

# Lheidli

*Where the  
Two Rivers  
Meet*

Decolonizing  
Cultural Safety  
Education  
Through Cultural  
Connections



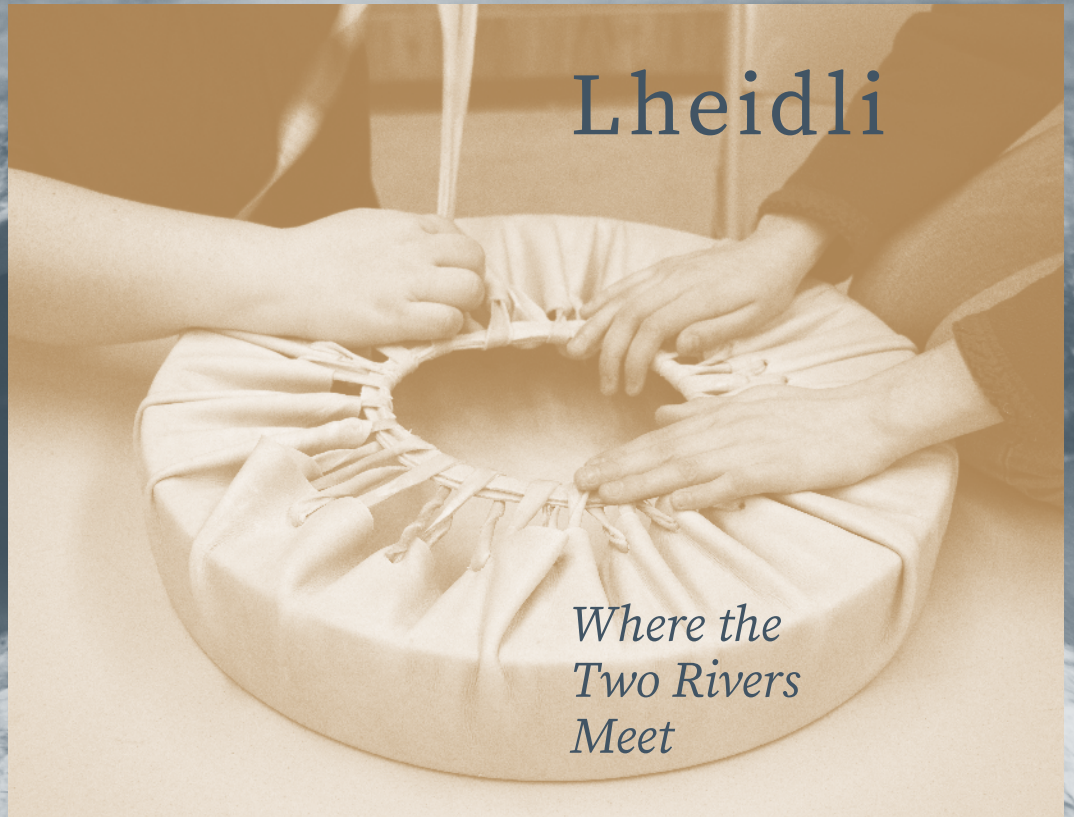
Through cycles of materials, making, listening, speaking, and learning, cycles of hurt transform into those of healing.

As water flows beyond and the path is never forgotten, as it stands and changes, ebbs and flows—so must we, to change the systems, to better ourselves and those we work with.

Reciprocity through conversation and making create a space for learning and unlearning together. To build relationships and community by bringing two streams, two rivers of thought and experience together we are all connected.

Our knowledge is the water that heals and nourishes, that cleanses the systems of harm into systems of health and healing.

Zoë Laycock



Lheidli: Where the Two Rivers Meet  
Decolonizing Cultural Safety Education Through Indigenous Cultural Connection

A collaborative project by:

College of New Caledonia  
3330 22 Ave, Prince George, BC V2N 1P8

Aboriginal Resource Centre  
[cnc.bc.ca/services/prince-george/aboriginal-resources](http://cnc.bc.ca/services/prince-george/aboriginal-resources)

Emily Carr University of Art + Design  
520 East 1st Ave., Vancouver BC, V5Z 0H2

Aboriginal Gathering Place  
[aboriginal.ecuad.ca](http://aboriginal.ecuad.ca)  
[agp@ecuad.ca](mailto:agp@ecuad.ca)

Health Design Lab  
[healthdesignlab.ca](http://healthdesignlab.ca)  
[hdl@ecuad.ca](mailto:hdl@ecuad.ca)

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The *Cultural Connections* workshops were co-created by the project team from the College of New Caledonia, situated on the Lheidli T'enneh Territory (Prince George, Canada) and Emily Carr University of Art + Design, on the unceded, traditional and ancestral x̣ṃəθḳ'əỵəm (Musqueam), Ṣḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səililẉətaʔṭ (Tsleil-Waututh) territories (Vancouver, Canada).

# grounding

*Elder Darlene McIntosh*

As we put our feet flat on the floor  
close your eyes.  
Take a few deep cleansing breaths throughout your body.

*pause...*

As you breathe into your body  
start to feel the deeper connection to yourself.

*pause...*

Start to breathe into your shoulders, where you carry burdens  
fears, anxieties.  
Your breath starts to lift those burdens off your shoulders.  
Feel it slide down your arms, down to your fingertips and drop on.

Mother Earth, Mother Earth takes your burdens  
and transmutes them into a positive energy  
and with a smile on her face  
she gives it back to you  
to fill your vessel as much as you need.

*pause...*

Imagine yourself early in the morning, outside  
standing in the East direction.  
Every day the sun comes up in the East direction  
and then you start to see the sun come up.  
What does this do?

It gives you a new day,  
new beginnings and new possibilities, as you have a clean slate  
every morning on how you want your day to start.  
This we are grateful for.


Now take another breath all the way down to your feet.  
You feel your feet sink into the deep rich soil of Mother Earth.  
You smell the richness of her soil,  
you feel it between your toes.

And there, Mother Earth grounds you into today,  
into this very moment, coming together as one  
And this we are grateful for.

*pause...*

All my relations.





“Our connection is  
our strength, connection  
to the land, to the  
culture, to each other.”

Like the land this project took place on—  
Lheidli, where the two rivers meet—this  
publication holds the converging voices of  
people who have shaped and experienced  
the *Cultural Connections* workshop, flowing  
together perspective and reflections  
represented through poetry, essays, quotes  
and images.

Snachailya (thank you, in Dakelh) to all  
of our participants, team members, and  
supporters who made this project possible.



## Moving Beyond Inequities

### Brenda Crabtree

Brenda Crabtree is a member of the Spuzzum Band in the Nlaka'pamux territory. She is Director of Aboriginal Programs at Emily Carr University of Art + Design and Special Advisor to the President on Indigenous Initiatives.

I am grateful for the relationship and connection between Emily Carr University and the northern rural community of Prince George for the past 20 years.

Colonial practices such as Canada's residential school system and the Sixties Scoop forcibly removed and isolated Indigenous children from their families, community and traditional lands, in order to assimilate them into the dominant Canadian culture. The legacy of these policies continues to contribute to the over-representation of Indigenous people in child welfare and criminal justice systems, and contribute to intergenerational trauma, which have adverse effects on the health of Indigenous peoples (Erickson et al., 2022).

In 2020, a review of Indigenous-specific racism in British Columbia's provincial healthcare system was conducted through the Ministry of Health. The *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care Data* report indicates current widespread Indigenous-specific stereotyping, racism and discrimination (Turpel-Lafond, 2020).

“The measurables remain heartbreaking. There are currently extreme health gaps that continue to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.”

As noted in the report, current education and training programs are inadequate to address Indigenous-specific racism in healthcare. Indigenous healthcare statistics continue to highlight marginalization, inequities and disparity in healthcare for Indigenous peoples.

Other recent reports note that status women and girls have mortality rates that are three to four times that of the general female population between the ages of 10 to 44. Infant mortality rates are three times higher than the Canadian national average. In some Aboriginal communities, the suicide rate amongst youth is fifty times higher than non-Aboriginal youth, and the list goes on (Feir & Akee, 2019). This is why we need culturally relevant strategies and learning tools to improve cultural safety within healthcare.

Clearly, something is lacking, and we need to extend the learning of health practitioners to include the pillars of cultural competency; but more importantly we must recognize the limitations of classrooms/clinical practice in teaching those pillars and find methods to move healthcare providers to a place where they integrate them into their practice.

To address this need for a new approach, the *Cultural Connections* workshops bring people together in a safe, structured way to achieve change. It is our shared reciprocal knowledge and insights from team members, Indigenous community members and healthcare students that enable us to establish a culturally safe space that

fosters and encourages conversation. In the workshops, we address the direct connection between Canada's colonial past and present, and the health inequities we see today. While the conversations and sharing are cathartic, they often start initially as a mess of inconsolable tears, involving many boxes of Kleenex and soothing reassurances, and healing. We aren't just compiling a list of inequities; we are reversing the colonial lens. Instead of the colonial gaze looking at us, we are trying to look out at you, the non-Indigenous community, the healthcare providers who can make a difference. The measurables remain heartbreaking. There are currently extreme health gaps that continue to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. We need to value the intangibles, the immeasurables, such as personal and cultural safety, and self-esteem.

In our workshops, we often end the day with an activity of asking participants to share one word to describe how they are feeling which reflects the participants' collective goal of building something better. We ask, what are our responsibilities?

We should be collectively imagining a future with Indigenous access to healthcare that mimics non-Indigenous health statistics. Our shared vision for change includes a common understanding of our healthcare concerns and a collaborative approach to achieving action. We are committed to being both advocates and activists for Indigenous healthcare equity. My word for the day is *resilience*.

# Decolonizing Cultural Safety Education through Cultural Connections

## The Cultural Connections Team

*How can we address racism in healthcare through community-based cultural safety education, grounded in Indigenous methodologies for learning and dialogue?*

Cultural Connections is an Indigenous community-led approach to cultural safety education that seeks to decolonize the healthcare system through making and dialogue. This is a collaboration between the Aboriginal Gathering Place and the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUAD) and the Director of Aboriginal Education at the College of New Caledonia (CNC), and funded through a Systems Change Grant from the Vancouver Foundation (*Systems Change Grants*, 2018). The overall goal of this project has been to shift how the next generation of health professionals view Indigenous health and support an environment where Indigenous peoples can consistently access culturally safe and appropriate care, feel comfortable using the healthcare system as part of their health management, and experience better health outcomes.

Through our collaboration over the past three years, we have developed, tested,

and refined a cultural safety education workshop model, referred to as *Cultural Connections*.

A key aspect of the workshop model is the prioritization of local Indigenous protocols and inclusion of local Indigenous artists, knowledge holders, and cultural advisors as workshop facilitators, supported by designers, design researchers, and a physician. Through a combination of activities that are grounded in Indigenous methodologies, the workshop aims to create a culturally immersive space for the purpose of shared learning and mutual benefit.

### Cultural Connections Workshop Model

The cultural safety training model takes the form of a three-day workshop. This workshop invites approximately ten health science students and a similar number of Indigenous community members/students to come together in a shared space. Knowledge sharing with a *gentle hands* approach (see page 16) blends hard-hitting conversations with making drums, rattles, beadwork, moose hair tufting, and other local Indigenous material practices. As illustrated in *figure 1*, Indigenous ways of knowing and being are foundational to this workshop model. This approach

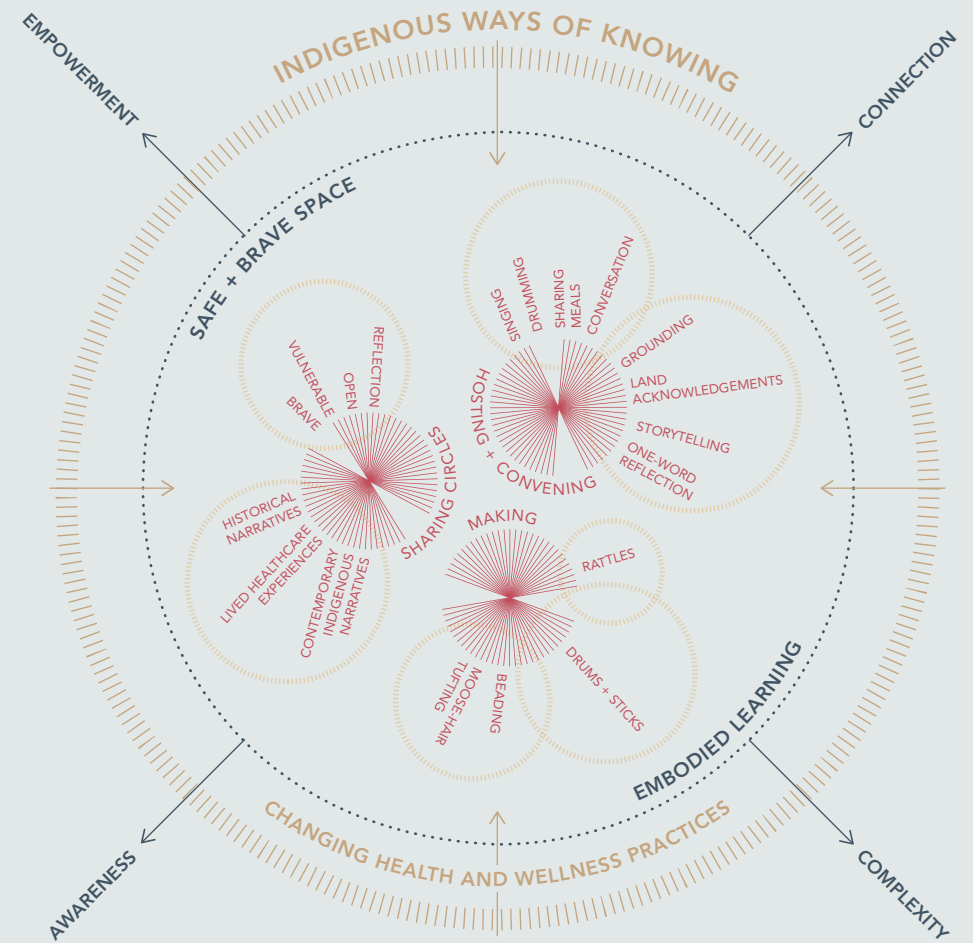


Figure 1: Cultural Connections Workshop Model Overview

aims to flatten power hierarchies and create space for meaningful connection and shared learning through conversation and making, looking at how centring Indigenous voices, experiences, and practices can enable change within healthcare systems, or make space for alternative systems to emerge.

The concepts of embodied learning, brave spaces, and safe spaces are inherent within Indigenous knowledge sharing, and our team took special care to shape those kinds of learning environments. Enabling students to connect with

community members and hear everyday stories and experiences, we found that this relational way of learning can help to break down prejudices and views on racism. This kind of learning doesn't happen by clicking through an online course or listening to someone read a list of historical facts—it's about creating a safe and brave spaces to have difficult conversations and practice learning that we feel in our hearts and bodies, as well as our minds.

Within the learning space of the workshops, we practiced three methods:



**HOSTING AND CONVENING** highlighted the importance of culture, tradition, and local protocol as the point of entry into conversation, opening up a safe space for discussion by setting the tone for the room. Bringing Indigenous people and non-Indigenous participants together allows for perspectives, experiences and world views to be catalyzed in place by providing context and faces to stories and sharing.

**SHARING CIRCLES** are structured periods of dialogue, led by our Indigenous hosts and team members. Sitting in circle, each member of the group could choose to speak and listen. These sharing circles created spaces where participants felt safe and welcome to be open and vulnerable, and brave enough to share their emotional response with the group. Participants were able to reflect on how

this learning felt for them emotionally and physically, and what allyship and advocacy could look like for them as individuals and as health practitioners.

**MAKING** offered participants space to rest and reflect on the sharing circles, creating meaningful conditions for introspection, learning, unlearning and healing. Making also created an environment that stimulated dialogue; participants connect and learn from Indigenous artists and their peers through formal and informal moments. Further, it offered tangible connections to land and traditional Indigenous practices, and knowledge holders in their communities. Through learning the skills to create using traditional material, the participants could feel the teachings, their connection to First Nations culture and relationship to the land.

Each making activity was specifically selected to support learning and align with the pacing of the workshop (*figure 2, next spread*). The rattles show how First Nations use every part of the animal, honour the life in everything, and live with the mindset that everything is connected. The drum making takes a tenacity that exhausts the body, yet brings out the best laughter and stories. There was a relief and a great reward when participants finished their drums that brought everyone together, reminding us of an integral Indigenous perspective: we are all one. Making opened the participants' creativity, which in turn opens their ears, eyes and heart.

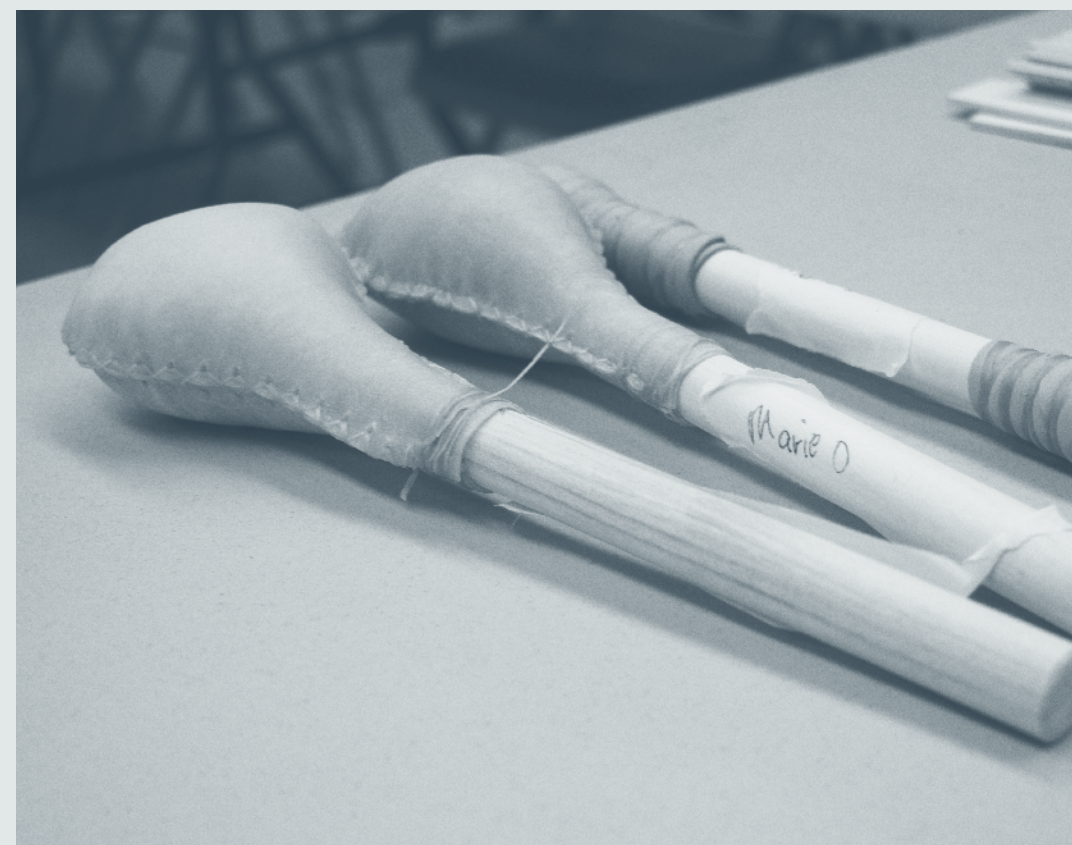
The diversity of the materials allow for individuals to find their own connections—it was not about completing projects, but the process of building relations, sharing cultural, and being in conversation with one another. It was a space to gather and

tell stories, to open up and share about what they learnt, experienced and felt. We witnessed the growth of community in the workshops.

### **Reflections and Impacts**

Key to the development of the cultural connections model was the reflection and evaluation of the approach through a set of pilot workshops. The research and evaluation work was led by the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University.

During and following the workshops, we had the opportunity to meet with the participants and talk about what they felt were the biggest impacts on them. We heard participants talk about a learned **AWARENESS** of the impacts of systemic, Indigenous-specific racism, both within health care settings and broader communities. Participants were struck by the statistics and stories of lived experiences revealing inequalities (historical and

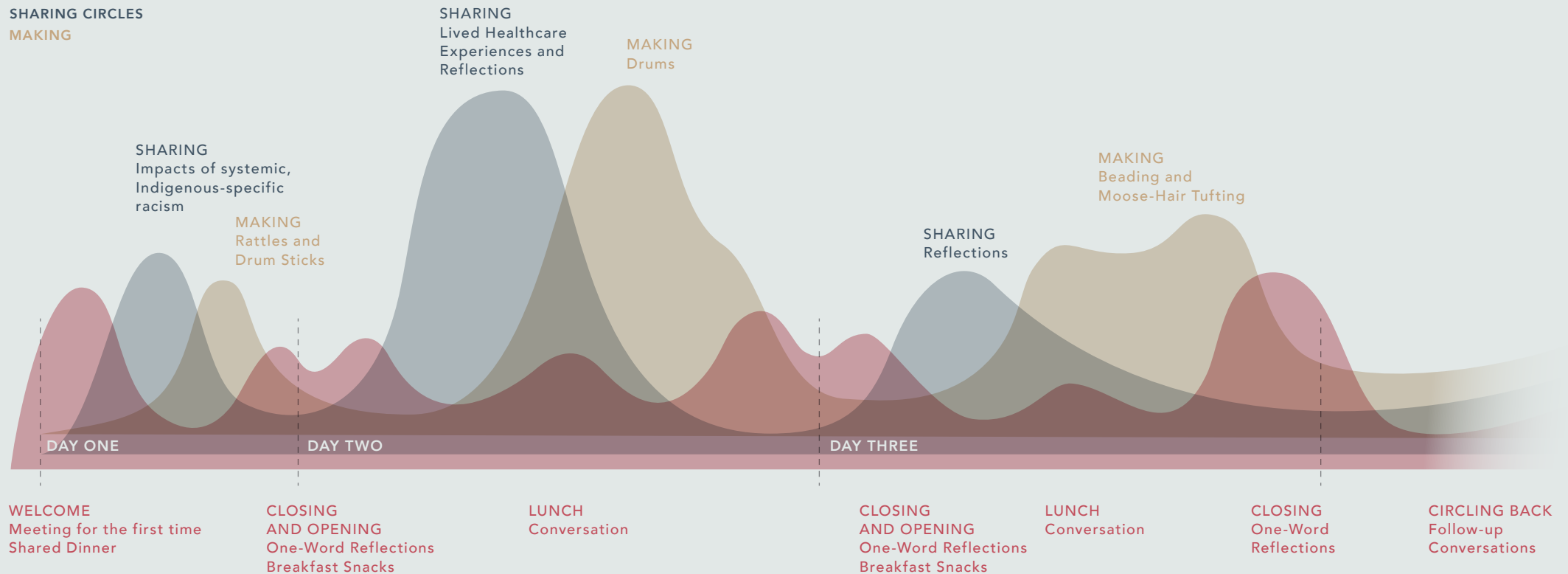




## HOSTING AND CONVENING

## SHARING CIRCLES

## MAKING



current), and talked about their own knowledge gaps, reflecting on their individual privileges, blind spots, and assumptions.

The *Cultural Connections* workshops facilitated CONNECTION to local Indigenous culture and community. Participants built relationships with local Indigenous elders, artists, and students, through both structured and unstructured conversations and activities. These kinds of culturally immersive experiences shifted away from a deficit-based perspective of Indigenous culture, and Indigenous participants were able to share a spectrum of themselves and their stories as present, embedded and engaged members of their nations and communities.

Learning came from hearing each other's lived experiences and perspectives. These face-to-face, group conversations created a learning space that didn't feel detached—like traditional lecture-based learning—but rather built a sense of trust and accountability. Engagement with Indigenous people as people, not patients, supported relationship building with mutual respect and equality.

The workshops demonstrated the COMPLEXITY of Indigenous practices, materials, relationships, and the need to do this learning in supportive, relational ways. We talked in various ways about challenging the notion that Indigenous makings are simple crafts, or that racist attitudes and behaviors are in the past—

there are rich and complex relationships to the land, storytelling and each other in all these practices.


Participants expressed a real sense of EMPOWERMENT—and an understanding of not just systemic impacts of racism within health care settings, but also where they sit within those systems, and how they might be able to respond.

The combination of these elements left participants feeling grateful for this workshop, and able to see themselves/their practice as being able to be part of change.

This publication and related exhibition, *Lheidli: Where the Two Rivers Meet*,\* are

the result of a three-year pilot project to develop and test the *Cultural Connections* workshop model. We hope by reading this you may come to understand the potential of this approach to address Indigenous-specific racism and health inequities that persist today and consider your own role in enacting change towards improving Indigenous care experiences.

\**Lheidli: Where the Two Rivers Meet* is an exhibition hosted by Two Rivers Gallery, in Prince George, BC on Lheidli T'enneh Territory, August 11 to September 25, 2022.



Yvonne Pierrero, local artist and Indigenous Knowledge Holder, shared her generational knowledge of beading and traditional moosehide tanning during the *Cultural Connections* workshops.

“When we can tell our stories, and they are listened to, we can heal.”



## A Gentle Hands Approach

### Marlene Erickson

Marlene Erickson is an Elder of the Nak'azdli Whut'en Nation and a member of the Lusilyoo (Frog) Clan. Marlene resides on the unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh, and tries to walk softly and with respect knowing that she would not be here, if not for the dispossession from their lands. She is the Executive Director of Aboriginal Education at the College of New Caledonia.

As the Executive Director of Aboriginal Education at the College of New Caledonia, I have spent much of my career working towards decolonizing education.

Within the workshops all the students and facilitators participate in sharing circles, where there are key elements to learn. First, we discuss the impacts of residential schools. It's one thing to read about hunger, abuse and loneliness; it's quite another thing to listen to a fellow group member tell their experience of how it impacted them and their fellow students, who witnessed the trauma. While residential schools don't exist today, we teach about how that experience still impacts every single First Nations person and community, even though most of us never set foot inside a residential school.

Many topics are discussed within the sharing circles: cultural shock, living in two worlds, loss of culture, and the need for compassion. Students learn how trauma was passed down to the next generation, they learn about the loss of knowledge of parenting skills, the loss of trust in

authority figures and education systems, and the guilt and shame (especially over things like the body and self-image, sexuality), all of which have profound impacts on healthcare. Lots of people don't go to doctors until they're in a great deal of pain, and often in end-stage illness because they are ashamed. Add to this the lack of understanding on the part of the healthcare professional, and you have the tragic health outcomes we see too often today. Through making, sharing and discussion we create understanding. So instead of First Nations people being a page of statistics, a pathological case study of high diabetes rates, heart problems and suicides, the participants gain a deep understanding of what these statistics mean to the people who live them every single day.

We are really excited about the positive outcomes of this way of teaching. It demonstrates how building relationships

is foundational to changing attitudes and building networks of support—and these key teachings are not being taught, and really can't be taught in most classrooms. This is a reciprocal process, drawing on the knowledge, wisdom and experience of local knowledge holders, and of every participant in the room.


Cultural competency—which the elders call *gentle hands*—is a critical component of improving the health outcomes of Indigenous people; probably as important as the medical knowledge that students learn. We hope workshops like this one will instill those skills so participants will carry them into their professional practice and beyond.

Snachailya, Thank you, you have honoured us.

**“Cultural competency—which the elders call *gentle hands*—is a critical component of improving the health outcomes of Indigenous people.”**



Our elders say that “we all have our gifts,” so not all materials connect to every person. The detailed work of beading or the dexterity needed to tuft didn’t connect to every participant, so they could go back to finish their rattle, work on a drumstick, or add something to the group hide project.



“The making is the conduit of conversation. That’s where safety comes from.”

M. Colleen Erickson

## Still Water

Ancient paths do you cry for the footfalls of your people

*Still water who knows you?*

Do you yearn for the communion with those who blessed you  
Tall trees do you keep watching in their stead  
Strong Alder kneeling by the water to weep  
Aching for the time when you provided protecting smoke  
Balsam, joining the dirge, lost with the sacred ceremonies

*Still water who knows you?*

Is it the same without their presence  
Does the duck skimming over so close still thrill you  
Does your stillness feel the same without the deft cut of a canoe  
Can the rage of your waters sustain you without witness of your power

Red willow can you remember their voices  
Reverent through your branches in search of your help to heal  
And you, East wind, blowing in what weather you please,  
Do you lean in sorrow with no children or old ones to dance you away

White poplar, your leaves so yellow falling one by one  
Did you wonder at their departure, the pain in their last look

Oh still water

*Still waters mourn for the people who knew you.*

Your tears shall fall true  
into the hearts of those who still do.

## Atsoo I'm Trying

I saw you fall by the side of the road  
Wine soaked,  
you struggled to rise  
Then just settled your head in the crook of your arm  
Though confused,  
you knew the comfort of fresh grass  
And even as your friend called to you  
You lay resting in what was

Atsoo  
used to tell you fresh grass is good Child,  
it will cleanse your blood  
Give thanks and eat lots when it arrives  
Always celebrate the first spring's nourishment,  
Strong medicine after the earth's long winter sleep

But the Father said why do you romp in fresh grass  
You Heathen,  
you need to cleanse your soul  
You are wild!  
Must I teach you everything  
Cut the grass. Keep it short.  
Do you not know how to bring culture to your place?

When you return home,  
Atsoo wonders at your crazy ways  
Why cut the grass with fevered frenzy?  
Child remember who you are.  
You call Atsoo I'm trying  
As you lay there, I hear you whisper

*"Atsoo I'm dying"*

Colleen (Marion) Erickson is a recognized community leader and veteran member of the RCMP. She holds a Master's degree in Education focused on traditional philosophies of Carrier teachings. Colleen is a former two-term Chief of Saik'uz First Nation and brings a wealth of negotiation, financial administration, mediation and leadership skills to the First Nations Health Authority as Chair of the Board of Directors.

A Dakelh grandmother (Ut'soo) from the Nak'azdli community and member of the Lasilyu (Frog) Clan, Colleen is an active community member who participates in the balhats (potlatch) system, and she believes that cultural identity is the foundation of health and wellness.

*Cultural Connections* moves beyond singular and tokenistic guest speakers towards hearing directly from the voices of community. Learning happens through story and conversation in sharing circles and while making.



“Cultural Safety  
isn't something that  
you can really learn in  
an 8-hour course.

You have to learn  
through hearing  
these stories.”

# hard

*Violet Martin*

In your reaction I was flooded  
with how hard is my hard?

Your face filled to every corner with shock,  
at contrast my face of confusion

*this is my normal*

My reality is shocking to you?  
In this moment I don't feel hard  
I feel soft and vulnerable.  
My confusion is this my history that shocks you

*it is our shared history!*

Still sitting in confusion, how do you not know?  
This truth is part of every cell of my DNA?

Who denied you?  
Is this why your hard is different than my hard?

Now you are left holding a heavy bag of trauma  
that I have carried my whole life.

I am stronger, strong enough to carry the bag  
now weighing you down.  
I have it at all times  
without anyone even knowing I have it.

Maybe I should have given it to you  
a small piece at a time  
but in my moment, I just dumped it on you,  
burying you in it. Sorry.

I wonder if you will look back on the before fondly  
or with the same shock or horror and ponder

*what hard is to you now?*





## Cultural Connections: Experiences & Reflections

### Violet Martin

Violet is a Nursing student at the College of New Caledonia who participated in the *Cultural Connections* Workshop herself and then joined the planning team to support local workshop coordination.

I will start with a brief introduction of myself, I am an Indigenous woman from Prince George, I am a member of the Nakazidli band centered in Fort St. James. My mother was a great asset to the Indigenous community here before her passing in 2017. I have tried to take on some of her advocacy and education roles in our community. I believe that the *Cultural Connections* workshops are a continuation of this work. I feel that this is a fantastic way to help bridge and build connections between the healthcare system and Indigenous people.

Indigenous peoples have had hundreds of years and generations to deal with the trauma of racism and are used to carrying it with us. The non-Indigenous participants have not had the time to become strong enough to handle this information, and I believe that the workshops help to deliver some hard truths. The way that the hard truths are delivered in first person accounts coupled with the making of Indigenous arts has a transformative effect on participants. The way that participants confront themselves and the preconceived notions of Indigenous peoples is amazing to see in person. I feel that the participants do come away with a new perspective on Indigenous peoples and how complex and resilient we are. The impact that this workshop has on all that participate is long lasting and important to lay the foundation for real change.

### Brittany Sword

Brittany was a Dental Assisting student at the College of New Caledonia who participated in the *Cultural Connections* Workshop in April 2022.

Attending a workshop like this one is not something I normally do, but for some reason I was drawn to it. I had to push myself to leave my comfort zone when this opportunity was presented to my Dental Assisting class, but the lessons I learned with this circle of amazing people are ones I will carry throughout my entire life.

I was shaken to the core from the beginning of our first sharing circle. Listening to the tragedies that occurred either to those in my company or their loved ones was one of the hardest things I have listened to in person. It was so painful to hear of the heartbreakingly cruel things done to Indigenous people despite that they had done nothing in the slightest to deserve it. I have learned much about Residential Schools throughout my years, be it in high school, post-secondary or from self-research on the internet. But there is a raw, sickening feeling hearing it being told to you live by someone who had survived it or had a close member who survived/passed away from the experience.

I intended to simply observe, listen and only speak when spoken to. I do not normally do well with public speaking, especially when it concerns such intimate, private knowledge. I had zero intention of

sharing anything in my life with the group, these strangers whom I did not know and assumed had no idea of what I have been through. But as each person did their speaking/sharing, I felt a connection forming and before I knew it, it was my turn. And what do I know, suddenly I am sharing some of the most traumatic and horrible things that have happened to me because I felt like everyone understood and saw me.

The making of the drum and rattle was amazing. They were difficult, with much of the steps being the hard manual work of stretching the wet leather. It gave me such respect for Indigenous peoples who work so hard and make such beautiful, meaningful art. I really enjoyed how almost everything that was done was done to be social. There was no deadline, stress or rush when it came to the crafts or sharing circle, but simple socializing and enjoyment. People sat in different places all of the time and I was approached multiple times by multiple different people who were striking up conversation.

This workshop has really changed a lot of my outlook since it ended. It was an eye-opening experience that taught me a lot of emotional lessons. There is so much inequality in our healthcare system (on top of everywhere else) and there is not remotely enough awareness. The first step to even being able to think about changing this is making more people aware, and this workshop has done an incredible job at making me more aware.

“I have never been in an environment where I felt so vulnerable and brave at the same time.”



## Fallon Johnson

Fallon is a Dental Assisting student at the College of New Caledonia who participated in the *Cultural Connections Workshop* in April 2022.

Going into this experience, I did not really know what to expect. Though I made sure to go into it with an open mind, full of acceptance and eagerness to learn about the lives and culture of the Indigenous people we would be spending the weekend with. Little did I know, we would all end up in a talking circle on the second day, listening to and sharing heart-breaking stories about experiences that either themselves and/or their families have endured while growing up.

As the day progressed, we got to learn how to sew and mold some rattles with pre-cut pieces of hide and leather strips that they so generously provided

us all to use for educational purposes. As we were lining up to grab our materials, I questioned to myself how much all this hide and leather must cost and how incredible these people are to allow us to use it. I later found out that to make one hide from elk or deer, it costs at least a couple thousand dollars which I found shocking.

To learn and see just how much effort and time it takes to ready these raw materials and create such intricate pieces, really made me appreciate Indigenous people and their culture. I felt so much closer to everyone as we were making our crafts.

On the second day, we were warmly greeted again, and we were encouraged to join them in the circle again. I was rejuvenated from a good night's rest after the long day we had prior. This day is when it was disclosed to us that the conversations

**“Positive relationships in healthcare are essential for positive care that Indigenous people deserve.”**

and stories they will be sharing with us will be quite heavy and saddening. Participation to share a personal story was voluntary, and I went into it with 100% certainty that I was not going to share a story or my feelings on such a touchy subject.

The very first story shared to us immediately pulled my heartstrings and made me cry out of extreme sadness and confusion. It was about this person's mother, and what she had to go through as a child growing up. She explained that whenever she went to see a dentist, they pulled nearly every one of her teeth when they never needed to be pulled.


Another story that really stuck with me was shared to us by an Indigenous group member about their mother as well, and how she was forced to get her tubes tied at a very young age. It was so disheartening to hear and take in. I immediately thought about how absolutely gut-wrenched I would be if that were to happen to me, that I could only imagine the amount of pain and heartache that would have given his mother. At that moment, I did not know how I should be feeling exactly. I felt so many different emotions all at once. It made me feel so... upset, angry, confused, empathetic, and sorry. It made me question humanity. I asked myself, “why would anyone deserve that kind of treatment when they did not want it? It just seems... inhumane, unfair.” It really made me think about the Indigenous people and what most of

them went through years ago; what they go through in today's world.

This entire experience was honestly life-changing for me. I will admit that before entering this voluntary event, I had been a person who would be so quick to judge others, based on stereotypes. However, I also admit that I was and still am, fairly uneducated on the subject. My role in this experience was not only to become involved and saturated in the culture to learn about the hardships they have once endured and even endure to this day, but also to really see the beauty behind the art and what the culture is composed of.

Being exposed to the incredibly sad stories and true horror stories that Indigenous people have gone through in life has honestly changed my perspective in my daily life. The two stories I mentioned earlier, are just two of the many stories I heard during that weekend that have become engraved in my mind. I think about them all of the time. I learned the term “intergenerational trauma,” while I was there. This means that even though these hardships occurred generations ago, the hurt and pain is still felt and passed down to their children and their children's children. These stories need to be heard. They need to be understood. Humanity can do better. In my opinion, this experience can be a small stepping-stone into the right direction of making this world a better place, full of acceptance and love.



A group of approximately 15 people are seated in a circle on chairs in a room with wood-paneled walls. They appear to be engaged in a workshop or community meeting. The room has a door in the background with a sign that says "156". The overall atmosphere is warm and focused.

The pace and structure of the workshop was intended to be flexible and emergent. Local artist Michael Antoine shared songs inspired by the group and their stories, and brought the room together with his drumming.

“Medicine is for our whole self. Physical, mental, spiritual and emotional.

What we do here is medicine for the soul and the spirit.”



## We are All One Song

### Dr. Sari Raber

Family Physician and graduate  
of the UBC Indigenous Residency  
Program

My name is Sari Raber and my ancestors are from Russia and Poland. My Hebrew name is Sheara, שירה, which means song.

I am so honoured to be included as part of this incredible team and powerful project, as a physician consultant. A special thank you to my sister Caylee for pulling me in. Relationships truly are medicine.

I work as a family doctor with a focus on maternity care, children and youth, mental health, and education. I entered medical school with the knowledge of the power, privilege and responsibility that comes with being a physician. I grew up learning about anti-Semitism and the genocide of my ancestors. I learned about the harm physicians caused to marginalized groups through medical experiments throughout the holocaust. This was in a large contrast to how little I knew about the genocide within the country where I was born, live and work... Canada. I had a lot to learn. I still have a lot to learn and unlearn.

I completed my medical school and residency training through the University of British Columbia where I had the opportunity to be taught by Physicians as well as Elders in the Indigenous Residency Program. Indigenous ways of knowing and healing helped support my own wellness throughout the learning process and strenuous residency training program. Ritual practice, including connecting with my own ancestors and Jewish practices, continue to be foundational for my own wellness practices today.

I have been privileged to work and learn in many different communities during my first five years of practice including Cowichan Tribes (on Vancouver Island), the Traditional Territory of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (in Yukon) and briefly in the Qikiqtaaluk and Kivalliq regions of Nunavut. I now live and work on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples and don't plan on moving far, as my Auntie duties ground me here.

Through my training, and into practice, I unfortunately witnessed the ongoing racism and impacts of white supremacy within the current healthcare system. I learned how racism, discrimination and stigma had torn families apart, through residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. I also learned that great harm is still

happening today. And I also experienced Indigenous ways of healing and witnessed the strength. I am continually motivated by the patients who share their stories, demonstrate their strengths, and teach me about what they need from their doctors and from the medical system.

It is hard for me to briefly summarize why and how important I believe this project is, so I will redirect you to the recent *In Plain Sight* report by Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and her team (2020). They astutely summarize the current state of Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in the BC healthcare system today and highlight key recommendations.

Personally, I have completed virtual and in person, required and optional, courses and training in cultural safety offered by more than one health authority. I've been to conferences and heard many leaders, mentors, and Elders' presentations. But in my experience that wasn't enough. Learning about history is different from learning to see what is in plain sight. Learning only about heartbreak and harm will leave not only patients but also providers unable to complete the full circle to healing.

I could not have read about the taste of freshly smoked salmon, the love and support of community members holding each other on through ceremony overcoming

**“I am continually motivated by the patients who share their stories, demonstrate their strengths, and teach me about what they need from their doctors and from the medical system.”**

# reflections by the pool

Dr. Sari Raber

grief and addiction on their traditional lands; I could not have understood what it meant to have an Indigenous Midwife and an Elder support a patient through the delivery of a stillborn, without the privilege of being invited to be there to witness that taste, that smell, that love and those tears.

After our first *Cultural Connections* workshop in February 2020 I boarded the flight home from Prince George, holding the first drum I've ever made. When I looked at the photo afterwards, I was shocked at how happy I looked! I almost didn't recognize myself. Planning and participating in that workshop was so healing for me and it wasn't until afterwards that I realized how much I needed that.

Today, the opioid crisis continues to take lives daily and the pandemic continues to present new challenges. My job hasn't gotten any easier. The system has many, many gaps. Working with this incredible team and on this project continues to provide me with moments for pause and reflection. Our team believes that through this project of *Cultural Connections* we can offer some solutions, or at least a platform for conversation, growth,

learning, re-connection and healing—and this is what I have been honoured to witness as part of this project.

I will conclude with this excerpt from Richard Wagamese, from his book *One Drum: Stories and Ceremonies for a Planet* that deeply connects me to my name, my work and this project.

*"See, my people say that we are all one song. We are born of the same spiritual energy. We are created in its image and we carry it within us. As we walk upon the Earth we move with the same eternal rhythm that beats within it. The heartbeat..."*

*All of us seek a reconnection to that same eternal, spiritual heartbeat. All of us seek a reconnection to creative, nurturing spiritual energy. All of us carry that yearning, and we created ceremony and ritual and religions out of that ache. So the truth is that we have always been one song."*  
(Wagamese, 2019)

For me this is heart work and also very hard work, and the only way forward is to work together to create positive change.

The week was full on  
Every moment felt so large it was hard to keep them all in my mind  
I worry as times moves forward I might forget the moments  
I'm trying to hold them tight

But I need to relax my hands, to let them, flow so I can process  
and learn and move forward.  
How can I express the magic I felt? The change I witnessed?  
The shift I felt within?

The mornings remained my own personal sacred time  
My way to hold my self accountable to the order of care  
Care for self, so you can care for family,  
so then you can care for your community, for the world

And after I did my morning exercises I couldn't resist  
slipping into the untouched pool, the still water

I thought about ritual and ceremony  
I thought about how we are all one song

I stepped in

And I watched as the ripple slowly advanced, making its way to the far end of the pool  
before it slowly made movements back towards me.

How can I take just one step?  
How can I be a positive catalyst for change without  
getting used up myself in the process?

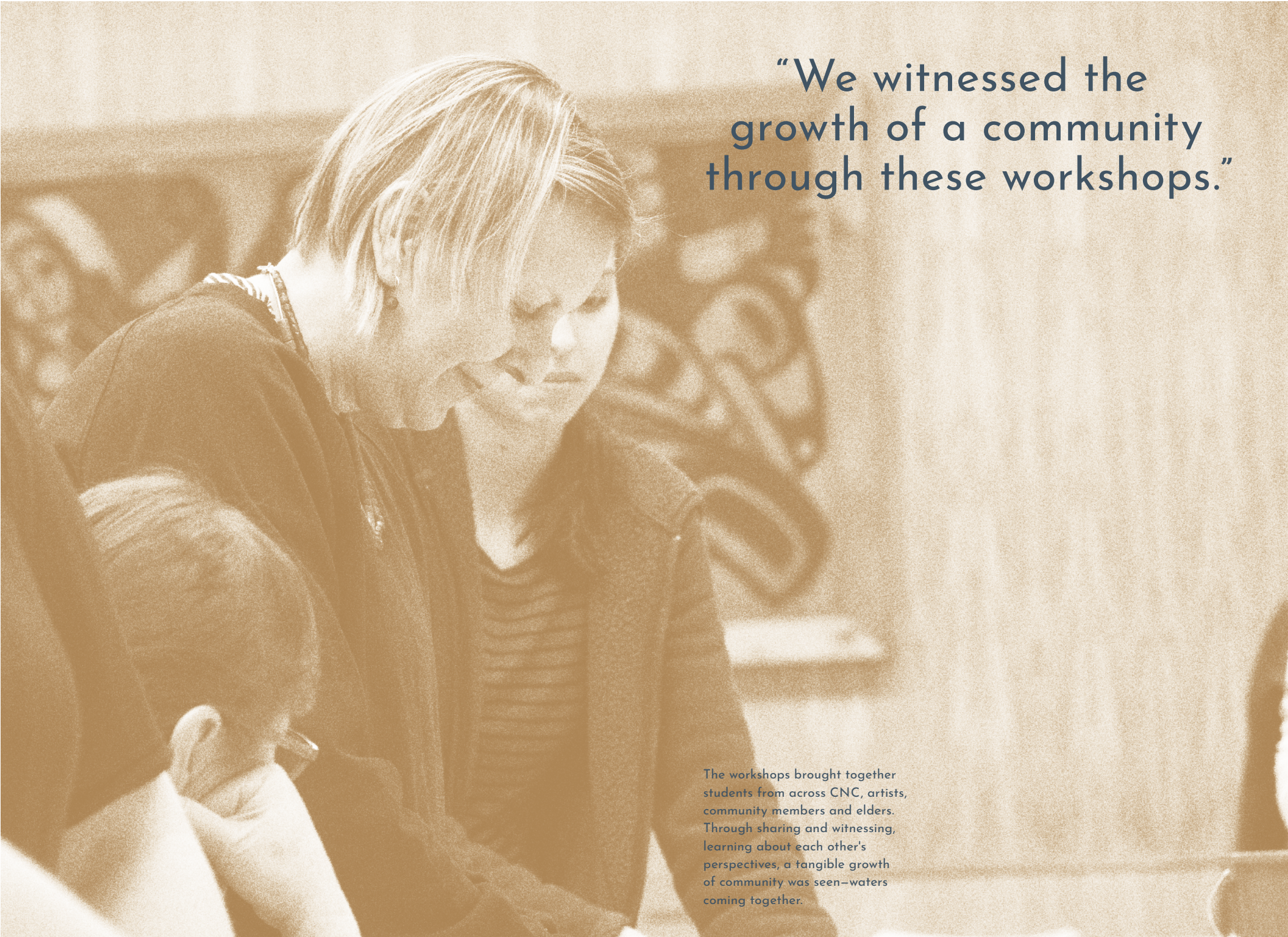
I took another step and watched the roll of the ripple move out from my legs.

How do our words and actions impact those around us?  
How do we interact with each other?  
What words and actions, sometimes without even knowing,  
are creating a change in the lives of those around us?

We don't have all the answers. We *don't* have the answers.

We need to be open to each other, to find ways in every moment  
to work together, to be together, to reconnect to return to the one song.  
To the heartbeat. To the drum. To the earth.





“We witnessed the growth of a community through these workshops.”

The workshops brought together students from across CNC, artists, community members and elders. Through sharing and witnessing, learning about each other's perspectives, a tangible growth of community was seen—waters coming together.

# Relational Ways of Working

## The Cultural Connections Team

The strength of this project has been the diversity of our team—Indigenous leaders and artists, and non-Indigenous designers, a physician, Elders, researchers. We each bring a range of important perspectives, skills and experiences, and we are all aligned in our values and our objectives which has allowed us to work well together.

As Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous designers coming together, one thing that was always understood by our team was the value of making and how that can support dialogue and change. Each of us individually have been needed on this project. It's very much about a collective, and there is an interdependence of all these components and roles—it's not something we can do alone. There's been a lot of shifting and blurring of roles as our team has come together over the past three years. Sometimes one person was a coordinator, the next minute they were a designer, the next a participant. The idea of clear, singular roles is an aspect of colonial attitudes and academic structures that we've had to reconcile on this project and move beyond.

We need to work relationally with respect, trust and reciprocity. This project and our team are on a continual learning journey together, and we are each learning new things from our own perspectives. We are grateful to the many people who have come together to form this community.



### Brenda Crabtree

Project Co-Lead from Emily Carr University's  
Aboriginal Gathering Place,  
Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Artist

### Marlene Erickson

Project Co-Lead from the College of  
New Caledonia, Local Cultural Advisor,  
Indigenous Knowledge Holder



### Connie Watts

Project Leadership Emily Carr  
University's Aboriginal Gathering  
Place, Facilitator, Artist

### Elder Darlene McIntosh

Elder, Indigenous Knowledge Holder,  
Local Cultural Advisor





**Caylee Raber**

Project Leadership from Emily Carr University's Health Design Lab, Researcher, Designer

**Nadia Beyzaei**

Project & Research Coordinator from Emily Carr University's Health Design Lab, Researcher, Designer

**Zoe Laycock**

Facilitator, Exhibit Designer, Researcher



**Sari Raber**

Family Physician Consultant, Facilitator

**Erin Finnerty**

Publication and Exhibit Designer



**Joyce & Christine Roberts**

Local Artists

**Michael Antoine**

Local Artist, Indigenous Knowledge Holder

**Marie Desjarlais**

Local Artist, Workshop Participant

**Brenda Crabtree**

Project Co-Lead from Emily Carr University's Aboriginal Gathering Place, Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Artist



**Violet Martin**

Local Workshop Coordinator, Workshop Participant

**Nicole Preissl**

Facilitator, Designer, Researcher



**Prince George Native Friendship Centre**

In-person workshop hosts

**Two Rivers Gallery**

Exhibition hosts

**Marlene Erickson**

Project Co-Lead from the College of New Caledonia, Local Cultural Advisor, Indigenous Knowledge Holder

**Jean Chisholm**

Designer, Researcher

**Angela Marsdon**

Artist



**Connie Watts**

Project Leadership Emily Carr University's Aboriginal Gathering Place, Cultural Facilitator, Artist

**Yvonne Pierreroy**

Local Artist, Indigenous Knowledge Holder



**Elder Darlene McIntosh**

Elder, Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Local Cultural Advisor

**Andrew Siu**

Designer, Researcher

**Crystal Behn**

Local Artist



# what does *medicine* mean to me?

*Elder Darlene McIntosh*

Medicine means different things to different people.  
For me, everything that is around me is medicine.

When I see the sun rise,  
*this is medicine.*

When I drink water, water has life,  
it heals and vibrates to what you bless it for.  
With each step forward as I walk and absorb my surroundings  
*that is medicine.*

To see a smile on someone's face  
as they return the smile that you gave them,  
*is medicine.*

When I do the groundings,  
this is medicine,  
when I say a prayer  
*that is medicine.*

When I gift someone  
*that is medicine,*  
a reciprocal approach is a good feeling.

When someone truly is listening to you and hears you...  
*this is medicine.*

Of course we make medicines from Mother Earth,  
but someone would have the special gift to do that.  
When someone drums and sings and dances...  
*that is powerful medicine.*

All the above is attached to healing also,  
because sometimes it's one and the same.

Elder Darlene McIntosh, is an Elder with Lheidli T'enneh Nation in Prince George, who is also a Cultural Advisor in the Aboriginal Resource Center at the College of New Caledonia. Darlene has been chosen as the 8th Chancellor of the University of Northern British Columbia, the second woman in 30 years who is also Indigenous.





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Further information about this project and a digital copy of this publication can be found here: [bit.ly/CulturalConnectionsProject](https://bit.ly/CulturalConnectionsProject)



