different outlooks. That is the success of this centre, programs and different agencies working together.”

Having Certain People in Certain Roles

Whether it was cultural workers who spoke Cree and Ojibway, or executive directors, executive assistants and bookkeepers who were innovative and business savvy, or Ministry workers who know about Indigenous protocols, like offering tobacco, specific skills and flexibility are needed for success in certain roles.

Protocols and Cultural Safety Training Policies

Participants offered numerous examples of how protocols and cultural safety training positively affected their working relationships with certain partners over time – including historically hard to work with partners like Children’s Aid or Probation and Parole.

After hearing from staff about the positive developments in a working relationship with [name of organization], the Executive director shared the history behind that relationship, and the creation of protocols.

When I hear how our organizations are working together and how this has improved, this is really historical, considering what has happened in the past, this is important to know where we come from and create changes respectively.

She added,

I think back to 2007 when I noticed we were having march break activity, lots of people in our little gym, that is a worker from [name of agency], she is conducting a family visit, with 100 other people. That is not ok. Later on, I said, Wow, I struck up a conversation with the ED of [name of agency], she said, this is how it has always been done, but, I said, we are gonna change it. Family visits should be done in private to give them dignity and respect. A protocol was developed.

Similarly, another participant mentioned the impact of contracts developed ‘in a good way’,

For the past 4 years, we have entered into contracts with probation and parole, to deliver prevention programs for the adults. When we first took the contract, we had it at the common area, we use to have to smudge outside. We had a spot in the front, with the vending machines. People said they didn't like the space, and it was changed, to a spot/office ... where they had a healer present. We get the Friendship Centre staff to come in and talk about things happening in their life, relationships, etc. and how this impacts their outcomes. It's through that contract that the ministry actually got it right because, they actually gave tobacco to elders, to help develop that program.

Last, a participant described how organizations need to move beyond cultural competency and into safety, and how policy can aid in this transition.

I applaud [name of agency] for doing what they do and continuing to do what they do, providing training to their staff, around culturally safety. It's time to move beyond cultural competency and into safety. So they actually created policy, because they like policy, that their workers (staff 200 almost) they receive cultural safety training at least every two years, that came out of a statement, from senior managers.

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“This is a starting point” one participant stated, moving forward in her chair. “We were brought together in this room for a reason.” Her hand rested on the papers in front of her. “This can’t be the end of what you’re doing. This goes against everything. I am only one person and not reflective of the community. It feels wrong and goes against how we gather and share knowledge. You can tell them I said that, too!” Her laughter filled the room.

Interview Participant, North Bay Friendship Centre

Interview and Historical Context

Interview Context

Two group interviews took place at the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre (NBIFC). Because of longstanding connections with the North Bay community, the interviewer was able to draw on past relationships with seven participants in total.

‘Research-Wise’ Participants

The interview participants, and many other agency staff and community members, had been involved in carrying out a two-year community-driven Indigenous research project called Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive (U-ACT). Well-versed in their understanding of research and confident in their views about ethically gathering and sharing knowledge, the participants shared concerns about *this* research process and the wording of the questions along with expressing interest in reviewing the material generated. For the participants, the process was not community driven, nor as the quote above demonstrates, did it reflect how they would approach the topic. They raised concerns about: not understanding the full why or how of the overall project; wondering how the particular questions would be of use to them; and, how they would own the information and use it.

Further, at times, the wording of the questions was a barrier. Some of the participants had difficulty with the word ‘scope’ for example. One participant called her mom to ask about the Cree translation for the word and later sent along her reflections on that discussion by email:

My mom said, "That doesn't work in the Nish way." Even when I tried to explain to her what the meaning of scope was, she just didn't understand because what you do in a community, like ours, can't work everywhere. So the way she repeated it back to me, trying to understand what I meant, was like "the White way of trying to make us all the same." When we know what we need in our communities, and if we can share and help each other that's great, but there is no way we can put together a model or service or program that would work the same way it works here - all things have life, move and change and transform with time - so it will never be the way we intend it to be. It's actually fascinating to me how different that is, like mom just can't wrap her mind around it because why do we try to find a word for making something affect everyone? So bizarre, but so simple ...we just can't have all the answers!!

However, once the concept was grasped during the interview, the participants had a great deal to say on the topic. To some extent, the probes accompanying the questions (e.g. *local, provincial, national, and international*) excluded the important familial and relational approach the participants used when sharing their answers, often reflecting Indigenous worldviews. For example, the participants situated themselves in relation to the topic, taking into account notions of heritage and familial relations (referring to “my mother’s family”). In addition, some of the questions and probes seemed to overlook Indigenous concepts of space, capacity and breadth. In some instances, the participants brought forward these concepts and/or supplied their own understandings of the various terms.

More Research Needed to Obtain Fuller Picture

Participants also made it clear that they were either not the “best person to talk to about all of the services” or that further research was needed with many more service providers to obtain an accurate reflection of the service delivery landscape in North Bay. At the end of the discussion, they decided to organize another gathering with ‘key informants’ who would have a lot to say on some of the topics they felt they could not speak to. They also spoke about writing about their role and participation in this project. One of the participants will be visiting other Friendship Centres to learn more about what they are doing, what they have to say about service delivery, and about this process as a whole. This particular participant is in a unique position to share her learnings with others and feels ethically responsible to do so in a good way.

North Bay Indian Friendship Centre - Historical and Organizational Context

The North Bay Indian Friendship Centre (NBIFC) has been in operation for 40 years, opening its doors in 1974, and becoming the fourteenth Indian Friendship Centre in Ontario. Originally, the Centre was located in a small building on the corner of Cassells and Third Avenue – originally an old Church with a dirt floor – then the Centre moved to its current location at 980 Cassells Street in 1978 (Aboriginal Economic Development Network Web site).

In addition to supporting Indigenous people as they moved to the city of North Bay from their reserve communities, the NBIFC also had a key goal of offering a “gathering place” for the 600 or so Indigenous students who came from Manitoulin Island and James Bay area communities, to attend schools in North Bay (Aboriginal Economic Development Network Web site).

The Centre currently operates with a board of ten elected directors and two appointed members (an Elder and a student representative) and was historically described as a “non-political, non- sectarian, autonomous social service agency existing to administer and implement programs to meet the needs of the Native people either migrating to North Bay or living in North Bay.” (Aboriginal Economic Development Network Web site).

The mission of the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre (NBIFC) is to improve the quality of life for urban Indigenous people in the City of North Bay and surrounding area by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access and participation in Canadian society and which respect Indigenous cultural distinctiveness. Historically, aims and objectives of the Centre were described as “providing] a medium for Native and non-Native people and development of mutual understanding through common activities; to stimulate and assist Native self-expression and the development of Native leadership and planning of service through public and private agencies” (Aboriginal Economic Development Network Web site).

Currently, the Centre offers “25 programs addressing Pre-Natal to Elderly and everything in between” and has the ability to service clientele in English, French, and Cree. Signage posted in the front reception area demonstrates the Centre’s ability to provide services in these languages. Some major accomplishments of the Centre include running a homeless shelter, which was situated directly behind the Friendship Centre. In 2012, the Centre opened the Medicine Wheel Health Way Clinic (a nurse practitioner’s office) and in 2015, launched North Bay’s Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

Addressing the questions... the interview

1. Please describe your organization and the people that you serve

Because this was the first interview of all the sites, it was a little more formal, following the questions and probes closely. However, we quickly realized the formality was not working, with wording like *scope* and *populations* being very confusing to two of the participants in particular. So, we spent a lot of time talking about the meaning of the questions, then answering them. When we spoke about *scope*, they agreed that *reach* worked better, and when we talked about the *mission of the organization*, it was agreed that it was okay for them to speak from their hearts, because the formality of the question put some participants on the spot trying to remember specific wording. Supporting documents, such as an annual report, were requested.

Emerging Themes

Being ‘the Voice’ and Serving Indigenous People

In answering the question about mission and mandate, the participants recited their formal missions, showing some of the commonalities and differences:

To be the voice of urban Aboriginal people for the next five years, through our initiatives and through our community action circles, and through partnerships.

To service urban Aboriginal people, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, as well as non-aboriginal people, in North Bay and Nipissing region.

However, once they moved further into the questions, they layered in their own personal visions and values, highlighting the role and importance of the NBIFC in amplifying the voice of urban Indigenous community members.

Having a voice...for many years as Aboriginal People we have sat, listened and...not feeling like we had a voice. Within the last ten or 15 years, we are out there saying, ‘this is what we want and this is what we want to see.’ We have doctors, lawyers, and judges, etc., all from a community of 250...Being able to speak, and knowing and having confidence in what we are saying is right. And we are doing it in a way we are not going to hurt people. We don’t need to be a violent people; our voice is very strong now.

This same participant went on to share her vision for the organization: “Being authentic and being what we are...” While another participant related her comment to her own personal journey, “If I wasn’t

walking the red road, especially in this role, people wouldn't buy in to what we are trying to do. This is key." Similarly, another participant spoke about how her values influence how she engages with Elders, which Elders she involves in programs, and how programs are structured and publicized.

The previous statements demonstrate how participants situated 'self' within the conversation and these threads continued throughout the meeting. So while participants shared information about "formal missions," they also included comments reflecting personal visions, ways of life, ways of seeing the world, and notions of identity, space, heritage and historical roots, etc.

Diverse People are Served

The diversity of people served is wide ranging, including Métis, non-status, urban Indigenous, First Nations, on-reserve people who utilize urban programs, and anyone who wants to come into the Friendship Centre. Simply put, "No one would be turned away."

A high percentage of people arriving at the doors of the Friendship Centre come from the James Bay Coast, speaking English as their second or third language and Cree, Oji Cree and French as their first languages. In 2013, U-ACT reported similar findings after carrying out interviews with over 30 North Bay mental health service delivery staff and Friendship Centre staff. The perception at that time was that approximately 75% of their clientele was coming from James Bay coastal communities and were often young, single mothers or families coming to the area to attend school.

Métis, non-status, urban Aboriginal, first nations – anyone who wants to come into the friendship centre. We have on our Community Action Circle [CAC] non-Aboriginal organizations that participate as well. More than half for sure are non-aboriginal, on the CAC, currently out of 65 there, approximately 35. They contribute to the larger CAC, they will sit on different committees, including labour, justice, sustainability, cultural safety, event planning, and children youth and elders. CAC members sit on other committees as well in the community to pool resources and reduce overlap in the community.

The Friendship Centre also views the broader public as part of its service delivery mandate because the Centre provides them with opportunities to learn more about and experience "authentic" Indigenous cultures and foods, etc.

Engage 150 people each year, on top of CAC, and initiatives, increases by 150 each year. We already surpassed it with the conference and with U-ACT as well.

As these comments suggest, "populations served" go well beyond Indigenous people "receiving" services from Friendship Centre programs. There is a strong and active outreach component working towards making North Bay a culturally aware and safe space for Indigenous people.

Scope Means Many Things

As noted, participants added their own understanding of the term *scope*. For example, participants identified the *cultural affiliations* of the people being described as opposed to limiting themselves to using only geographical boundaries: "James Bay Cree communities," "French-speaking Cree communities," "the MicMac out east," etc.

Scope was also defined in terms of relationships—interactions with a give and take nature. Instead of the using the word "local" for example, one participant spoke of family, community, dedicated workers,

volunteers and the board of directors pushing NBIFC to be visible in the community. “By being out there, and being visible and transparent, it shows people in the community what the Friendship Centre is doing! Very public, transparent and balanced.”

The key to keeping the community engaged is that they know that I am hearing them. I am supposed to be the voice for urban Aboriginal people, so they need to know that I am listening to them. That means taking criticisms sometimes, and responding to it by changing how we are doing things. People need to know that I am hearing them.

Participants commented that events (funded at times by one-off funding) can play an important role in expanding a project’s reach, bridging across Indigenous groups or increasing understanding of a target population. For example, Nipissing’s current research project is looking at the scope of their current services to better understand how far the reach truly is.

As well participants went beyond talking about the “populations” served directly, by identifying the potential reach of knowledge dissemination, outreach, funding, policy and program support:

Our Walking Together Sharing Together Conference--the scope was national, Vancouver, Micmac, International. It was shared so many times, particularly the media coverage in North Bay... people on the NBIFC who like and follow our events... we are attracting international.

Dissemination is supposed to go beyond Nipissing University. Our findings will be shared with other post-secondary institutions for example.

The Friendship Centre movement is national, provincial – Friendship Centres are a real network.

For the participants, when meetings take place with funders or learning is shared through reports, new knowledge is reaching them. Similarly, they view the way Friendship Centres work together as a “movement” sharing issues and information, advancing practices and causes.

2. Please describe the service(s) or program(s) that your organization offers.

Participants described a holistic circle of services and programs that support community members as they move through the lifecycle – and beyond. Recently a founding and active NBIFC member passed away. The Friendship Centre held a ceremony for her and her family, offering support to her family and the community during this challenging time.

When participants were describing the services offered by the Friendship Centre, their comments reflected various stages of life – “prenatal to Elder care,” often recognizing that clients will move through and draw on different programs. They spoke more about approach—holistic and circular—and less about individual program mandates. Instead participants described the philosophy behind services, or the times when there might appear to be “gaps” in services. However, these gaps were not true gaps at all. They were rich services in and of themselves—connectors between the community and programs – playing a very important role in the organization. Despite the fact that the organization has no formal crisis response worker or dedicated crisis response program, the Friendship Centre responds to clients or community members in crisis on a daily basis. Two examples help illustrate this point.

Consider the front desk or reception area of the Friendship Centre. One participant said, “Clients are often very frustrated by the time they have gotten to us...they have been to other agencies, where they have been told ‘no’ numerous times, and now they are coming here to find some kind of resolve. So by the time they hit our doors, they are already agitated, upset, depressed, on the brink...by the time they hit reception, it is the person’s job to say, ‘Okay, we’re here to help, let’s try and see what we can do for you.’ So they have to know, what do the programs do, what services are there here, and out in the community. You need to know how to approach the program staff.”

Participants agreed that front desk staff and the reception area is a “crisis response” space daily, and that the receptionist is often a crisis worker—that first point of contact for clients, making sure they are immediately cared for and directed to the appropriate program.

Another participant offered this example: “A client came in at 4:15. He was overwhelmed. He put himself in the hospital. They released him and he didn’t feel safe. He had gone to so many other agencies. Another staff and I spent till 5:30. We were able to figure out a plan for the weekend, with emergency numbers to contact. He was so grateful that we spent an hour with him because he felt like he was being rejected everywhere else.”

The point is, if we rely solely on looking at the list of programs offered by the Centre, important services like ‘crisis response’ and safety planning would be missed. These ‘services’ don’t have a specific name and they aren’t funded. And yet they are provided daily, almost happening in between the listed programs, playing a key role in connecting community members to urgently needed support and into the programs offered by the Friendship Centre.

Emerging Themes

Programs Reflect the Lifespan, Teachings

Participants described programs and services that reflect the lifespan, “with each program within the Friendship Centre [having] a cultural component and a healthy living component. There are referrals to Elders, education, healthy living. Our services cover preconception to Elder care – our oldest elder is 95.”

Not only are programs described as having a cultural element, but one participant spoke also about how her vision is to infuse ceremonies, feasts, and round dances into the very fabric of the organization, moving *beyond* culture as a *component* of a service. She described how this authenticity will foster engagement with the community,

A list of current programs provided by a participant:

Drug & Alcohol, Pre-Natal Nutrition, FASD Community Support, Life Long Care (2), Wasa Nabin, Children’s Mental Health and Addictions(2), Health Outreach , Akwe:go, Akwe:go Enhanced, Family Support, Healthy Living, Healthy Living/Healthy Kids, Native Inmate Liaison Worker, Apatisiwin Employment unit, Healthy Babies, Criminal Court Worker, Family Court Worker, Waaban, Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niln, Medicine Wheel Healthy Way Clinic, Healing and Wellness, North Bay’s Urban Aboriginal Strategy

My vision, as the new ED, is to have more ceremonies, more round dances, traditional feasts, with traditional foods and Elders. Being authentic and being what we are is my vision, having Elders with profiles, having accessible Elders. I have been with the Friendship Centre for many years. I have a vision, baby steps right now. More culture will bring the community in and encourage them to come in – no matter what race.

Connectors to Culture and Programs

When asked to describe the services or programs offered, participants readily described the ‘connections between programs,’ demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of not only a program or service itself, but also the active web connecting the services within and beyond program walls. For example, they described moments where programs overlapped and collaboratively held events and feasts for specific occasions like Powwows. At first glance, a Powwow or feast is neither a program nor a service, yet they were readily mentioned in this section because the participants clearly recognize them as key components connecting people to cultures, connecting people to the NBIFC community and beyond, connecting the Friendship Centre to the broader community, and to partners. Powwows and feasts are delivering services.

Crisis Response and “First Point of Contact” Services

Returning to the crisis-response services and examples provided earlier, it is important to highlight these services not only because of their critical role in the overall service picture of the organization but also because they are not formally funded or identified in the list of services. One participant stressed that, “very competent administration staff” are vital to Centre operations and therefore considered part of the “services or programs delivered.” Indeed, administrative and reception staff are viewed as one of the most fundamental links, offering clients that ‘first point of contact’ experience and connecting them to programs.

Navigating Jurisdictional Mazes

This topic came through when speaking of people who were coming to the Centre from northern communities, often speaking English as a second language. Complex family issues result in workers juggling jurisdictional issues, translation services, family treatment, concurrent issues, medical transportation out of town, etc. At these times, restrictive mandates and budgets posed challenges.

3. How do you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

Emerging Themes

Grounding Our Work in Indigenous Worldviews and Teachings

For some participants, teachings were not only a part of a service offered or a piece of cultural competency training, they informed the very lens of *why* partnerships are now happening. For example, “The eighth fire, the eighth fire talks about a time when we are going to have to share our knowledge with mainstream, we couldn’t do that for a long time because they wanted to control it, but the way the world works is changing, they are starting to look at us and say, ‘Your ideas were smart’ ...they are starting to embrace that knowledge...”

Another participant echoed the above sentiment, reiterating that culture is more than an *aspect* of a service; it can *be* the service—the why, the how and the when of service delivery. One participant said,

We are getting into a partnership with [name of well-respected Elder] – more of a cultural component--we need more of this at the centre. The community itself, outside of the building, want to see more about this. ...have more ceremonies, more round dances, traditional feasts, with traditional foods and Elders...

The above quote highlights how the Centre hopes to engage with Indigenous communities and resources by integrating the roles of Elders and other knowledge keepers. She believes this approach will ‘bring the community in.’ Similarly, she noted how annual cultural events like the Centre Powwow are great opportunities to draw in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community, to experience Indigenous cultures and work with the Centre. “Our Big Powwow and festival will draw thousands of people and give people an opportunity to work with us or attend and experience Indigenous cultures.”

Involving Elders and Youth

The important roles of both Elders and youth were also noted during the discussion. Participants spoke about how involving youth and Elders was essential to “what we do”—they influence and strengthen programs and help connect the community.

Elders perform important roles and their involvement in the work of the Friendship Centre was highlighted (and will be addressed in other sections of this report, too.) Here, some examples will help illustrate how the Friendship Centre works with them.

During the UACT Project, Elders offered prayers at the start of Community Action Circle meetings and when community members wanted something done “in a good way,” that meant they wanted Elders involved in the process. When a large conference was held in the spring 2015, five Elders were asked to come and be available to offer support in case people attending the conference were triggered by some of the discussion involving residential schools.

One participant talked about how the Friendship Centre relies on Elders and at the same time facilitates them carrying out their responsibilities to the community. For example, some people hold the belief that the role of Elders is to give back to the community, offering sweat lodges and ceremonies, etc. In this respect, when the Centre involves Elders in these ways, the Centre is helping them to carry out what they are here to do. This perspective also brings up the issue of honoraria. Most times, funding does not include giving honoraria to Elders, even though they may be performing very important roles. When one holds the belief that Elders are expected to “give back,” then an honorarium may not be appropriate or expected in the situation. If however you follow the belief that people should be recognized in a tangible way for their contributions, then not having funding for honoraria creates ethical dilemmas and financial challenges.

Recalling a quote from the report, *A Child Becomes Strong*, Aboriginal Youth, “...do the work of the people and contribute to the betterment of their nation.”⁴ While the Centre offered services to 338 youth clients in 2014, the participants recognize youth also play key roles in outreach and decision making within the organization. For example, one youth position is held on the board, and the Centre

⁴ http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/CBS_Final_K12A.pdf

had a very active Youth Action Circle that contributed to and helped guide large scale research initiatives and partnerships with Nipissing University, CURA and the District of Nipissing Social Service Board.

Youth are also viewed as “partners” and stakeholders, as older youth are often engaged in mentoring opportunities with younger youth at the Centre, as well as serving in key roles such as “fire keepers,” “head dancers” and committee members. During Community Action Circle meetings, youth played roles in guiding focus groups with the mayor, chief of police and many other community partners.

Youth are also leading initiatives, with the support of the OFIFC. One participant said, “OFIFC youth initiative—they are doing a water project. As the NBIFC, we are not purchasing any more bottled water. Anything that goes on here, there will be no more water bottles.”

Space and Visible Presence

Space, in both the physical and theoretical sense, was discussed as a key factor in how the Friendship Centre works with the community and with partners. A large mural painted on the exterior wall of a centrally located building and the new site of the Centre’s Annual Powwow in North Bay’s downtown help to expand on this idea.

One participant said that a key goal of the organization is to, “Make Aboriginal people more visible and a part of the culture of North Bay—arts culture, economic culture, inserting themselves in all aspects of North Bay life.” She went on to offer the example of how the Friendship Centre helps to *infuse* an Indigenous presence in a very busy and prominent downtown core and helped connect artists, community and mainstream community members and organizations to each other through the process.

Fostering partnerships is a role of the UAS. We are often a facilitator between partnerships. For example, the partnership between [name of organization]--they were looking for a space or wall to gift the city with a mural. I worked to connect her with the city...We found a wall... in the downtown core of North Bay. UAS inserted ourselves into that! We got [name of person]-- a gifted Aboriginal youth artist involved to offer First Nations influence to the project. Just an example of how the UAS works to foster partnerships. Northern partners and people here, coming together, to create a mural in downtown North Bay.

The mural is physical. It is noticed by community members and people working in nearby organizations. But the mural also represents an infusion of “Indigeneity” into mainstream space.

When the Powwow grounds moved to Oak Street, a main artery in downtown North Bay, the impact was even more dramatic. It was immediate *and* lasting and it too was experienced on a number of levels. Imagine Teepees standing in the middle of a mainstream scenic area. Teepees were now being seen in a different light by all community members. Indigenous community members spoke about how good it made them feel, how proud they felt, how beautiful it was to see the Teepees standing there. For some, it means the Indigenous community is re-asserting its presence--Indigeneity is alive and well in North Bay.

Participants also spoke of the importance of physical space when it comes to programs, describing not only the services that are offered or accessed at the Friendship Centre, but also the space where Elders reside in buildings. One participant observed, “At Canadore, the Elder has her own office” echoing again the notion of an indigenous presence in an otherwise mainstream, academic space.

Last, the Centre offers a consistent, predictable and welcoming space for Indigenous community members to come for help and to come together for celebrations. This same space also welcomes the non-Indigenous community to come together with the Indigenous community to learn in a non-threatening way.

The Friendship Centre and the UAS provide a space for the CAC to come together, some [participants] have never seen a smudge. Those people are coming into the space and get to experience the culture in a 'non-throwing it in their face,' teaching them in a kind way, comfortable asking questions.

One participant talked about how her search for “cultural spaces” is a motivating factor for why she engages with certain Elders or people within the urban Indigenous and local First Nation communities. For example, she will work with a Studio on the local First Nation or with Elders offering space and teachings to carry out full moon ceremonies or a sweat lodge. The participant spoke about how these spaces are integral to the program she is running, and yet at the same time are informally networked and grounded in appropriate protocols, teachings and values of reciprocity and community.

Recognizing “Hubs” and Committees Actively Increase Visibility, Foster Connections, Lead to Positive Changes

When asked, *How do you work with your community partners?*, participants readily stated they worked with partners on advisory committees, various other committees and through service hubs. Friendship Centre staff stressed the vital need to connect with and foster relationships with people beyond the Friendship Centre walls to help bring people in *and* help, “increase the visibility of Indigenous people in North Bay’s urban community.”

One participant spoke about how participating on the HUB, a community case conferencing system, helped the Centre become more visible, encourages communication between partners with the same client, and sustains relationships. She said, “With community and partners, many program staff sit on committees. We have our own committees; we do a lot of social engagements... The HUB--since we have had a relationship through the HUB, we have been more out there. Us as an organization, we can call community counselling or they call us about a client. It helps in sustaining relationships.”

The recent launch of the North Bay Urban Aboriginal Strategy is viewed as a vehicle that will foster more partnerships, and be the “facilitator between partnerships” offering a regular monthly space for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to come together around a variety of “industry specific areas like labour, mental health, health, cultural safety, sustainability, justice and other emerging topics in the community.” One participant shared her hopes of establishing reciprocal and cooperative relationships: “My current hope is to put together an advisory committee. UAS has offered to be a part of it—as a researcher, past [Nipissing] student, Director from Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, on advisory, they are cooperative, yes. If there is any benefit to themselves that would be great. I do not want people to feel forced, I would hope relationships are cooperative.”

Relationships and Drawing on Natural, Personal Relationships

“How we work”—by actively including the community, using cultural teachings and practices, partnering with others, etc.—all described in the previous section, are the same factors that help the participants work with their respective communities and partners. In addition, the following factors were also mentioned:

Right off the start, leading with building relationships and building connections with people who are gently working in this field, working in a natural way, not steam rolling. Sounds so simple. Leading with relationships whose sole purpose is not to just meet their own objectives.

Combination of natural relationships...born and raised here... been coming to Friendship Centre since I was a kid. But have met lots of people who participated in UACT, people who are engaged in the project – family and friends, people are all connected. Draw on those.

Initiating and Actively Reaching Out to Partners, Not Waiting for Them to Come to Us

Whether connecting with cultural or other partners, projects like the UAS offer active outreach to community partners – after all, a key goal of the project is to connect. One participant spoke about how she has taken to literally “knocking on doors and harassing them” to reconnect with partners because a “gap in programming was an issue when we were awaiting funding,” resulted in stagnant partnerships. “Persistence,” “personal apologies and relationship building,” and going “back a third time,” are all key to re-connecting.

At the same time, this kind of approach is not used or supported by everyone—some community members work very differently. One participant described her own approach, strongly rooted in her teachings: “I don’t post times or locations, if people want to come, they will find their way there. They will call me.” This perspective stems from the view that people will find their way to programs, teachings, or the Centre, “when they are meant to.”

4. What would you say are the main factors that help you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

Overall, what stood out during this part of the conversation were factors that help transcend or bridge geographies, worldviews, programs, etc. For example, NBIFC staff who previously worked in mainstream organizations and “brought” relationships and potential partnerships with them were identified as important in partnering with historically hard to reach services like child welfare or police. Staff who could “walk in different worlds” were identified as key people in bridging divides between Indigenous and mainstream organizations.

This part of the discussion also helped us recognize that attending more to Indigenous worldviews regarding relationships might mean we would ask and explore different questions. So, for example, rather than asking if partnerships are *collaborative*, we could ask if they are *reciprocal*.

Emerging Themes

Location

Having a central location is key to offering services to Indigenous communities, in part because it offers a place to meet that is “central” (i.e. in the middle of things as opposed to being far from things) and because transportation was continually mentioned as a barrier in service delivery. In addition, being the “big brown building” on a street that is considered a main traffic artery in the city is also helpful in building visibility within the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

People

Dedicated staff, volunteers, and board members play important roles in NBIFC and when working with community and partners by showing commitment and support, and also by being out in the community. One participant said, “The community, the workers, dedicated workers who want to see us grow and who want to be out there, not just in the Office. Volunteers and a board being out there in the community.”

In addition, specific staff members play vital roles in bridging boundaries. Participants who had previously worked in mainstream organizations—particularly in “hard to partner with organizations” and/or those organizations with “difficult histories”—described how working in the mainstream helped them build on past cooperative relationships, bringing them forward into their new positions. One participant offered this story: “I was having a hard time getting representatives from the organization to attend meetings, despite their commitment, so I met with my old boss. She said, ‘If someone doesn’t respond, call me right away and I’ll make sure someone is there.’” Since then, they have attended every meeting and become an essential part of the committee. Many other positives are coming from this as well, including cultural safety training, workshops and protocols that are now being developed between the organizations.

Also mentioned was the central role certain staff play in offering services to community members who are new to the city. Staff from the James Bay coastal communities are looked to, on an almost daily basis, as an initial point of contact for the high numbers of coastal community residents relocating to North Bay. The “newcomers” are often initially connected to the staff member via community partners because of translation needs, but sometimes it is because the clients already know them from the home community and request them by name! One participant mentioned that he spends most of his time responding to such requests, and this has an impact on his day-to-day duties. Although these are all seen to be positive community relationships and partnerships, requests for translation or support services often involve working after hours and blur into personal time. Despite these challenges, participants clearly indicate that, “having staff who work from various communities” increases the responsiveness and effectiveness of the Centre.

Flexible Funding and Bartering

Funding is a key factor in helping the NBIFC work with the community and its partners. Participants talked about how certain projects like UACT (now UAS) with its flexible and diversely funded portfolio—including funds from Trillium, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, Ministry of Health, and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres—allowed the project to respond to a range of community needs and requests which fell outside of more restrictive program mandates and budgets.

Being able to meet those needs strengthened relationships among Friendship Centre programs and the project, with a great deal of “bartering” going on. For example, UACT had a budget for Elders, honoraria and food. Accordingly, the programs helped UACT by offering access to Elders, youth, clients and an array of established program and community partners. UACT could then work with them through the programs, helping to cover much-needed costs at the same time. Overall, participants spoke of how this strengthened the network and image of the Centre, both inside and outside. Funding from prominent funders like Trillium or the Innovation Fund that engages the public and generates media coverage also helps NBIFC “show people in the community... what we are doing.”

Sound Financial Practices

“Five years of sound financial practices” was identified as an essential factor when talking about what helps when working with community and partners. One participant stressed how the organization diligently adheres to budgets and program mandates and reports on such achievements. Another spoke about how the organization had not been able to access funding like Trillium in the past. However, over the last five years, financial practices have been sound, receiving recognition for excellence, enabling the organization to undertake large projects specifically designed for partnership development. It has also encouraged successful professionals to join the organization and the board of directors and improved the image of the organization as a “credible” ally.

Follow Through, Partnership Development and Earning Reputation as an Enterprising Organization

Despite the positive public image currently described by participants, “about five or six years ago, we did not have a good image in the community [Indigenous and mainstream]. People did not want to partner with us because our reputation was tarnished.” One participant believes that “following up and following through with everything we said we were going to do is key to building trust and relationships” with both Indigenous and mainstream community partners. Operating in this fashion has helped change this image over the past few years. “That’s what we did with the *Red Road Report*,” said one, “we delivered what we said we were going to.” Another said, “We are a good viable option for the community now. Our image is changing, we have better connections.” Sound financial practices and transparency were noted again as important factors in improving public image, helping secure respected and skilled staff, board and volunteers.

Projects and collaborations like North Bay’s Urban Aboriginal Strategy and the HUB are recognized as leading to improved partnerships with the municipality, the police and mental health, CAS, big business and banks – all traditionally ‘hard to reach’ for the Friendship Centre. The executive director noted, “Political – we have got the support from the City of North Bay, Mayor Al. We noticed a big transition from UACT who built and strengthened those contacts, and continue to carry it on. We have strong relationships with Trillium.”

Also, participants mentioned viewing the Friendship Centre as a “business” or as “enterprising” particularly given the Powwow’s continued growth and success as it garners increased recognition as a tourist attraction and as an economic driver for the Friendship Centre, offering authentic Indigenous experiences to mainstream community members and partners.

Working within Indigenous Worldviews

Again, moving beyond thinking about cultural practices as a *component* of a program is important in working with partners and community. Cultural *practices* (not just programs) create a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous services and communities. For example, “Audrey did a smudge of the new building--the food bank requested it.” There is no staff member, service or program at the Friendship Centre that has “smudging” as a deliverable, yet partners are able to reach out to the Centre with this request. Again, round dances, available Elders, feasts, Powwows are all activities that engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, drawing them to the Centre. These activities don’t fall within “programs” or “services” but offer important points of learning and connection.

Participants also said that, “embracing this way of living with values like humility, being humble” allowed them to be transparent, encouraging strong relationships with community members and partners. One went on to say, “When you don’t know something – ask. Transparency. Present yourself like, open and

transparent, say 'I don't know.' Know your own strengths and draw on other's strengths that you are missing. We all have our own gifts."

Participants also shared widely-held beliefs about how people find their way to the Friendship Centre. Some come, because their Indigenous roots draw them to the Centre, sometimes with a desire to know and connect to their Indigenous heritage. Others come because their path brings them there. The "drive" to learn more about one's own heritage is strong, as one participant said, "The drive to learn more about your own heritage is a common thread. People find their way back to the Friendship Centre." Another said,

My own personal interest in my own heritage. Having a better understanding of my own Aboriginal roots and the history of my community. I didn't realize how much that would catch, and become very quickly a passion. Now I am bit obsessed finding out more about colonization. ...The glue is my own drive to help people, learn more about my own heritage and give a voice.

Another commonly held belief is that people of "mixed heritage" play key roles in partnership building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, because they are able to "walk in different worlds" or "bridge worlds." These views on relationships look at them less as "cooperative" or as "partnerships," but rather more as rooted in Indigenous worldviews or teachings that help us understand why some relationships ignite in certain ways.

Voice

The concept of voice came up throughout the discussion—how participants believe that the Friendship Centre now has a "strong voice," articulating the needs of the community and what the Centre needs from certain partners when it comes to offering services to the urban Indigenous community. Participants again referred to projects like UACT/UAS with funding like Trillium that helped the Centre develop its own public messages and define its own image.

Operating as a Centre...with Integrated Tracking Logs, Consent Forms and Shared Resources

One participant noted there is a new way of recording information through the National Association of Friendship Centres, hoping that others have access to the Integrated Data Base reporting tool because of how useful and accurate it is. "If people share a client, [staff] can all access [the information]." Another participant described how the universal North Bay Indian Friendship Centre consent form similarly helps staff "talk with each other," saying, "If I see that another staff has the same client, we can talk and make sure we are on the same page for the client."

Having vehicles that belong to the Centre (not just a program) for everyone's use and other common resources help everyone carry out their work. One said, "Even though things are purchased by certain programs, once year end hits, they should be the Centre's." Another said, "That's how things used to be, we shared, we had common things, common areas."

5. What would you say are the main factors that make it difficult to work with your community and other partners to deliver services? How do you address these challenges?

Emerging Themes

History Influences Today's Relationships

Across the board, four main parties were identified as "hard to partner" with: child welfare, justice, Métis and on-reserve organizations. Food banks and Salvation Army were also mentioned, but mainly because of business hours that are challenging for the community. "Big business," police, the municipality, and banks would have been previously included, but it was noted that this has changed recently as a result of strengthened relationships through new programs such as UACT/UAS and the growth of the Powwow as a tourist and economic endeavour.

One participant described the challenges of working with organizations like child welfare: "CAS--we have never had a real relationship with them. There is a wall because of residential school, colonialism, sixties scoop. Why? Because they think they are losing control of us. It's always been about control." The "wall" is a strong metaphor reflecting how enduring the feelings and concerns may still be about organizations like CAS and law enforcement--organizations that actively removed Indigenous children from homes and enforced colonialist policies.

"Territorial Ownership" and the Legacy of Colonialism

Participants spoke of 'territorial ownership' over funding and clients, "because we need to show the numbers." Participants mentioned how this territorial approach has been created and enforced by 'mainstream ways' of doing things, including funding and reporting structures and requirements. Some of the differences and divisions are rooted in the *Indian Act*, and in policies and procedures, definitions and even geographical boundaries, all continuing to reinforce the divides. One participant said: "Way back when, we worked together, we helped each other, we shared resources."

Participants are acutely aware of the colonial impacts of residential school, the sixties scoop, and the *Indian Act* and offered valuable solutions to address the ongoing concerns. We often speak of trauma informed services, but participants stressed the value of *trauma informed partnerships* as well as the importance of knowing more about migratory patterns and historical ways of working together.

The Community Action Circle (through the UAS program) was identified as having a very positive impact on relationship building. It encourages all organizations to come together monthly, meeting to discuss current projects, funding, what's working and what's not, in the community. This neutral space, without having to be concerned about "counting clients," has been very helpful.

Searching for specific organizations or key staff that are willing and open to partnering is another useful strategy mentioned, as well as having people in key roles that can draw on and bring past relationships (and/or communities) into the work of their new positions. This helps bridge the divide. One participant said, "What's worked – having a personal relationship has helped one colleague develop a relationship...The personal relationship was the in. I know you personally, not as an organization, as a bridge, and they are now on the CAC."

Cultural Differences

To succinctly summarize the true diversity within the Friendship Centre and the North Bay community, one participant said, “At our community potluck, we had 75 people, and over 47 of them spoke a different dialect of language or were from different communities.” In addition to the two neighbouring First Nations, Dokis and Nipissing, there are many people coming to North Bay from James Bay coastal communities like Attawapiskat. The *Red Road Report*, authored by the Friendship Centre, said that service providers in the North Bay community believe their caseloads have upwards of 75% Cree people from James Bay coastal communities.

While this diversity brings many positives to the Centre and the community, cultural differences also create challenges. One participant described her experience of offering services to clients with such diverse needs,

We have a wide range of people from the James Bay Coast who experience culture shock when they get to North Bay. They have language barriers. Many of them speak Cree, then French, then English. I think about that and how hard it is to be able to express what their needs are. I see them come in here. At first I thought they were demanding—like when they asked to see the nurse. They weren't demanding, it is the cultural differences. A lot of the Cree are Anglican and Catholic. People from Six Nations, Ojibwas, Algonquins--everybody has a different outlook on culture. We recently had an event that took place. We needed to offer respect to the person from Saskatchewan, but we were just learning their way, you don't have to practice it. There are so many differences even within our territory!

Another longstanding challenge has been with working with Métis and on-reserve partners. One participant said, “Métis--we have invited them here a lot. We have a hard time working with them.” While this statement concerned the challenge of working with Métis partners, it also touches on a key and politically contentious topic – Métis identity and how it is understood. Despite how the Métis Nation of Ontario defines Métis people⁵, many Indigenous and mainstream community members believe that anyone with a “mixed heritage” or “mixed blood” is Métis.

The challenge here is that Métis people are then not seen or treated as a group with their own history and distinct cultural heritage. One participant said, “We don't have Métis people that work in the building [Friendship Centre]. Which part is Métis? What is the definition of Métis? It's an ongoing issue. It's very political.”

Another elaborated on how Métis people have their own languages, cultures and customs. “I am Métis, it's part of my father's heritage.” She spoke about how learning about the governing systems and customs, particularly how Elders are instead called senators, has made her much more comfortable in

⁵ <http://www.metisnation.org/culture--heritage/who-are-the-metis>: The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique history, culture, language and territory that includes the waterways of Ontario, surrounds the Great Lakes and spans what was known as the historic Northwest. The Métis Nation is comprised of descendants of people born of relations between Indian women and European men. The initial offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry. The genesis of a new Aboriginal people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these mixed ancestry individuals.

her relationships, echoing the continued need to move past monolithic and sweeping definitions of “Aboriginal.” It also suggests that teaching cultural awareness is not just something to be geared only to non-Indigenous partners; Indigenous communities can benefit as well.

Participants spoke of the many things they are doing to address these challenges including actively inviting Métis people to all events happening at the Friendship Centre. Other solutions include operating with inclusive and respectful values like, “Everyone has an opinion, different teachings, or upbringing. Everyone has to come together and that is okay. Be respectful of other cultures. Everyone has a different idea.”

Funding

Participants spoke about how funding greatly affects service delivery, influencing everything from organizational structure to strictly limiting program mandates. One participant observed, “Funding gets cut, clawbacks and lack of funding. Our building was very big--from where we came from. We had a sand floor and then we came here. It was a humongous building. And now it’s not. We have 36 staff and 34 programs. We have to share our offices, it makes it hard.” Sometimes staff will need to leave their offices so that another staff person can use the space to meet with a client. Once again, the receptionist plays a key role in assisting with co-ordinating meetings and spaces, using one scheduling book for all common areas, such as the board room, cultural room and rec room.

Another participant described her program budget as “despicable” going on to demonstrate how this influences the services she seeks and who she can engage. For the most part, this means relying on people who hold similar beliefs. So, for example, she works with Elders who believe that offering ceremonies and “giving back” to the community are a part of their role as a Grandmother or Elder and therefore do not expect to receive an honorarium. This works with her budget because she has no funding for this purpose. “I have never understood why they have one elder—they know how to say no, but why exhaust one Elder? Draw upon Grandmother circle here at the Centre.”

Similarly, as mentioned, participants spoke about how limited funds have an impact on their capacity to engage Elders and youth, even simply providing food at meetings or for feasts. However, partnering with programs with flexible funding offer opportunities to increase limited program budgets. One participant said, “We [staff] loved your program dollars [referencing the UACT/UAS project]! They were so flexible! We could give back to the community, pay for gas, offer honorariums.” In addition to flexible funding, partners having more cultural awareness about the importance of tobacco, feasts, or honorariums help in collaborations and in creating more flexible budgets.

Last, participants also discussed the further impact of strict funding allocations and rigid mandates on determining “success,” eligibility for subsequent funding, and who can receive services. One said, “If we don’t achieve everything we set out to do, we won’t get that money again.” She went on to say,

As far as the programs go, their hands are tied with what they can and can’t do, and that has nothing to do with the Centre. Those are the mandates that are given to us from [name of funder]. We have to follow their guidelines if we want to obtain that money. If we deviate from what the money is supposed to be used for, then we are not going to be getting that back. Because we didn’t meet our deliverables... there are times [staff name] can’t take someone because the person is not enrolled in a program.

Another said, “I have a client who has a son with health problems. The doctors referred him to Ottawa. He doesn’t fit program mandates because of his age, or other factors, what do I do?” Even how the kitchen is used is affected by funding: “There used to always be someone in the kitchen, cooking meals for kids who would come from school. No one does that anymore.” Another added, “It’s the numbers that walk in the door that get our money.”

Participants also mentioned how staff and programs have become territorial over vehicles or other purchases because of how they have to account for them. This last observation shows that funding restrictions have layers of impact—not only affecting the “clients” worked with, but also when and how staff can work with clients and engage the broader Indigenous community and community partners. One staff has taken to offering more services in the evening, so the vehicles are available.

Location

It would be great to have a satellite location because transportation and accessibility is big. We have Massey Native Elders building who have no access to a bus stop, who have to walk three or four blocks. [Name of person] no longer drives.

C. HAMILTON INDIGENOUS SERVICE WEB

We are an organization for the urban Aboriginal population, to give you that brown face sitting across the table from you. Because a lot of people feel better about that. They feel more supported. Our programs and services are from a twinkle in your eye to dust. And we service whoever walks in the door.

Interview Participant, Hamilton Regional Indian Centre

Interview and Organizational Context

Interview Context

Two separate interviews took place in June 2015 at the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC). The executive director and the drug and alcohol worker participated in individual interviews. One additional participant—a board member—was suggested but an interview could not be scheduled.

The staff member who participated had a great deal of cultural and historical knowledge to share; English may be her second language. After trying to start with the more formal version of the interview, following the questions and using the probes provided, I put the sheet down and we ‘just talked.’ The worker asked, “Who did the questions? Were they non-native? They don’t know the native community. They don’t know what to ask; they are asking broad questions. They are stated in a way that doesn’t make sense. Don’t use big words. Natives are simple, get to the point.” Once we got past the initial challenge of the questions, we had an in-depth discussion.

The interview with the executive director was similarly in-depth. She brings a great deal of executive management experience and an administrative perspective to the Centre, but also has knowledge of its history and how things were done ‘before her time.’ Her strong commitment to public education and awareness was a thread throughout the interview and it really came through when she described the unique ways in which she has been involving the organization in non-Indigenous public events like the Pan Am games and Hamilton’s Winterfest.

Organizational Context

The comings and goings of the staff and guests of the Centre are tracked by our Receptionist, which is no small task. During the year there were 16,483 incoming telephone calls and over 1,858 guests through the front door... Annually served? ... I want to say, individuals—3,000 or 4,000 people are accessing services. Number of contacts? Three or four times more.

The funding source for the Centre has changed from Heritage Canada to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development under the Community Capacity Support Program. The HRIC receives \$176,667 annually and these funds are not considered sufficient to fully support Centre operations and a full complement of staff. Instead, the funding currently supports two full time staff positions, the executive director and the bookkeeper, along with the costs associated with “running” the Centre.

As reported last year, the National Association of Friendship Centres continues to negotiate for increased funding to the Community Capacity Support Program budget. “It certainly is a task that is daunting and frustrating at times,” said the executive director. “One day the government will recognize all the work that we do as Friendship Centres and fund us at a level that will meet our needs. If we were fortunate enough to receive an increase to the budget we would be able to address the shortfalls with the hiring of a program manager and another bookkeeper.”

Addressing the questions... the interview

1. Please describe your organization and the people that you serve

Both the mission statement and the interview participants identified partners as integral to the Centre’s goals and operations. For example, the Centre’s mission statement specifically includes, “to engage in community partnerships that will build a vibrant and positive future for our communities.”

In addition to identifying the key role of partnership development, there is also a keen awareness that there is no one Indigenous community and that there are many populations of Indigenous people within the Hamilton community. This theme, as well as the perspective that Indigenous people can respond more appropriately to the needs of Indigenous people, came up throughout the conversation. While holistic service delivery is clearly identified as a key aspect of how the organization carries out its mission, “community development” was also highlighted as a key function of the organization.

After the formal vision and mission were shared, each participant was encouraged to ‘speak from the heart.’ This opened up and deepened the discussion tremendously.

Like other centres, the executive director presented the numbers of ‘people served’ as people accessing services versus number of contacts. She noted how the program funding type and goals determines how those numbers are tracked. For example, a public health funded program focuses on connecting with “as many youth as possible, out walking the beat downtown.” That kind of program cannot track the same detail as a program seeing 15 people over a period of time. Also noted was the increase in non-Indigenous people seeking services, particularly Spanish. She said, “We don’t turn anyone away. We just ask that you be respectful. We have had a lot of Spanish people come in that want to access services, and non-natives. And I say, ‘Absolutely. How can I help you?’ They relate to the Indigenous culture and traditions and that is why they wanted to come here.” As a further example of the impact of this, one staff member’s caseload of 60 has 5 non-Indigenous clients.

When speaking of ‘populations,’ the participants used the word “nations.” For example, one shared, “the majority of people I see are between the ages of 18 and 29, some between 30 to 49. The oldest is age 50. I see mostly First Nations, but people are from different nations: Six Nations, Senac, Mohawk, Ojibway, Cree. The majority are Ojibwa from Six Nations. Some don’t know their nations.”

Hamilton Regional Indian Centre

Vision Statement

Creating change that empowers Aboriginal people.

Mission Statement

To promote and provide wholistic and cultural programming, services and support; and to engage in community partnerships that will

Throughout the interviews, the participants commented on how programs are offered “from the native perspective” or how teachings like the medicine wheel guide the Centre’s work with clients and partners.

The concept of the Centre as a “crisis” centre was also touched on, echoing the interviews in other communities where participants spoke of the Friendship Centre as a “last resort” for many community members. It is important to be clear about what is meant when this expression is used. “Last resort” can mean that something ends up being chosen, because all of the better options have been exhausted. In this community, and in the others, “last resort” means that when Indigenous community members have tried all of the regular, mainstream channels, they turn to the Friendship Centre as their “last resort” or “last hope.” For many, the Friendship Centre will be the “last place” they will have to go because they will now receive the assistance and support they were seeking. Assistance with securing housing or government identification may not be what community members first associate with a Friendship Centre, but increasingly, these are the kinds of supports being offered—because there has been a steady stream of people ending up at their door with that request and because Friendship Centres have developed the expertise to respond effectively.

Emerging Themes

Services by Indigenous People for Indigenous People – A Cultural Safety Continuum

The concept, ‘services by Indigenous people for Indigenous people’ permeated all aspects of the discussion.

Opening the interview, one participant began, “We are an organization for the urban Aboriginal population, to give you that brown face sitting across the table from you. Because a lot of people feel better about that. They feel more supported.” Another stressed that for her, it moves beyond comfort, and into safety, recognizing that many clients have had harmful experiences in mainstream organizations: “My main focus is the people, a lot of them have been hurt and damaged from mainstream, and they see a non-native person sitting there, they may not stay. I know I wouldn’t.”

The concept of client empowerment also influences the referral process when it comes to other community services; the Centre encourages clients to “keep trying” until they receive the services they are comfortable with. For example,

We have the health centre on main street. That is who we refer them to. The majority of workers are non-native though. ..if I was going to a native program to get help and it was a non-native person there, I wouldn’t go. Native people need to be in those roles to make people feel comfortable. I refer clients there, but I also let them know, if the person does not help, keep going till you get someone you are comfortable with.

This emphasis relates to one of the core concepts of cultural safety – *How safe is the environment or service for Indigenous clients?* In the same vein, the participants also commented on the need to improve the awareness and competency of mainstream community agencies and future staff. Moving along the cultural safety continuum, we see that offering “services by Indigenous people for Indigenous people” is a concrete strategy to help ensure safe service provision. At the same time, it also positions the Centre and other Indigenous organizations as “teaching spaces.” One participant observed that both the Centre and its partners view them in this light:

We are having students ask for placements here. If they want to, or will have to work with native people, my thought is have native people train them, so they would have more understanding... the teacher of a student that will be working at the Friendship Centre had the same thought. If the student was going to be working with native people, why not do your placement at the Friendship Centre? Why not be trained by them? So if native people go to see them, and they are the only people around, they may have a better understanding. And be more helpful.

An important by-product of this belief is that it helps strengthen relationships and culturally safe practices: as organizations like post-secondary institutions and health centres reach out to Friendship Centres for help with student placements and staff training, by offering to take on students, Friendship Centres are helping these organizations address their training needs, while at the same time promoting culturally safe service delivery and developing relationships with the staff working in those organizations.

Lastly, another invaluable component of what could be described as a 'reciprocal' process is that the Friendship Centre is also fulfilling the integral role of the "culturally safe gatekeeper." While the benefits of this reciprocal interaction are multiple, one participant stressed the need to remain cautious and ensure safe measures are in place from the beginning:

If a student goes and asks for a placement, the first question I ask is, 'What are you here for? What do you have to offer?' Depending on their answer, you can tell if they are here to help the 'poor Indians' or if they are here to be helpful... I let them know, 'If you are here because you want to help the poor Indian people, you are not here for the right reason. And if you are not honest with yourself, how can you be honest with someone else?'

Empowering and Creating Change in Our Communities...and the Mainstream

While the theme of *empowering and creating change* came up at different points in the interviews, it is pertinent here because of its direct relationship to the role of staff and the role of the organization in carrying out its mission. As one participant said,

We are trying to create change to empower Aboriginal people—that's our vision. By creating change, we are creating change within mainstream, with the individual themselves. Looking at them holistically, giving them their voice, and empowering them to do some of the work on their own, but to be here to help them. The mission—giving Aboriginal people the tools they need to live that good life.

Supporting and empowering clients to be persistent when seeking services was mentioned earlier. In the first example, it concerned supporting clients to not automatically accept their "first point of contact experience" as the only kind of experience to expect from a particular organization. In the following example, empowering community members relates to supporting them to advocate for cultural services. As one participant said, "the more awareness people have of themselves and their own history, they can advocate for themselves. If they don't know the system, they don't know what to ask for."

Services Respond to Community Member Requests

Similar to how the Centre began assisting community members with identification in response to a growing need, the following quote exemplifies both the responsiveness and the holistic nature of the services provided. For this participant, scope is not about how far the organization may reach in terms of

who it touches or where the person lives. Here it is about responding to, and following through on, the individual's request of the organization:

Scope? - It depends on the request. I do programs at the detention centre, eastern door, understanding the journey, seven grandfather teachings, medicine wheel, circle. I have had requests for JVI [Juvenile Detention], if they want help with their parole hearings. I have been asked to go to the federal institutions--they let me go because it was someone I had followed along the way.

Intended for Indigenous Clients; but will Include Others, Space Permitting

Although if a program is a client-based program, if there is room we will take you on, but if an Aboriginal person comes along, the space will go to them. Our services towards you are going to have to change.

We give the Aboriginal people our priority.

2. Please describe the service(s) or program(s) that your organization offers.

An extensive list of the programs offered by the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre is provided in the inset box. However, in addition to the clearly described and funded services, many other services are also provided. These services are often not specifically funded, nor do they necessarily have regular staff or budgets to carry them out. Even so, they are integral to the work of the Centre and to partnership development.

Emerging Themes

Crisis Response

Interestingly, clarifying or redefining *who* and *what* the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre is, was a recurring theme. There is recognition that some services and activities go beyond what people commonly believe the Centre does or what it has been structured to do. For example, one participant spoke about the number of people in crisis who walk in their front door:

I see a lot of people who walk through our door are people in crisis, most of the time. Those that are looking for something to hold on to, to give them some identity...lower end of the scale of poverty. Not too many people come through the door who are mid to upper class. But certainly we try to do stuff after hours, so that we can entice those people to come and participate in those programs and services.

Not one of the listed programs is necessarily funded to support crisis response, yet increasingly, in carrying out its commitment to being responsive, the Centre is becoming more involved in supporting community members in distress.

The above quote also touches on the socio-demographics of the clients, suggesting that the majority of people using Centre services live in poverty. Still, the Centre wants to engage all members of the

community so they “entice” the middle class to come to the Centre by making programs available outside of regular “business hours.” She also added, “the challenge is for us to have someone at the front desk until 9:00 pm...trying to make sure that we are available for those that walk through the door at any time.”

Coordinated Community Events

Offering more “coordinated” community events is vital to: engaging and supporting regular clients; engaging those who do not regularly

use Centre services; and, engaging community partners and networks. One participant commented on the breadth of events,

We do a number of events, we did a picnic lunch for Canada day. There were people there that I have never seen before, people come with members... we had three busses, we all take our families. There were over 200 people. Then we have our thanksgiving dinner, community Christmas dinner. If everyone showed up, we wouldn't have enough food! Usually about 200 people at these events. Usually, that is where you see people that aren't attached to a program per se, they just want to come out to the event.

The Centre organizes these events by, “creating teams, each responsible for a cultural event within a quarter.” This approach has helped the Centre respond in a more coordinated fashion to the growing demand for community-centred, cultural events. In its most recent *Annual Report 2014-15*, the Centre highlighted that 1,707 people participated in just six of the many events held during that time period! That figure is just shy of the 1,858 guests who were counted as walking through the front door of the Centre itself for services.

During the interviews, and in the annual report, the importance placed on the role of such events in partnership development and cultural awareness, suggests that these and other events will continue to play an integral role in the functioning of the Centre in achieving its mandate. One participant added, “We have been doing a lot of that. Like at Mental Health Week, we were a stop on the mental health week tour, Winterfest, you know.”

Accessing funding from the Ministry of Colleges and Training and Universities, through job training contracts, has helped the Centre take a more co-ordinated approach to event planning and outreach.

Variety of Community Events

- A number of people attended the **National Aboriginal Day** event at Hamilton City Hall, an event made possible by all the Aboriginal Agencies participating. We handed out hotdogs, a bag of chips, a bottle of water and a piece of cake to over 300 people;
- **July 1st Community Picnic** – We had a great day, not too hot with a nice breeze, 225 people enjoyed a bar-be-que, games and company;
- **Thanksgiving dinner** – 508 community members attended;
- **Christmas dinner** – 486 community members attended and most went home with a meal;
- **Children's Christmas party** – 78 attended and saw Santa, had some food and received a gift with 40 adults also attending
- This past year we also had an **Easter dinner** for the membership, 70 people attended and enjoyed a ham dinner followed by an Easter Egg hunt for the Children.
- We participated this year in **Hamilton's Winterfest**, this was well received and we had some great coverage in the Hamilton Spectator

We hired an event community coordinator. It has to be something that is not a traditional role like reception. This stuff usually falls on me. She actually created a manual, with a checklist with everything that we do annually. And then she did all this outreach, so we got involved with Winterfest, the street DIA, an Aboriginal Liaison Committee with the Mayor... PanAM Games, Aboriginal Leadership Table to the province.

She went on to note the positive impact this strategy has had so far: “We got some amazing feedback from the community, especially the non-native community that didn’t know that we were here. They sent a beautiful write-up, a letter to the editor, about attending the Indian Centre... we got some really good promo that way.”

Annual events like National Aboriginal Day and social movements like Truth and Reconciliation also have an impact on Centre, as one participant said, “The last month has been big. Because of National Aboriginal Day and Truth and Reconciliation came out.”

Daily Living – Food, Transportation, Identification

In addition to the Centre’s expanding role in crisis response, teaching, and event planning and management, the Centre is also responding to growing requests for food vouchers, transportation and assistance with status or other needs related to identification. A participant shared,

People coming in recently for their identification. Who pays for their status card? Are they eligible? And to me, that is a big piece of walking through the door, not knowing who they are, having those pieces of paper in their hand. So that has become, ‘Where do you charge it? How do you track that?’ Sometimes we pay out of our core or a program, or getting people to Six Nations or Brantford to get their cards or order health cards.

Interestingly, the individuals making these requests are not necessarily already associated with the Centre or a particular program, which means that being able to respond to this variety of requests, offers benefits in terms of drawing new clients to the Centre. However, the participants also mentioned the challenges associated with this include tracking such requests and finding available staff to complete the often time consuming and challenging forms. This creates a burden on those who continually fill these roles, and an increased administrative load associated with financing and reporting on such tasks. In the case of the status cards, considering the running theme of “empowered clients” being the “ones who know who they are”--this may become an increasingly important component of the services offered.

Aboriginal Alternative Secondary School (ASSP) & Strengthening Hamilton Aboriginal Education (SHAE)

is an alternative education program for Indigenous students wishing to continue their education, in a culturally appropriate learning environment, but not currently attending a secondary school to shorten the gap of Indigenous student's dropout rates within the mainstream school system.

Aboriginal Alcohol/Drug provides preventive services, intake/intervention, assessment and treatment, planning and education awareness programs in the areas of alcohol, drug and solvent abuse using a wholistic approach.

Aboriginal Criminal/Family Court work Program provides assistance to all Indigenous people who are in contact with the legal system, regardless of Status.

Aboriginal Family Support Program provides support and services to families and their children (0 to 6 yrs) through the provision of community-based wholistic and culturally based activities.

Aboriginal Healing & Wellness ensures that the healing and wellness needs of the Indigenous community are addressed and to reduce family violence, promote healthy lifestyles, and culture- based programming and healing.

Aboriginal Healthy Babies/Healthy Children Program promotes healthy growth and development of Indigenous babies, build on parenting skills, and link families with the community supports and resources.

Aboriginal Prenatal/Nutrition provides culturally appropriate information for the purpose of improving pregnant mother's and father's knowledge and offer help with nutrition, healthy lifestyles, preparation of labor & delivery, breast feeding, newborn & baby care in a traditional and culturally appropriate manner.

Akwe:go provides cultural activities for children 7 years – 12 years old focusing on understanding and values of Indigenous culture. The program component involves respecting others, our community and ourselves. Our focus is on bringing the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual components of the human personality together as children grow and become youth. Akwe:go is a Mohawk word that means "All of Us".

Apatisiwin provides support and assistance to clients in their pursuit of permanent employment, through resume writing, job search counseling, and computer access, fax/photocopying services, access to job listings, training course listing, education/occupation resources. Apatisiwin is a Swampy Cree word meaning "Employment, Training and Jobs".

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Nutrition offers direct service for urban Indigenous Pregnant women and Families, Indigenous Children and Youth, and networking with Indigenous and mainstream agencies/organizations. In addition to increasing awareness of risks associated with alcohol/drug consumption during pregnancy, including breastfeeding and alcohol use.

GREAT assists Six Nations Band members, in meeting their employment and training objectives by supporting them in obtaining access to employment programs and services.

3. How do you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

Overall, the discussion reflected differences between working *with*, and *within*, the Indigenous community, and working *with* mainstream or non-Indigenous organizations.

Emerging Themes

Working within Indigenous Worldviews, Using Cultural Teachings, Holistic Approach

Indigenous worldviews, cultural teachings and a holistic approach inform how HRIC staff work with clients and Indigenous communities. Throughout the discussion the following comments were echoed: “giving Indigenous people the tools they need to ‘live that good life;’ “offering programs and services that increase their knowledge, skills, attitude and values, so they can be contributing members to society, ‘in a good way;’” “I work with individuals like how I would like to be treated, in a good, kind, challenging way”; “When you look at the medicine wheel, it looks at people as a whole, and offering opportunities for families to have that ‘connection.’”

One participant shared her approach to services: “Me, being here for as long as I have been, people say if you want to get help, go here. I use native teachings, Ojibwa and my own teachings. Using the medicine wheel, yeah, that makes sense, they get different services here than mainstream.”

She went on to talk about the importance of doing things “differently” including, “not telling them what to do. When you take a look at our background, we were always told what to do. But they need to find their own answers, and their own way. When you take a look at this [the questionnaire], it doesn’t focus on that.”

The HRIC is represented on the following Committees to ensure that the Hamilton urban Indigenous population’s voice is heard:

Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition (HEDAC)

Hamilton Aboriginal Education Coalition (HEAC)

Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI)

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

Hamilton Healthy Birth Weight Committee (Formerly Code Red)

Best Start

Aboriginal Best Start

Hamilton Literacy Planning Committee

Ontario Native Literacy Coalition

Adult Justice Collaborative

CAMH Youth Mental Health Collaborative

Women Abuse Working Group

Sisters In Spirit/Stolen Sisters

Branches of Native Development (BOND)

Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC)

Frontline Workers Advisory Collaborative (FLAC)

Aboriginal Youth Services Providers Network

Professional Aboriginal Advocacy Networking Group

Partners in Nutrition

Good Food Box

Crown Point Hub Committee

CONTACT Hamilton

Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN) – Indigenous Health Network

Domestic Violence Court Advisory Committee

FASD Task Force

Youth Engagement Network

Hamilton Special Needs Strategy

Integrated Rehab Planning Table

Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast Committee

Hamilton Youth Collaborative

Young Parent Network

McMaster – Indigenous Education Council

Aboriginal Education Council – Mohawk College

Youth Employment Network

Employment Assistants Resource Network

Skills Development Flagship

Planning for an Age Friendly Hamilton

Aboriginal Leadership Table - PanAm

Working within a Culturally Relevant Referral and Service System

Familiar faces, continuity of programs, and awareness of self and heritage not only affect referrals, they highlight the importance of working *within a culturally relevant referral and service system*. While the first theme mentioned in this section—*Working within Indigenous worldviews and using cultural teachings and a holistic approach*—emphasizes the role and influence of Indigenous culture, here we are referring to the service-related aspects of operating in a familiar cultural context.

Practical factors affecting the referral process certainly appear to play a key role in how the centre manages referrals and delivers services both internally and with its partners. Familiar factors such as location or funding were the first mentioned as influencing referrals, such as “referrals for treatment are to local treatment centres because transportation is a lot easier. Funding to get people to programs is very challenging.” However, while transportation may be a common factor influencing referrals, it is important to consider the full array of factors such as the growing credibility of the HRIC and the comprehensive and holistic nature of Centre programs. This begins to help us recognize that culture-related factors may be overlooked and further suggests that in time, there may be less need to refer Indigenous clients to mainstream organizations.

One participant added, “The consistency of having the contact ... for example, ‘I want [worker]. They maintain contact with workers.” At the same time, the participant referred to the importance of promoting programs suggesting that the key is when the familiar connection is there *and* supervisors know about the program.

Other comments such as, “I have been asked to go to the federal institutions. They let me go because it was someone I had followed (treated) along the way” echo the statement above regarding familiarity and consistency. This perspective highlights that people, not paper, are the referral thread helping to bridge challenging jurisdictional gaps which Indigenous people fall through so often.

Self-advocacy also plays a role in the process of finding and connecting with the right service. As one participant said, “Sometimes you get very aggressive individuals who push for native programs. The more awareness people have of themselves and their own history, they can advocate for themselves.”

Community Events and Collaborations

A key component of how the organization works with Indigenous communities and its partners to deliver services, boils down to events. The diversity and breadth of events, partnerships and public outreach occurring within and outside the organization is astounding. The following distinctions help to describe how the Centre uses events in its work with the community and partners:

1. *HRIC client and community events* - The Centre organizes cultural and community events for its clients, their families, extended families and many other Indigenous community members who do not receive services yet are broadly a part of the Centre’s network. It is estimated that approximately 200 people regularly attend these gatherings and feasts. As mentioned, these events operate out of core or special funding and are carried out by the Centre as a whole, led by teams that take quarterly turns in planning and organizing.
2. *Client and mandate-specific events* - Specific programs within the Centre, according to their mandates, either on their own or in partnership with community organizations, plan and hold events and activities for program-specific clients.

3. *Mainstream events* - The Centre plays one of several roles in mainstream events—sitting on the planning committee and/or providing an Indigenous component or presence. This participation is often guided by partnership development, public relations and education and awareness goals.

Outreach and Promotion

Building on the importance of participating in mainstream events, the Centre has recently expanded its participation in events such as Mental Health Week, Pan AM and Winterfest by applying for and securing funding from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This resulted in a dedicated position which has had a significant impact on the Centre's capacity to organize and participate in events. The staff member hired has created an inventory of all of the events in which the Centre is involved, along with a manual and checklist for organizing events. She has also reached out to new partners which has already resulted in new opportunities—participating on committees like Winterfest, the Mayor's Aboriginal Liaison Committee, and Pan Am, etc. In addition, the Centre hosted the first ever Drums from the Four Directors Gala, encouraging mainstream organizations to come and explore the HRIC. The Gala's goal was to increase mainstream knowledge and awareness of the Centre, as well as offer opportunities for exploring cultural awareness. Even so, it is important to recognize that the funding application and process is "onerous" and that being prepared and having access to past successful proposals made a difference in this situation.

Political and social developments also continue to have an impact on the Centre's participation in, and/or organization of, events. Specifically, the Centre hosted an event for a mayoral candidate and for Truth and Reconciliation. It is expected that the demand will only grow.

Being Responsive to Community Desires, Needs

Again, while this was mentioned previously, the importance of being flexible and responsive is highlighted here. One staff shares, "That's my biggest pet peeve. I always tell the staff, 'We are here for the people and if the programs and services are needed in the evening, then that's what we are going to do'."

Cultural Competency—Providing Training, Creating Protocols, Serving on Committees

How the HRIC works with Indigenous communities and other partners to deliver services is inextricably tied to the work it engages in every day: the Centre sits on 38 committees and has been involved in developing dozens of protocols and provides trainings. One participant noted the increase in requests within the last couple of years and the increased need to formalize such involvements: "We do a lot of partnership development. I noticed in the last couple of years, the requests to come out and sit at committees has increased two fold. We are represented on 38 different community boards, coalitions, committees, so now trying to formalize that."

Cultural competency appears to be at the core of many relationships with partners. One participant said, "We do a lot of cultural competency training. And that takes up a lot of time, which is good time." How the HRIC works with Indigenous communities and other partners to deliver services often involves working to ensure that students or health professionals working with Indigenous communities, are trained by Indigenous workers, in order to increase cultural safety in services.

When asked, *Who do you not work with?*, there were few responses, and yet these related to the issue of cultural competency. For example, if HRIC felt they had no purpose being on a committee or that they

had no input (such as when people were fighting over which aspect of the situation to address first), then the HRIC would not be involved. This relates to cultural competency insofar as mainstream services were not listening to or recognizing the expertise being brought to the table by HRIC.

Throughout the conversation, participants also highlighted the importance of including key people and roles (administration, program superintendent) in training when it comes to integrating cultural competency within organizations. One pointed to the benefit, “We have always smudged inside. They allowed us to do it. We follow their rules, BUT we give them the teachings of when and how it should be done, then they do it. We work with the program superintendent.”

Allies Help Get Us “to the Table”

Also mentioned was the role and importance of allies in ensuring HRIC not only gets to the table, but also benefits itself by being able to “broaden our horizons.” In this respect, HRIC becomes involved with activities and/or learns about things that it might not, if the Centre was not at the table.

I think it is really creating allies on some of the committees. I sit on the street youth planning collaborative, and that committee, they are such champions, like [name of person] from Good Shepard is literally banging on the table, saying ‘Where’s the Indian Centre? It’s like, ‘Loretta, I can’t do any more committees. Stop banging your table!!!’”

As well, being at the table means that the Centre can hear and learn about what is happening with Indigenous community members in other services and organizations. Not at an individual/client level, but rather on the whole. For example, one participant commented on how another organization is tracking Indigenous clients: “She can say, here at [organization] 19% of the youth walking through the door are Aboriginal, so they are tracking, they are getting those numbers for us, they are really good allies and referring people back over here.” As well, the Centre can hear about how other organizations want to help make sure Indigenous clients are connected to their own culture. In one example, the organization asked, “Can we host something at your centre?” in order to help support that connection back to the HRIC.

One participant also said how formalizing programs between numerous partners helped co-ordinate and centralize services, “They had so many different workers going into the jails. So at the detention centre, they got together and they formalized the program. They decided that Hamilton would take care of the native spirituality program, and if others are requested, they work it out with them.”

However, other forms of centralized service delivery – case conferencing with mainstream agencies for example – were viewed negatively and the example offered earlier about which issue gets treated first -- addictions or mental health--serves to make this point; what is needed is a service response that is tuned into concurrent issues, not prioritizing one over another.

Relationships, Connections and Other Factors Influence How “Co-Ordination” Works

One of the probes asked, *Are these relationships coordinated?* Participants at times, had challenges with this wording. When talking about relationships, one response came in the form of an Elder’s story: “One Elder talked about the connection that we have when we meet with someone. Sometimes it might be a string and sometimes it might be a great big cable.” In this light, the question we might instead ask is, *Does coordination strengthen the string?* The answer appears to be no. But a good relationship, might.

A participant provided an example of the co-ordination challenge: “Yes, to have an effective program, you need coordination...the smudging program does not happen very often right now because they [name of organization] are short staffed. But they try to accommodate. For example, most programs have to happen in the common area, but because they are short staffed, they allow us to come onto the floors...if there are no staff, there are no programs. Their coordination really affects our programs.”

She also added, “If you have a bad relationship with the CEO or guard, they will make you sit there for five or ten minutes before you can go in the gates. There is nothing you can do. If you have patience and are not overbearing, it goes a long way.”

What comes through in both of these examples is that co-ordination and co-operation are dependent on a number of different factors including staffing and relationships. In the first example, a longstanding working relationship meant that the Centre was given greater access, however, when it came to the organization being short-staffed, it immediately resulted in no program delivery. The relationship and co-ordination didn’t matter—it was the lack of staffing that determined the outcome. In the second example, the negative relationship trumped any formal agreement or established co-operation and co-ordination.

If we look back at the earlier example regarding the role of allies in “getting the Centre to the table” various other factors were at work: advocacy (willingness and determination of the organization to ensure HRIC was at the table); knowledge of current trends in service use (having statistics regarding Indigenous clients using services); and, knowledge and willingness to collaborate in supporting Indigenous community members to connect with the cultural supports offered through the Centre (request to host a collaborative event at the Centre).

Having an open mind and accepting different views were also mentioned as important. The range of examples and factors noted here help shed light on the role of co-ordination in services and further highlighted through the Elder’s story about the nature of connections in relationships.

4. What would you say are the main factors that help you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

Emerging Themes

Offering Connection to Culture, Indigenous Worldviews

The Centre, and its many partners, view the HRIC’s ability to offer clients, partners and staff a “connection” to Indigenous cultures and worldviews as essential.

As one participant said, “Friendship Centres are bringing people back to their culture. Whether its Ojibway lessons or Cree lessons, they are giving them something that they don’t get somewhere else. Having that connection, from a similar background.”

Another participant offered a similar perspective, suggesting that, “the programs and services [at the HRIC] are to increase [clients’] knowledge, skills, attitude and *values*.” Every program offers opportunities for cultural connections, through activities like berry picking, or programs being run

through the “native perspective.” Dozens of partnerships that happen throughout the year are grounded in this approach, encouraging organizations like the Hamilton Police, Right to Play and many others to collaboratively host activities, incorporating cultural components like Powwow dancing, medicine box making, history, teachings, etc. One participant, when speaking of a successful partnership, said, “they are going to provide the services that they provide, and then they are going to make sure they are connected to their culture.” Current and potential partners connect with the HRIC to help ensure their clients are connected to their own culture.

Recently, the Centre has focused on improving the delivery and organization of quarterly cultural events for the broader HRIC community by restructuring the staff into event planning teams. Participants also shared how the Centre is positioning itself as the “connection” to Indigenous cultures with the general public as well. HRIC invites the public to visit the Centre by being a “stop” on Mental Health Week or by participating on the Winterfest tours, or by opening its doors to host innovative Galas, like the Four Directions Drum Gala. All of these opportunities increase the general public’s knowledge of, and connection to, Indigenous cultures.

As mentioned earlier, educational institutions or health centres, and more specifically, individuals within these institutions, are also connecting with the HRIC around student placements, looking to the HRIC to play a key role in fostering cultural competency in those who may work with Indigenous clients over the course of their careers.

Last, the HRIC offers opportunities for staff to connect with Elders and teachings through training provided by the OFIFC or the Centre itself:

The knowledge, the education that I have gained throughout the years. I’ve been here for a long time--that’s why [name of person] brought you down here (smiles). The understanding that everyone is different. Whether they are native or non-native. Being able to accept them for who they are. Having an open mind. Having that connection. All of the training from OFIFC. We get teachings from Elders. I’ve learned a lot.

Dedicated Staff Positions for Community Engagement, Promotion

While the HRIC was already serving on dozens of committees, a dedicated staff position for community engagement and promotion has been useful in expanding public outreach and promotion activities with mainstream organizations. The benefits of this approach are numerous including alleviating pressures that usually fall on the executive director, increasing coordination and documentation of HRIC participation in events, and continuing to build a positive public image. The executive director said,

We hired a Community Event coordinator. It has to be something that is not a traditional role like reception. This stuff usually falls on me. She actually created a manual, of a checklist, everything that we do annually, and then she did all this outreach. So we got involved with Winterfest, the street DIA, we have an Aboriginal liaison committee with the mayor.

Protocols Help, but Cooperative, Collaborative Relationships are also Needed

This echoes the previous theme about connections and relationships mentioned in the last section. While there may be systems or protocols in place, people – and how respectful and cooperative they are – influence the success of a protocol. Again, using the example of the detention centre, one participant commented on the positive developments occurring, such as a developing protocol,

Detention centre – they did training on smudging, items, they get teachings from other communities too. They know certain words, how to say hello. They are doing training with children’s aid, they are coming up with a protocol. They have a protocol with the detention centre – an agreement.

She went on to talk about how equal and positive relationships with the Chaplain at the detention centre and the program coordinators support her in continuing her work, despite challenges that arise, like short staffing. She also noted how poor relationships still negatively affect her work, despite protocols being in place. For example, staff making you wait longer than needed to access the facility, or, “there have been a few that have the attitude, ‘Are you qualified to help?’” Still, the participant believes that, “the awareness that is getting out there is really helping.” This view reminds us of the importance of ensuring protocols are supported with continuous cultural awareness opportunities for staff involved. Defining coordinating or defining a partnership is not enough; it must be supported in practice.

Mainstream Services Promoting, Referring to Indigenous Services, Tracking Indigenous Clients

The executive director recited statistics and referenced a multitude of partnerships and committees off the top of her head. She believes that information is empowering. She encourages her staff to always be prepared and know their numbers and this approach is used by other community partners too. She spoke about why this is important,

It’s about promoting programs and services of all the Friendship Centres. Because she has that knowledge, because the women in the institutions don’t just come from Hamilton, they come from all over, so, her being able to connect them...

Similarly, as mentioned previously, knowledge of Indigenous service use also empowers organizations in their advocacy efforts,

And she can say, ‘Here at [name of organization], 19% of the youth walking through the door are Aboriginal.’ So they are tracking, and they are getting those numbers for us. They are really good allies. And referring people back over here, if they are working with somebody, they are going to provide the services that they provide, and then they are going to make sure that they are connected to their culture....

OFIFC Integrated Database

The database was mentioned as a positive as it “helps with tracking.” However, it also brings with it a challenge: “I have programs that aren’t federation programs.”

5. *What would you say are the main factors that make it difficult to work with your community and other partners to deliver services? How do you address these challenges?*

Emerging Themes

Pressures of Being Accessible, Responsive

This point was mentioned at the organizational level as well as the individual level. One participant talked about “business hours” posted on the door, but the reality is that staff and volunteers are there long hours, at the crack of dawn cooking for events that will happen later in the day, etc.

The challenge for us is to have someone at the front desk until 9:00 pm. Youth programs happen after school, Monday to Friday, and every other Saturday, we do a breakfast for the youth. They can go and do swimming, the gym. We provide a full breakfast for them. Trying to make sure that we are available for those that walk through the door, at any time.

Participants also commented on the additional burden placed on certain staff roles, particularly executive and administrative, for: filling out tedious and complicated forms (i.e. status cards, sealed birth records, etc.); responding to non-program related requests (food vouchers, transportation for non-clients, payment for status and other cards); completing detailed and lengthy funding applications and processes; and, meeting with partners and/or representing the HRIC on formal committees and activities. In short, “time” is one of the overall challenges internally *and* externally when working with partners and responding to ever-increasing requests like being invited to go to Church on a Sunday, which then further cuts into one’s already limited personal time.

However challenging, when successful, it is these same time consuming and onerous funding applications that are the very ones that helped the Centre strengthen, streamline and alleviate some of the above-mentioned burdens on executive and administrative positions. Through the MTCU (Ministry of Training and Colleges) funding for example, the Centre was able to hire someone to complete the policies and procedures, look after pay equity and co-ordinate events. Simple strategies like having an organized system for documenting and using past proposals to help with new ones, saves time. The executive director commented that simply being there for an extended period of time and working on developing her own system for this has aided greatly. However, there also still appears to be a great deal of potential for streamlining and increasing staff literacy in filling out forms for status cards, or partnering with others to address food voucher and transportation issues.

“Aboriginal” Services Provided by Non-Indigenous People

Indigenous services provided by non-Indigenous people were mentioned as a serious challenge, with significant repercussions, recognizing that many Indigenous people “have been hurt and damaged from mainstream.” As mentioned, “we are that brown face” that helps increase client comfort.

As suggested by an earlier example shared by a participant, “We have a health centre on main street. That is who we refer them to. The majority of workers are non-native though... If I was going to a native program to get help, and it was a non-native person there, I wouldn’t go. Native people need to be in those roles to make people feel comfortable.” As noted, the presence of Indigenous staff affects

referrals, client comfort, and service delivery with key partners. In response to this and other concerns regarding cultural competency, the Centre provides a lot of cultural competency training as well as taking on students to teach them from the “native perspective.” As mentioned, Centre staff also empower clients to advocate for their own care, encouraging them to go back if they are not getting the service that they need.

Funding that is Narrow/Restrictive, Administratively Onerous, Doesn’t Recognize What is Important to Indigenous People

Annual events and activities organized by the HRIC, like the Canada Day BBQ which approximately 200 people attend each year, are often funded out of the core budget. The interview participants suggest that one of the reasons for this is because funders don’t recognize or value the powerful “connection” role that these activities provide—they connect community members to each other and to their cultures; they connect community members to concrete resources like food, transportation, and activities; they connect the community to the Centre and its staff, helping to build relationships and bring them a step closer to walking through the door one day; and similarly, they help staff connect with each other and their clients *within* their culture. Instead, the participants conclude, these funders would prefer that Indigenous people “go to treatment.”

We had a picnic yesterday, buses go to a conservation park, and we do that ‘cause some families don’t get to go. We have a BBQ and food, water to go swimming, and have a fun day. These are programs that provide that connection. The funders don’t look at it this way – they want people to go to treatment. But they don’t have treatment for that.

Again, as mentioned previously, funding applications are considered to be time consuming, with one participant saying, “Why do you think more organizations don’t access funding like this? Because they are very onerous!”

And funding affects referrals and access to services and supports—“Referrals for treatment are to local treatment centres because there is transportation, it’s a lot easier. Funding to get to programs is very challenging.”

One participant shared her view of health through the medicine wheel and the implications when the medicine wheel meets western-based service/funding approaches: “When you look at the medicine wheel, it looks at people as a whole. Mental health, everyone has. We have three titles in our position. Mental health, addictions, wellness. Which one first? Which hat?”

‘Cultural Divide’ Stereotyping and Need For Open Mind

We asked, *What makes it challenging to work with community partners?* Indigenous People being stereotyped and experiencing discrimination dominated the response.

I would say the understanding. From their side to our side. Being able to have an open mind. Getting rid of that stereotype—drunk native involved with the law. We are human. Because of the history, the only way people in mainstream get their information TV. We need to help people understand we are not.

One participant spoke about her own experience at school: “When I was in school, we had a trip to the rez. Some didn’t go. They were afraid to go, so they didn’t go to school.”

As mentioned, stereotyping affects collaborations with partners including referrals, case-conferencing and access to treatment which may be discouraged or delayed for Indigenous people experiencing concurrent issues, in particular:

Because so many Aboriginal people have concurrent issues, the mental health would say, 'Deal with mental health first.' Then addictions would say, 'No, deal with addictions first.' No one would get anywhere because they would be stuck with what to address first. Their behaviour in how they present themselves—they are drunk.

Despite these challenges, one participant suggested, “It is becoming more aware. Before, people used to just label them as a drunk. Now people are more aware that the person with addictions most likely has mental health issues as well.”

Again when speaking of working with partners, one participant commented: “There have been a few that have the attitude, ‘Are you qualified to help?’ But the awareness that is getting out there is really helping.”

Tracking

Tracking is an important topic, as noted. While the OFIFC integrated database was mentioned as a positive, one participant noted that some funding sources and programs do not run through the OFIFC and therefore are not reflected in this database. She added there are also challenges in responding to different funding and reporting requirements where one funder wants clients and caseloads tracked and another wants numbers and contacts tracked, with the goal being the highest number possible.

We have youth outreach workers--Good Shepard, the Indian Centre, Good Rock--they are pounding the pavement Tuesday to Saturday, connecting to unconnected youth. They see a couple of thousand kids, but they don't have a case load. They do do some tracking, but it's very minimal on the corner. It's not, 'I saw Susan.' How do you track this compared to a contract for Vanier Centre for Women, 'this is how many people we are seeing.'

D. SAULT STE. MARIE INDIGENOUS SERVICE WEB

1. Please describe your organization and the people that you serve.

“Come and see what we do. Be a part of what we are and what we do.”

Interview Participant, Indian Friendship Centre, Sault Ste. Marie

When asked about the mission of the organization, the executive director described their “culturally based mandate” and shared how the Indian Friendship Centre in Sault Ste. Marie (SSM) works “under the principles of the seven grandfather teachings.” The website elaborates on this mission, stating that “these teachings will unite us in harmony as we build a strong, proud community for seven generations.”

Throughout the conversation, it became apparent that these teachings truly permeate all aspects of the organization, including service delivery and partnership development.

While the Centre is described as a “service based Indigenous organization, serving urban Indigenous people in SSM...” and as having “wrap around services,” Indigenous worldviews of the life cycle also inform these very concepts. For example, the participant shared how the Centre promotes “a healthy lifestyle, in all aspects of life” and “we cover that life cycle, with our life long care programs.”

Similar to other interview sites, the issue and concept of voice came up in all aspects of the discussion. At one point, the participant said, “We are a forgotten people” reflecting the “responsibility” of the SSM Friendship Centre to be that voice in the community, and to be ‘at the table’ with community partners.

The population served is Indigenous people, but also anyone who walks through the door. The term “nations” was used often to describe the various people coming to the centre. The participant said their “highest clientele is Indigenous people—a mixture of Ojibwa and Cree.” And that Sault Ste. Marie is “well diversified in terms of the Indigenous nations who reside here.” A lot of people from the Chippewa tribe volunteer, use services,

Mission Statement

The Indian Friendship Centre in Sault Ste. Marie Is Guided by the Teachings Given by the Creator to the Aboriginal people.

These Teachings Will Unite Us in Harmony As We Build a Strong, Proud Community for Seven Generations.

Beliefs of the IFC-SSM

In providing a safe and secure environment for the people we serve

In the freedom of the individual’s right to choose their belief

In the equality of all ages and races

Promoting the wholistic approach to a healthier way of life and,

In the reinforcement and revitalization of our native heritage.

Values of the Friendship Centre

The Physical, Emotional, Mental, Spiritual, and Social well-being of all

The dedication and commitment of people who share their wisdom and knowledge for the betterment of our community

Respects the uniqueness of individuals, and our special relation with all creation.

Objectives of the IFC in SSM

To provide a meeting place for Native

and come to coffee houses, she added, “They love the Friendship Centre.”

It’s located in a central position, two local first nations, huge partnership with Northern Shore Tribal Centre. We get a lot of people here because of the geographic location. We have students that fly in here, go to school here, from remote communities. Because we are central and because we are a border city, that has a lot of attraction to the community.

Also when speaking of the population served, the larger SSM community and service delivery agencies were mentioned. The Centre recognizes its strong advocacy and cultural safety roles within the broader community and describes itself as a leader in cultural competency, advocacy and community development. At times, the participant described the importance of history and the how the centre is the vehicle for those who are knowledgeable in the old ways (language and traditions) and compassionate so that they can help “understand where people are truly coming from.”

Emerging Themes

Values and Teachings Guide How We Work

Unlike the other Centres, this aspect was literally built into the vision and mission of the organization and therefore greatly influenced all aspects of the discussion. The executive director shared how the organization “works under principles of seven grandfather teachings” and “our culturally based mandate.”

We Offer Services to Everyone Who Walks Through the Door

IFC estimates they service 5,000 people a year through a range of services, with some clients using a number of services and programs. The Health Centre alone serves 4,500 people.

How many people served annually? We have health centre here, we a doctor, a 4 registered nurse, foot care, dietician, physio, on average, with the health centre alone, 4500 last report last year. With all other programs, mixed/integrated into all programs some clients use other programs. 5,000 estimate.

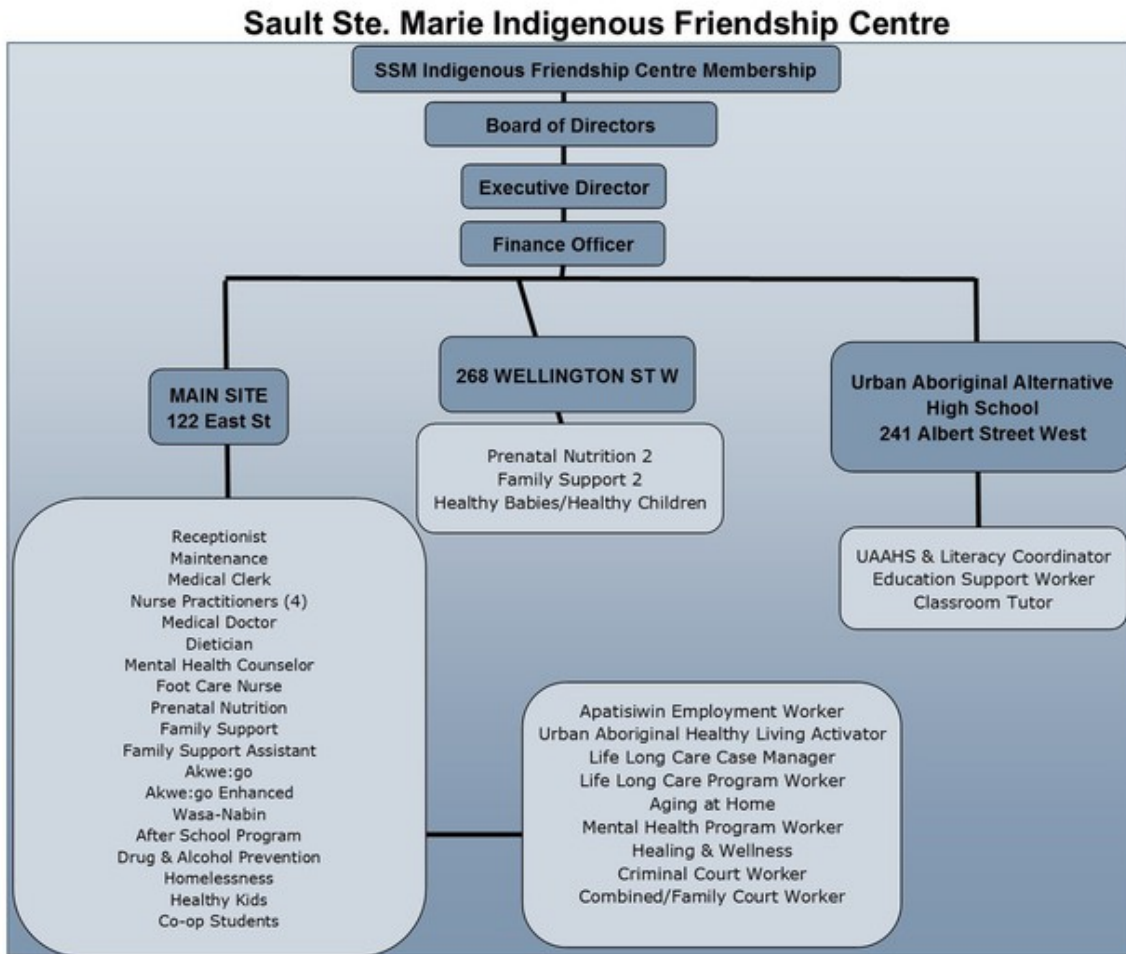
Reporting on Local Activities Reaches Provincial, Federal and Other Funding Bodies

The participant commented first on the fact that with an urban community, the reach is municipal. However she followed this by saying that partnerships with local First Nations and partnerships on the provincial level, mean their reach goes beyond the immediate area.

As well, because the IFC provides reports to funders who may be regional or provincial, they recognize that part of their reach comes not just through services but through sharing information about those services via reports.

The OFIFC is a provincial organization. We have applied, with Nordik Institute, to the Urban Aboriginal Strategy and...and obtained 100,000 geared to youth, and social enterprise, and entrepreneurship so that, when we speak in terms of scope...we report provincially, and then they in turn report back to government, to funding bodies.

2. Please describe the service(s) or program(s) that your organization offers.



Initially, the participant focussed on the client’s experience moving through the life cycle of programs or how programs literally “wrapped around” individuals, no matter what challenges they were facing. As the interview went on however, she spoke more about the community development and advocacy role of the Friendship Centre in working with and educating the municipal government, community organizations and systems about Indigenous people and their history.

Emerging Themes

Programs, Services, Day-To-Day Activities Grounded in Indigenous Philosophies, Practices

As reflected above, when talking about the services offered by the Centre, the conversation rarely reflected a list of services or programs. Instead, the discussion reflected Indigenous values and worldviews about all of the things that impact services or service delivery, including moving beyond the concept of culture as a component of service, to culture *as* service. The participant said, “Here ceremony is on a daily basis. Smudging, we start the day with ceremony.”

Similar to other sites, the discussion focussed on where a service came from or why it originated, how it is used or accessed, the relationships between people and services, or service to service, etc. Essentially, the philosophy of “service” itself was vividly described through the experiences of those visiting the

Centre or the qualities of the people delivering the services. For example, the participant noted the gifts of the superintendent, “same thing with superintendent, Kimmy – she’s a helper of people, she’s picking up the language and she’s non-native.” She shared another example of the compassion demonstrated by local police reaching out to community members,

The key people in those key positions have compassion. Even our police officers that we are engaged with at the Resource Centre. Gore street - high crime, low poverty area. They walk the beat because they haven’t seen Joe Jones for a couple of weeks. They knock on his door because they are concerned, not because he is in trouble. “Hey, we haven’t seen you down at the Friendship Centre.” They amaze me. They got donations from local hotels and businesses and put together baskets for the street workers. They bought carnations; the police walked down and said, ‘We want you to be safe.’ It’s a whole different outlook. I see this movement happening.

A holistic and life cycle approach was also mentioned when describing services. The participant said, “We offer programs, I always say, from the time of conception [prenatal]. We cover that life cycle, with our life long care programs.” She went on to state that “We offer wrap around services: a young mother walks in, she has addiction problems, she can’t make the rent, we have every program in that can assist her, and she has mental health issues and two kids. We are wrapping our services around her in all the ways that she needs.”

She also described how the Centre’s new Eagle staff and its feasting ceremony will be used a means of reaching out to partners, for them to experience “how we do things,” based on the value of reciprocity. “My message is, ‘I’m including you, reciprocate.’ It’s all about reciprocity.”

Cultural Competency Training—Trauma Informed and Grounded in History

Throughout the discussion, “the movement” towards a culturally competent community was referenced, with recognition that the SSMFC “has everything to do with that.” First, the movement started with all SSMFC staff participating in the training, and then moving on to major partners, like the Municipality, the School Board, and ODSP/OW. For example, within six days, 380 ODSP/OW and School Board staff received training! The participant reflected on the relevance of history, historical trauma and healing on the process and the participants:

This movement in the Sault is positive. We have had a lot of requests for our training. This cultural competency is what we call it. I’m 58 years old; I have been to cultural trainings upon cultural trainings upon trainings. We are not sitting and making little dream catchers. We are talking about history, before Europeans arrived, and then what has happened since then, and why we are the way we are, including residential school system.

We have a circle square exercise, where the people in the audience partake in this small exercise. It’s all about healing. When we trained the principals and teachers, there were so many tears, because they never understood our indigenous kids, and the way they are today. It’s because of that historical trauma, it goes untreated. You have a little boy in their class, and he has these maladaptive behaviours that he has inherited. He doesn’t want to listen at school, and that’s the truth.

Despite not having a cultural competency “program or service” listed on the website or referenced in the Annual Report, offering cultural competency training is clearly an important and prominent service.

There is also a strong understanding of the key aspects making it so useful and successful including being trauma informed and founded in historical experiences, like residential school.

Voice, Advocacy . . . Strengthening Presence, Increasing Visibility

The concept of advocacy was also noted, but not in the sense of individual advocacy. It was referred to more often at the organizational level, or when ensuring the voice of Indigenous people was present at community events, or representing the community in SSM history. For example, the participant spoke about an experience of being invited to the 100 year anniversary of SSM, where any mention of any form of Indigenous presence or history was excluded from the event or promotional materials. However, SSMFC used the opportunity to build a relationship with the organizers who initially responded, “I apologize; it was not intentional.” The participant said to herself:

Okay. I have heard that all my life, and I am still hearing it today. But, you are still not going get away with it. I am still going to be your friend and I am still going to work with you. The opportunity did arise for her to do a welcoming, when the OFIFC did their 45 AGM here, so I invited her and she did come...and she gave a wonderful welcoming. We use those opportunities to initiate relationships.

She shared similar examples of being excluded from other public events, despite the longstanding presence and numbers of Indigenous people who make up the SSM population:

We make up 10% of the population--that's more than Garden River and Batchewana First Nation combined, so the work that we do here is very important. I don't take it lightly, I take it very seriously. The last couple of years we have been bringing up our profile in the city, but yet, I see there is work to be done. We have an urban Aboriginal alternative high school that just moved to a school . . .we have to change the sign and have ceremony. The last couple of years, the city had plans to beautify the grounds. There is a place there called spiritual garden, on the grounds, where Indigenous people can go and have talking circles, and sit there, and we can have ceremony there. When they had the news release, they had the mayor, and Algoma district school board rep, and another superintendent, but they didn't have an Aboriginal voice there, where they should have. Our program is a very integral program for the Algoma District School Board. It's huge. Every year, we have 15-165 students, we just graduated 24 and that was overlooked. In order for us to move forward, we need to feel like we are equal to you in our community. There is still some work to be done.

Again, the Centre used the opportunity to strengthen relationships with community partners, offering the Algoma District School Board cultural competency training. Not only is “Advocacy and Voice” a service, it is also being used as a *tool* to connect and work with partners and “get out in our community.” She went on to say, “We as Indigenous people can't sit back and expect things to happen. We have to bring our organization to the forefront, we have to do that. That's the work that we do. It's not only servicing our people and then go home. It's about ‘Hey, let's get out in our community.’”

3. How do you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

Grounded in Cultural Mandate, Teachings

Again, the response to this question, like others, was clearly grounded in the cultural mandate of the organization. For example, one participant said, “We are culturally based and I hold that in high regard. We work under those seven grandfather teachings, I go from there. I always say that.”

As the discussion progressed, there were key qualities described in the work with community and partners, including reciprocity, culturally competent people are compassionate people, and offering culturally safe programs, through cultural protocols etc.

Simply stated, “It’s all about reciprocity.” Through the discussion, examples would arise of situations that described a give and take – of resources, respect, time, etc. Talking about the upcoming feast for the Centre’s eagle staff, the participant said, “We have an eagle staff. We have to feast it. Come and see what we do. Be a part of what we are and what we do...”

The Centre’s view on staffing or resource sharing also reflects reciprocity, respecting that clients cross organizational and geographical boundaries and that sharing of staff or resources across these boundaries is for the betterment of the individuals and communities – moving away from strict client-based resources. For example, a high percentage of Centre clients also frequent a newly established Neighborhood Resource Centre. As a way to connect and support their efforts, “One of my staff [would] go every Wednesday donating her time to answer phones.” The participant went on to describe the collaboration between the Resource Centre, the Friendship Centre and the SSM Police, and how the Police would connect with SSMFC clients out of concern.

Partnerships Still Need Relationships at the Core

“They are partnerships, but our people at city hall, the non-native organizations, and those people in power, they need to learn about the history, and why things are the way they are today. They need to understand us, and we need to understand you. We have to work on those relationships before we can move forward. Being open and accepting of each other.”

Those principles are key to good networking, good communication and partnerships. The participant spoke about Kimmy the Superintendent, or the Commissioner who lived with Elders and others and learned their ways in the North, or staff who know “the old ways” or grew up in their culture with their language. These people are all described as being compassionate, often serving as a bridge or a conduit to change or strengthen a partnership. The question is not necessarily, “How do you work with your community and partners?” It could also be, “What are the qualities of those who are doing it well?”

Cultural Protocols Reinforce Important Relationships

Throughout the discussion, cultural protocols were also mentioned as a means of working with community and partners. For example, a Wampum Belt presented to the Mayor and his council will be added to the written partnership memorandum and the Eagle Staff Feast will be used as a means to engage the community and partners in relationship building.

These activities were not undertaken in isolation. Instead, they were being used to add a “cultural” layer to western agreements. One participant said, “We are going to have a feast at this conference. I plan to work with the mayor’s assistant, and do it more culturally, from a cultural perspective. I want to present to the mayor a Two Row Wampum Belt. That is a legal document, a very cultural and traditional document, an old and strong legal document. I want to present that to him on behalf of the Friendship Centre. I will

also sign the papers. However, this belt will be displayed in his office. It will remind him of the partnership with the Aboriginal people.”

In addition to cultural protocols, agreements were also mentioned as a means of working with partners. One participant said, “We are going to come together in conference, and we are going to formalize these partnerships. We are creating a memorandum of understanding or agreement, that we recognize each other’s differences, but we are going to move forward in a positive direction and work together.” This reiterates the previous point that a mutual understanding can only be arrived at when historical factors are taken into account and recognized.

One participant went on to offer the following story:

When the mayor was officially inaugurated, before he was sworn in, I invited him to the Friendship Centre and have a tour and learn about what your Aboriginal people are doing in SSM. He wrote back, ‘As soon as I’m sworn in.’ This was the first place he came. He stayed all day in our hall, with Elders, and community and staff, and it was really awesome.

It was after this that the mayor committed his office to participate in cultural training.

Persevering with Challenging Relationships, Partners

When speaking of how to work with hard to reach partners, the key factors highlighted included perseverance, drawing on moments of challenge to reach out and have face to face meetings, building personal relationships and building on past relationships.

For example, when speaking of a particular partner, one participant said, “Getting her to come to FC was like pulling teeth. When she finally did come, she gave me 20 minutes, and she was looking at the clock. ‘I know you really don’t want to be here.’ That was okay; at least I had 20 minutes. And if I said anything that stuck in her mind great. If not, oh well.”

One participant said, “We have worked a lot with CAS, it is getting better. It’s hard to pull them into the trainings. I have established a good relationship with the executive director there. And we are going to be having a meeting in a couple of weeks, and these are some of the things we are going to be talking about... I can work it that way. She used to be the commissioner here. When people were evacuated from Kach because of the flooding they worked with the Friendship Centre.”

Respecting and Drawing on Resources, Context

The unique geographic location mentioned by one participant, results in a diverse clientele for the Friendship Centre. Accordingly, the Centre has responded by tapping into resources that support this diversity. For example, the participant shared an instance reflecting the migration trends of clients coming from the North Shore Tribal Council’s communities: “North Shore gives us a pot of money, with ours, we get a traditional healer that comes once a week, and it’s always the same one.” She went on to speak about how their volunteer program includes many volunteers from the Chippewa Nation, reflecting the high number of Chippewa Nation members that use Friendship Centre services. Recent social changes as well, including trafficking of women and high drug use among young moms, has motivated developing reciprocal partnerships with local police, and expanding Friendship Centre programs to include more outreach, instead of offering programs only at the Centre. She said,

There has been a change in community dynamics. Drugs have really doubled, since 2008. The Sault

Youth Association did a report, pills and cocaine and heroin. With that said, our young moms, it's hard to get them to come to programming. They can't sit there for more than 15 minutes; prenatal workers are doing more services than programming. A few years ago, our programs were full with young moms, and now it's hard to get moms out. Even with incentives. Now they are doing more home visits, 'Is everyone ok?' Because of human trafficking, still trafficking, and using while on meth, that is something that is rather new.

4. *What would you say are the main factors that help you work with your community and other partners to deliver services?*

Having the Right People in the Right Roles, who are Flexible, Open, Compassionate

There was a good deal of discussion about the characteristics of people in certain roles. For example, having staff that have cultural knowledge and know-how⁶ was viewed as somewhat of a wise practice.

One participant said the benefits of staff that are culturally sound traditional people, "that follow them old ways" and are very well educated in terms of western education. She went on to share, "being here as long as I have, there is a difference between people who know their culture and language... my previous court worker, he grew up with the ways. He was in the court system, helping our people, he would look out for Indigenous people who have come in contact with the law to make sure they are represented, and they understand what they are talking about." The participant went on to share the impact this approach can have on making changes in mainstream services:

There were a couple of young boys, brothers, remote First Nations born, going to school in SSM, FASD, both sexually abused as children. They are now behind bars, but they need proper assessment, the court worker was saying to the lawyers. They have to go to Sudbury where there is a two year wait. There is nothing in SSM. Those people who have that compassion have a stronger understanding of where people are coming from.

One participant also spoke about how key people in the mainstream ensure that the SSFC is represented in meetings happening out in that community. She went on to talk about the importance of having people in key positions, with compassion, lived experiences, a desire to support and make change. Roles like the, "commissioner of social services, the superintendent of the First Nations school, the mayor, the police, are key people in key positions, with that compassion" that "just make it work."

She offered another example, "Mike, commissioners of social services, supervisors, ow, odsp, housing, all of that, prior to that, he worked for 13 years with the Ontario Native Welfare Association--he has 80 First Nations under his belt. He stayed with Elders in remote reserves, slept on their couches, went on their trap lines, goes hunting with the men, so now he is our commissioner in SSM. You aren't going to get someone with a better understanding than him!"

When people truly understand, are informed and compassionate, they are more flexible to adapting to challenges that arise. One participant said, "Being open and accepting of each other. Those principles are key to good networking, good communication and partnerships."

⁶ Perfect example of how having the knowledge in the organization has helped people outside the organization learn about what is needed so that they make more informed decisions the next time around.

Cultural Competency Training

Again, this theme was prominent here, as in all other aspects of the discussion. Aware people offer more competent services. As mentioned, the mayor and council, the school board, and social service agencies have all received training, with many more requests coming in all the time.

Working Within Culturally-Based Mandate

“We are culturally based and I hold that in high regard. We work under those seven grandfather teachings, I go from there. Here ceremony is on a daily basis. Smudging, we start the day with ceremony. We have an eagle staff, we have to feast it, ‘Come and see what we do [invite out to our partners] be a part of what we are and what we do.’ My message is ‘I’m including you, reciprocate.’”

Connected Programs Better Serve Clients

Programs or services that help connect clients, like Nightingale, were offered as examples of best practice. One participant said, “We have the Nightingale program. You insert their name, their symptoms, why they are being seen. They saved a life because of the Nightingale program. The Traditional Healer gave a medicine, and the western medicine clashed. They got on the program, and consulted, they adjusted and it worked out fantastic.”

An important aspect of this is bridging cultural and mainstream practices, offering mechanisms that help them work together, as opposed to insisting that clients have to choose.

Come and Get to Know Us

During the discussion, the issue of inclusion, or lack thereof, came up at times when speaking of factors that help work with community and partners. For example, one participant said, “Come and see what we do. Be a part of what we are and what we do.”

People that encourage inclusion as well, were also noted as important allies: “Hey, we should have the Friendship Centre represented here.” And “... Can I have a meeting with you? This is what we are doing.”

Holding Others Accountable, Insisting on Inclusion – per above example, and below

Strike three-the previous mayor got up to say her speech, and the very first sentence was all that we could take: ‘One hundred years ago, SSM was nothing but a mere fishing community.’ We thought OMG there were Ojibwa people here with cultures and language. This water source was our main source of travel. We had gardens, we are gardening people. This is the hugest Métis settlement in Canada, in SSM. But there was no validation, nothing.

5. What would you say are the main factors that make it difficult to work with your community and other partners to deliver services?

Inclusion

Despite the “movement happening here,” one participant was clear that “there is still lots of work to be done in terms of inclusion” and that “Indigenous people are a forgotten people in the systems.” For example, Friday during the cultural competency training with the mayor, the mayor stood up and said, “In the fall we are looking at partnerships with Garden River and Batchewana First Nations and establishing partnerships. And I’m thinking, “What about the FC? Here we go again!! You need to recognize us, you need to include us!”

Similarly, a media launch at the Urban Aboriginal Alternative High School excluded the voice of Urban Indigenous representatives. She shared the experience,

The last couple of years we have been bringing up our profile in the city, but yet, I see there is work to be done. We have an urban Aboriginal alternative high school that just moved to a school, Etienne Brule, school name, we have to change the sign and have ceremony. The last couple of years, the city had plans to beautify the grounds. There is a place there called spiritual garden, on the grounds, where indigenous people can go and have talking circles, and sit there, we can have ceremony there. When they had the news release, they had the Mayor, and Algoma District School Board rep, and another superintendent, but they didn't have an Aboriginal voice there, where they should have. Our program is a very integral program for the Algoma District School Board. It's huge. Every year, we have 150-165 students, we just graduated 24 and that was overlooked. In order for us to move forward, we need to feel like we are equal to you in our community. There is still some work to be done.

Having community partners and allies address this exclusion was identified as helpful. For example, one participant described how one partner said, “Mr. Mayor, what about the Friendship Centre in this partnership? We have the biggest population of Indian people.” People making sure the Friendship Centre is at the table means that the Friendship Centre is participating in conversations with other CEOs and directors.

Another means of promoting inclusion is ‘knowing the numbers.’ Friendship Centre staff and allies regularly share with others that in SSM, the Indigenous population represents 10% of the population, or as relevant, the number of students within the school board, or clients using a service, etc.

Dramatic Increase in Drug Use, Impact on Programs

Challenges in changing demographics have also been noted as impacting both working with partners and community. As mentioned, the change in drug use in young mothers has greatly affected the use of one Friendship Centre program, and is also resulting in more home visits.

Insufficient Funding / Lack of Sustainable Funding /Cutbacks

Insufficient funding and no funding for certain populations was also noted during the discussion. For example, “Unfortunately we lost our youth program, funding cut for 18 to 25 year olds--federal government cut.” And, “We have had a daycare, we had to close, we had 39 spots, and we had to pull because of cuts. We had four sites downtown, because daycare left upstairs, we brought our staff back from other sites.” Also noted, many clients are coming from the United States.

Central Region Report: Conclusion

Nurturing relationships, internal and external to the community, has always been foundational to Indigenous community success. The reports from both Ontario and Québec indicate how Friendship Centres in the Central region are interdependent upon relationships with community members, funders and other service organizations, in order to ensure urban Indigenous community needs are met. These relationships are not merely one way, as Friendship Centres have, over time, become major economic contributors to urban communities.

The service delivery landscape of the Friendship Centres in the Central region has grown significantly over the past four decades. The research undertaken for this report provides a current picture of the realities of Friendship Centres in Ontario and Québec. The main goals of the project were to examine the “invisible infrastructure” of the urban Indigenous service landscape by developing an inventory of organizations and service areas with a view toward identifying gaps and improving services; learn about the nature of the partnerships of the Friendship Centres; and to examine opportunities for enhancing participation in the economy, innovative partnerships, and positive relationships between various stakeholders.

It should be reiterated that the Indigenous service delivery contexts of Ontario and Québec are very different. Though there are shared hopes, challenges and legacies of colonization, the approach to Indigenous service delivery within each province is unique to its environment. In addition, the reports generated by the OFIFC and the RCAAQ differed in terms of methodologies. For instance, in the Ontario study the researcher was able to do many interviews at most of the four sites, with a variety of employees. In Québec, one executive director or experienced professional represented each of the eight participating Friendship Centres.

Each report has done an excellent job in drawing its own conclusions based upon the nature of each study. The research from Québec concluded that partnership is at the core of every undertaking of the Friendship Centres. From their experience, the research participants in Québec shared that these relationships are successful when they begin from a place of respect and long-term vision. In addition, these relationships should be mutually beneficial, formalized and embedded in organizational practices. These Friendship Centres found that they had to frequently seize opportunities and drive the relationship-building process by involving partners from the beginning of projects and working at maintaining the relationship. Despite the challenges of a lack of resources, “forced” partnerships, language barriers and a continued ignorance to Indigenous realities, the Friendship Centres in Québec have successfully developed strategies to work with the community and with partners.

The four sites in Ontario emphasized that advocacy was an important part of relationships. In order to be advocates, Friendship Centres find themselves at different tables and committees throughout their cities. In addition, Friendship Centres are, as service organizations, much more than the programs and services they offer. They are central community spaces that are interwoven with Indigenous cultures and protocol, and the staff regularly ‘goes above and beyond’ to meet the needs of everyone who walks through their door. Relationships are fuelled by protocols, events and people, in particular those people who are able to serve as bridges between the Friendship Centres and mainstream organizations. Broader social and political movements impact the programs and services, as increased awareness in the non-Indigenous community means that the Friendship Centre, which can be the first point of contact

with the Indigenous community for many non-Indigenous peoples, is asked more frequently for cultural safety training, talks, etc. The reality of this relationship building with potential organizational partners is that it can still carry with it challenging proposal and reporting requirements.

It is difficult, then, to summarize the research outcomes from both reports and paint a common landscape of Indigenous service delivery in both Québec and Ontario. Instead, we will present high level common themes that can be ascertained from both reports.

1. Advocacy and Education - It is evident that Friendship Centres in the 21st century are much more than service delivery conduits. One of the first conclusions that can be drawn across both reports is that two of the main activities undertaken by Friendship Centres today are advocacy and education. Those interviewed for this project saw these jobs as among the most important. Friendship Centres respond to requests for Indigenous cultural awareness training and other educational workshops. These requests will increase as the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission start to be implemented in mainstream organizations. Friendship Centres also find themselves in the role of Indigenous advocate in relationships with larger non-Indigenous organizations. The Québec report highlighted that there are so many instances in which there are no Indigenous voices and it is the up to the Friendship Centres to take the initiative and make those voices heard. This is particularly important in those political contexts that are not aligned to Friendship Centre visions or economic contexts of “austerity.”

2. Economic Partnerships - Friendship Centres operate within a business model and make economic contributions to the local community. As pointed out in the Ontario report, the Friendship Centre model is one of accountability and transparency and this encourages partnerships and relationship development. Friendship Centres not only contribute to tourism, but also have a significant impact upon the local workforce. According to the Québec report, successful organizational practices and mutual benefit are necessities. It was clear that the most effective way for Friendship Centres to access new and innovative funding opportunities is through maintaining a strong working core: that is, by ensuring the Centre itself is reliable and accessible to potential partners.

3. Vision – The research from Ontario and Québec reveals that in order to have strong partnerships, deliver effective services and advocate for Indigenous peoples, Friendship Centres must maintain a strong vision. This vision is founded on the cultural mandate of the individual Friendship Centre and based upon the land and people that it serves. Both reports indicated the importance of the centrality of this vision and to set smaller goals in order to achieve it. In the Québec report it was mentioned that in order to have effective partnerships, it must be ensured that potential partners both understand and respect the vision of the Friendship Centre.

4. Relationships – Forming and maintaining good relationships is part of the bedrock of Friendship Centre activities. The research from Ontario and Québec both concluded that, where possible, these relationships should be formalized. It was recognized that these relationships are not “one size fits all,” as there are different kinds of relationships that require different commitments. It takes time to cultivate good partnerships and this nurturing takes time. Both reports mentioned that some of these relationships can have onerous reporting requirements attached to them, which can be difficult for the

Friendship Centre staff to complete in the midst of all their other duties. The Québec report shared that sometimes Friendship Centres found themselves in forced relationships with partners who had very little knowledge about Indigenous peoples or Friendship Centres. Friendship Centres in these situations persevered, educated those partners and did what was necessary to carry out their mission.