

HONOURING THE CAREGIVER

**A WELLNESS INITIATIVE FOR
FIRST NATIONS CAREGIVERS**

**JANUARY
2025**



Art by Tsista Kennedy

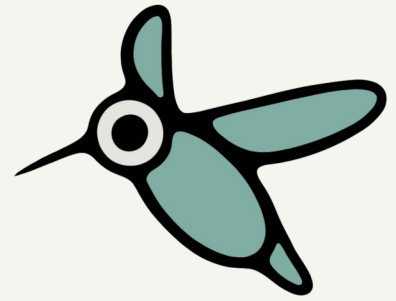
Illustration: Tsista Kennedy

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Tānisi Nitotemak,

We are pleased to share the story and outcomes of 'Honouring the Caregiver', an Indigenous-led wellness and self-care initiative for First Nations caregivers of neurodiverse children and adults. This pilot project was born out of a recognition of the unique challenges faced by First Nations caregivers; challenges rooted in the enduring impacts of colonization and the inequities within our health, education, and social service systems that doubly impact our neurodiverse relatives and their families.

From October to December 2024, we facilitated four, two-day workshops with 117 caregivers in Maskwacis (Alberta), Winnipeg (Manitoba), Richmond (British Columbia), and Six Nations (Ontario). These gatherings integrated conventional self-care approaches with Indigenous helping and healing wisdom. The workshops were led by a caregiver/clinician facilitation team, and supported by local Elders and helpers. Caregivers across the country participated in sharing circles, ceremony, and heard teachings from respected Knowledge Keepers from each region. These practices were interwoven with mindfulness exercises, self-reflection, and values-based activities to help caregivers stay present, and approach their roles with renewed resilience and self-compassion.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada urges those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Indigenous healing practices (Call to Action #22). We believe this initiative reflected that call by centering Indigenous knowledge systems as foundational to wellness in caregiving. We strove to emphasize the strength and resilience inherent in Indigenous healing practices, and offered caregivers practical tools to navigate their roles in ways deeply rooted in their cultural identities. Further development of the intervention based on participant feedback, and a focus on accessibility and sustainability will be important next steps.

With deep gratitude to the funders and partners who made these sessions possible, and, most of all, to the caregivers who joined us and shared their experiences—you inspire us to continue this work.

Kinanâskomitin / Pᓇᓇᓇᓇᓇᓇᓇ / Thank You,

Grant Bruno

Dr. Grant Bruno, Ph.D.

Louis Busch

Louis Busch, M.Ed., RBA (Ont.), RP

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



PROJECT OVERVIEW



OUR MISSION

Honouring the Caregiver was created to empower First Nations caregivers of neurodiverse children by fostering wellness, resilience, and cultural connection. The program provided culturally relevant mental health support, acknowledging caregivers' vital roles while addressing the unique challenges they face through a community-based approach.

OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance Mental Well-Being:

Provide caregivers with culturally tailored tools and practices that promote stress management and psychological resilience.

2. Strengthen Cultural Connectedness:

Foster deep connections to culture through the integration of traditional teachings and sharing of collective experiences.

3. Build Community Support:

Create spaces where caregivers can share their journeys, build supportive networks, and foster a sense of belonging.

SCOPE

The project consisted of four pilot workshops held in communities across four provinces, including:

1. Maskwacîs, AB: October 15–16, 2024
2. Winnipeg, MB: October 30–31, 2024
3. Richmond, BC: November 20–21, 2024
4. Six Nations, ON: December 17–18, 2024

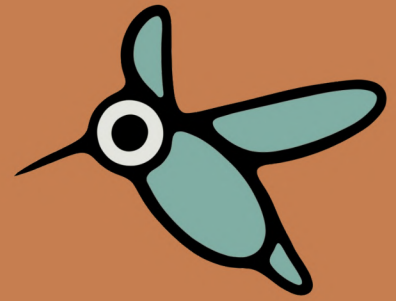
SUPPORTING ELDERS

Rick Lightning (Maskwacîs)
Reg Nepinak (Pine Creek First Nation)
Bruce Robinson (Nisga'a People)
Renee Thomas-Hill (Six Nations)
Jan Longboat (Six Nations)

KEY PARTNERS

PetroCanada CareMakers Foundation; Kids Brain Health Foundation; The Shkaabe Makwa Centre for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Wellness at CAMH; The Ispimihk Awâsisak Program at the Women and Children's Health Research Institute; AIDE Canada, Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre; St. Amant; Maskwacîs Parents Place; Oshki-Giizhig, Pacific Autism Family Network; Autism Community Training; Six Nations Health Services, Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence; and the Indigenous Caregivers Collective

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE



CONTEXT

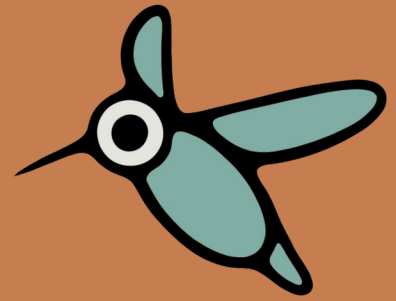
First Nations caregivers of neurodiverse children and adults in Canada face significant challenges that stem from the ongoing process of colonization, intergenerational trauma, and the systemic inequities embedded within healthcare, education, and social service systems. In addition to caring for their loved ones, they are often required to navigate complex roles that encompass advocacy, education, and service navigation, which can lead to feelings of exhaustion and isolation. Stigma surrounding both mental health and neurodevelopmental disabilities can further amplify the emotional toll. In this context, caregivers not only manage the daily demands of supporting their children but also contend with broader societal barriers that limit access to appropriate and culturally responsive care. The traditional values of spirituality, interconnectedness and wholistic health are essential to the wellness of First Nations communities. Programs and services designed to support First Nations caregivers must align with these values.

NEED FOR CULTURALLY ADAPTED INTERVENTIONS

Mainstream mental health practices often overlook the unique cultural, historical, and systemic realities faced by Indigenous communities, leading to services that can feel disconnected and inadequate. For instance, conventional therapeutic approaches frequently emphasize altering 'maladaptive' thought patterns or behaviour without addressing broader systemic and historical factors. This can make such interventions feel disconnected, pathologizing Indigenous Peoples' experiences while failing to support their unique needs effectively. The lack of culturally-adapted interventions is especially concerning in the context of neurodevelopmental disabilities within Indigenous communities. In a recent scoping review, Bruno et al. (2023) found that the quality of existing literature on autism in Indigenous communities is generally poor, often failing to include Indigenous perspectives or community-led approaches. Moreover, the study highlights a severe lack of data on the lived experiences of Indigenous families raising neurodiverse children. Without meaningful inclusion of Indigenous voices, mainstream research and interventions risk perpetuating systemic inequities rather than addressing them.



BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE



BRIDGING TWO WORLDS

Honouring the Caregiver sought to blend the therapeutic strengths of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) with Indigenous helping knowledge to support the wellness of First Nations caregivers. The initiative was rooted in the assumption that true wellness goes beyond clinical strategies, requiring the integration of practices that nurture identity and community as well as mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

ACT's focus on mindfulness, acceptance, and values-based action offers a flexible framework that may align more effectively with an Indigenous worldview than other psychological models. The program combined ACT principles with traditional helping and healing practices, including sharing circles and ceremony, to reflect Indigenous values of balance, interconnectedness, and accountability. This approach allowed caregivers to explore their experiences through culturally resonant methods, fostering emotional resilience and reinforcing their connections to cultural identity and community. By integrating these perspectives, the program offered practical and culturally meaningful strategies for caregiver wellness.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada urges health-care professionals to recognize and integrate Indigenous healing practices into treatment (Call #22). This initiative directly responded to that call by centering Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices as foundational to the wellness of caregivers. The workshop also worked to close the gap in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Call #19) by addressing mental health and caregiving challenges specific to First Nations families. Finally, by holding the workshop in a number of urban and rural locations we sought provide accessible, culturally relevant mental health support for caregivers living both on and off reserve (Call #20).



MEET THE FACILITATORS



Dr. Grant Bruno, PhD

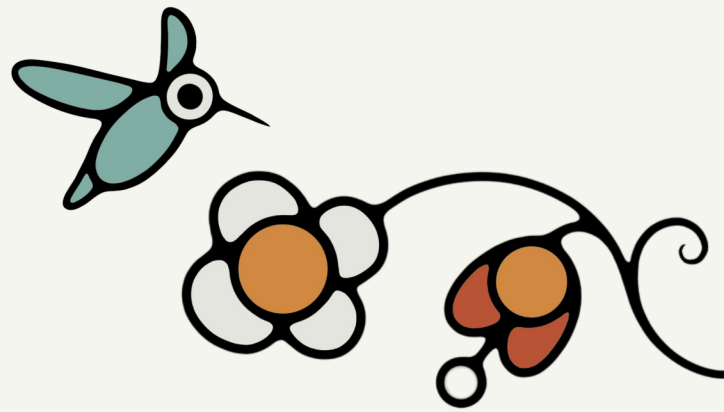
Dr. Bruno is nêhiyaw (Plains Cree), a member of Samson Cree Nation, and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta. Dr. Bruno's work focuses on creating culturally responsive healthcare models that support Indigenous children and youth, particularly in the areas of neurodiversity and child and youth health. Dr. Bruno's research weaves nêhiyaw knowledge systems and Western frameworks to create inclusive, decolonized approaches to healthcare. Dr. Bruno is currently the Academic Lead Indigenous Child Health for the Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) and is the founder of the Ispimihk Awâsisak (Sky Children Program) and the Indigenous Caregiving Collective.



Louis Busch, M.Ed. RBA (Ont.), RP

Louis is a Bear Clan member of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, a registered psychotherapist and behaviour analyst. Louis is a Vanier Scholar and winner of the 2024 SSHRC Impact Award in the Talent Category. Louis is a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto, with two decades of experience supporting the recovery journeys of people who find themselves in contact with the mental health, forensic mental health, and criminal justice systems. Louis hopes to contribute to positive social change through the advancement of culturally relevant wellness initiatives that promote the recovery and empowerment of marginalized peoples.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT



The workshops were designed as immersive, two-day events that combined modern approaches with Indigenous helping wisdom. Each workshop aimed to create a safe, culturally rich environment where caregivers could engage in self-reflection, share experiences, and build resilience.

1

Starting with Ceremony

The project began with a sweat lodge ceremony facilitated by Elder Rick Lightning. Each workshop began and ended with prayer led by local Elders. These practices established a culturally safe space and underscored the importance of culture in wellness.

3

Experiential Activities

Participants engaged in culturally grounded experiential activities, as well as culturally-adapted activities such as mindfulness meditations and values-orientation tasks. These activities were intended to foster awareness and psychological flexibility, encouraging caregivers to explore all of their experiences in a safe and supportive setting.

2

Elder-Led Teachings

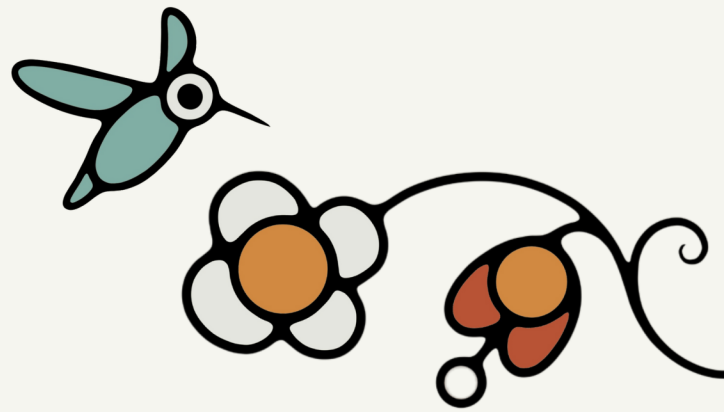
Elders shared traditional knowledge, stories, and teachings that highlighted resilience, interconnectedness, and the important role of caregiving within the community. Participants had opportunities to reflect on the teachings and to share their own experiences.

4

Reflection and Discussion

The workshops included frequent time for group reflection and open discussions, allowing caregivers to share insights, connect with others, and deepen their understanding of both the culturally-grounded concepts, as well as those adapted from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT



5

Supportive and Safe

Throughout the workshops, facilitators, Elders, and Indigenous clinicians ensured that the atmosphere remained respectful, inclusive, and responsive to participants' needs. Emotional support was readily available from the supporting Elders and Indigenous mental health professionals, and the overall structure encouraged active participation while prioritizing safety and cultural respect.

6

Shared Space, Shared Meals

An essential aspect of the workshops was the sharing of food. At two of four events, traditional foods, provided by local Indigenous vendors were shared. This practice fostered a sense of community and connection, reinforcing the cultural significance of coming together over food. The shared meals created a welcoming atmosphere, enriching the overall experience and emphasizing the workshop's focus on collective well-being and cultural continuity.

7

Practical Tools

Participants were equipped with usable tools and strategies, such as the ACT Matrix for exploring values, mindfulness techniques for stress reduction, and reflective exercises to enhance self-awareness. Facilitators encouraged participants to apply the strategies practiced in their daily lives.

**"I APPRECIATED GETTING TO THINK DEEPLY
AND TRYING TO HEAL THAT INNER CHILD.
WE ARE ALL LEAVING HERE WITH A NEW
PERSPECTIVE AND GOALS FOR OURSELVES"
-CAREGIVER**

MASKWACÎS ALBERTA

“THE SHARING CIRCLE AT THE END
WAS INTENSE BUT TRULY
IMPACTFUL AND ENJOYABLE.”
-CAREGIVER

Maskwacîs (L^ˆˆb^ˆˆ), located about 70 km south of Edmonton, Alberta is home to the "four nations," including the Ermineskin Cree Nation, Samson Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, and Montana First Nation, all signatories to Treaty Six. Maskwacîs, meaning "bear hills" in nêhiyawêwin, serves as a central hub with cultural, educational, and health institutions such as the Maskwacîs Cultural College and the Pê Sâkâstêw Centre, reflecting its commitment to community strength and tradition.

The workshop in Maskwacîs was held on October 14 and 15 2024 and attended by approximately 35 caregivers from the surrounding communities. Elder Rick Lightning conducted a sweat lodge ceremony with the facilitators the day before the first workshop to initiate the project in a good way, and supported the event sharing teachings and prayers over the two days. The event was supported by Maskwacîs Parents Place and the Ispimihk Awasisak Sky Children program within the Women and Children's Health Research Institute.

In particular, the support of Tierney Littlechild, Community Research Coordinator with the Women and Children's Health Research Institute was vital to the success of the event.



WINNIPEG MANITOBA

“I LEARNED HOW THE PAIN, TEARS, AND
THE CHALLENGING TIMES CAN TEACH
YOU TO BE A BETTER CAREGIVER”
-CAREGIVER

The second Honouring the Caregiver workshop was held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, at the Wyndham Garden Hotel, a facility owned by Long Plain First Nation. Winnipeg is located on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. Approximately 45 caregivers attended, creating a space filled with shared learning and connection. Meals were thoughtfully prepared by Red Seal Chef Jennifer Ballantyne from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, integrating cultural flavors and traditions that enhanced the sense of community and respect for Indigenous heritage. The workshop was made possible through the valuable support of St. Amant and Oshki-Giizhig Inc., whose contributions reinforced the collaborative nature of this initiative.

Over the two days, Elder Reg Nepinak (pictured below) from Pine Creek First Nation, supported the gathering, leading prayers and facilitating a powerful sharing circle. Reg’s presence provided a foundation of respect, trust, and safety. The sharing circle encouraged participants to openly express their experiences and challenges, fostering a deep sense of connection and mutual support.



RICHMOND BRITISH COLUMBIA

“I LEARNED HOW TO FOCUS ON WHAT I
NEED TO MOVE TOWARDS AND HOW TO
IDENTIFY THE ACTIONS TO GET ME THERE”
-CAREGIVER

The third Honouring the Caregiver workshop was held in Richmond, British Columbia, at the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN). Richmond is located on the traditional, unceded territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish Nations. Caregivers attended, gathering to share, learn, and foster meaningful connections. Meals for the workshop were provided by Paper Planes Café, an initiative by PAFN that offers training and employment opportunities to neurodiverse community members. The café’s mission of empowerment and inclusivity aligned with the workshop’s purpose, enriching the event with a sense of community and mutual support.

Support from Autism Community Training and the Pacific Autism Family Network was integral to the success of this gathering, showcasing the importance of collaborative partnerships. Over two days, Elder Bruce Robinson of the Nisga’a People supported the workshop, offering prayers and leading a sharing circle on the second day. While inclement weather resulted in a lower participant turnout than the other events, it remained a powerful and intimate experience.



SIX NATIONS ONTARIO

“THE CONCEPT OF ‘CAREGIFTING’ HELPED ME REMEMBER THAT CARING IS A GIFT. YOU ARE A GIFT AND YOU ARE BEING GIVEN A GIFT.”
-CAREGIVER

The fourth and final workshop of the year was held at The Gathering Place by the Grand, owned and managed by the Six Nations of the Grand River Development Corporation (SNGRDC), which oversees the economic interests of the Six Nations community. Six Nations is a First Nations community located along the Grand River in southwestern Ontario, Canada. It is the most populous First Nation in Canada and the only one that includes all six Haudenosaunee nations: Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, and Tuscarora. Over two days, 32 caregivers from across the region came together to share meaningful teachings, laughter, and meals. Stories, hands-on activities, group discussions, and a powerful sharing circle created a truly impactful experience.

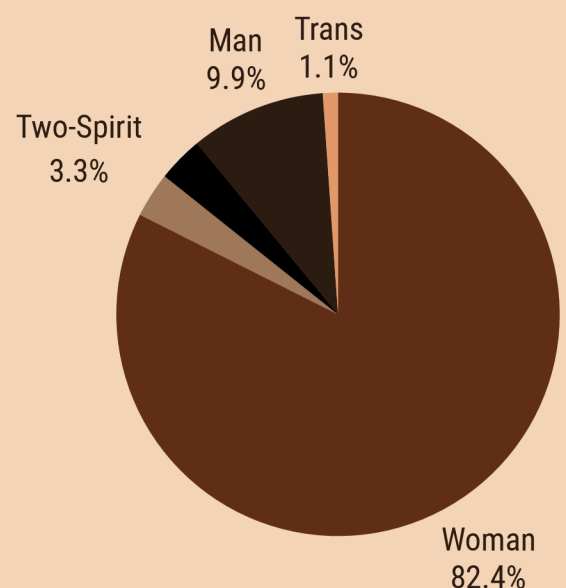
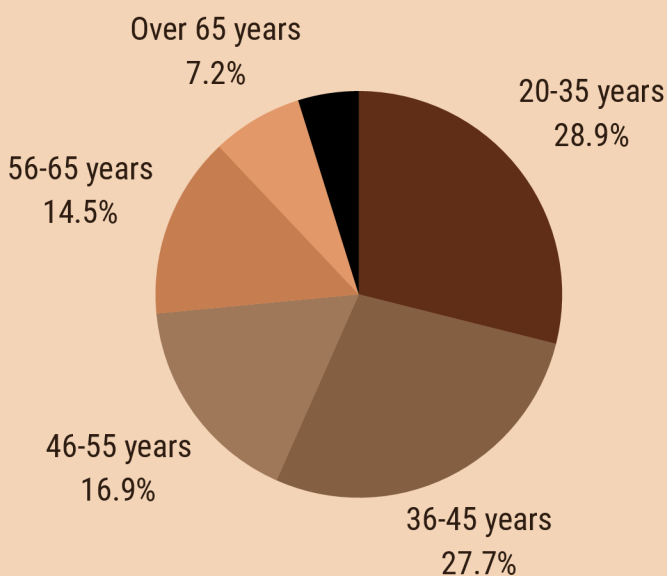
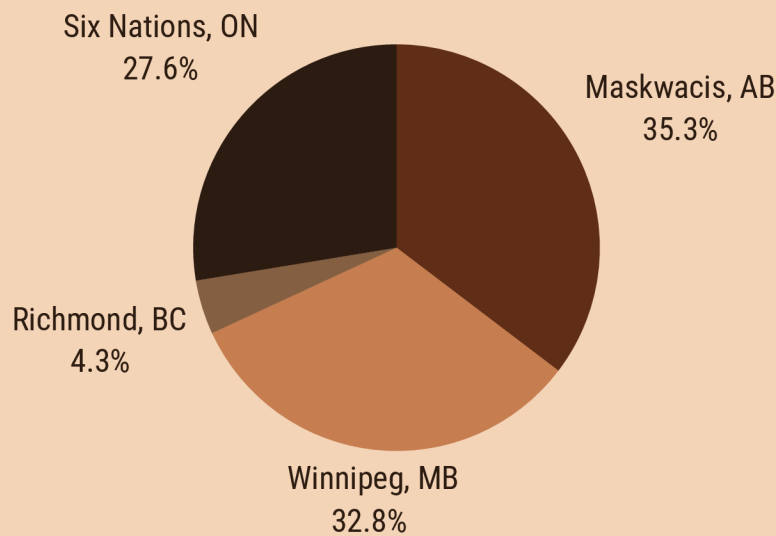
The event was organized in partnership with Six Nations Health Services and supported by respected community Elders, Grandmother Renee Thomas-Hill (right) and Grandmother Jan Longboat (left).



PARTICIPANTS AT A GLANCE



A diverse group of First Nations caregivers (n = 117) attended the four workshops. Most participants identified as Women (82%), with others identifying as Men (10%), Two-Spirit (3%), and Transgender (1%). Most participants were between 20-35 years (29%) and 36-45 years (28%) of age, followed by those aged 46-55 (17%), 56-65 (15%), and a smaller number over 65 (7%). This diversity suggests a broad spectrum of caregiving experiences. The workshops provided an inclusive space for individuals from varied backgrounds to connect and share their perspectives on caregiving, and to learn from the experiences of others.



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

One-hundred and seventeen (n = 117) caregivers attended the four events, with 83 completing the post-workshop evaluation. Results indicate a highly positive reception from participants.

Learning Objectives

A significant proportion of participants reported that the workshops effectively met the objectives of enhancing well-being, facilitating cultural connection, and building a supportive community.

Key takeaways included prioritizing personal well-being, mindfulness, and self-reflection to better support others. Many highlighted the need to ground themselves in challenging situations, be patient and kind to themselves, and recognize their own value and emotional needs. Participants also learned strategies to manage stress, connect with others, and embrace self-awareness to navigate caregiving with resilience and purpose. Several responses reflected the transformative impact of understanding one's emotions, focusing on positive actions, and valuing the lessons from pain and personal challenges.

Facilitator Effectiveness

Participants overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed that facilitators were well-prepared, knowledgeable, engaging, and responsive to participants' needs. This highlighted the success of the workshop's delivery and the facilitators' ability to create a welcoming and supportive environment.

100%

Reported satisfaction with the workshops overall.

99%

Felt the workshops provided tools to support caregiver mental well-being.

95%

Felt culturally connected through the workshops.

94%

Built supportive connections with other caregivers.

100%

Would recommend the workshop to other caregivers.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

“THE ELDER’S VIDEOS AND STORIES PROVIDED ME WITH DEEP CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS.”
-CAREGIVER

Valuable Components

Participants identified several valuable aspects of the workshop, with a strong emphasis on the experiential activities which helped them reflect on self-awareness and perspective-taking. Many highlighted the sharing circles, mindfulness activities, and Elder teachings, appreciating the opportunity to connect deeply with others, learn from personal stories, and explore cultural perspectives. Interactive components like group discussions, anonymous online polls (MentiMeter), and visual tools such as diagrams and analogies (e.g., The ACT Matrix) were also frequently praised for fostering engagement and breaking down barriers.

The workshop’s cultural relevance resonated strongly with participants, who valued the inclusion of smudging, prayers, and sharing circles, as well as the insights shared by Elders through videos and personal stories. The facilitators’ Indigenous backgrounds were especially appreciated for fostering authenticity and cultural understanding. Participants also noted the meaningful integration of art, mindfulness, and holistic teachings that aligned with Indigenous traditions and perspectives, deepening their connection to the workshop content.



Illustration: Tsista Kennedy

“THE SHARING CIRCLE HELPED ME REALIZE THAT I AM NOT ALONE”
-CAREGIVER

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

“I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN HOW TO ADVOCATE
FOR MY AUTISTIC CHILD IN CULTURAL SPACES
AND NAVIGATE CULTURAL PROTOCOLS”
-CAREGIVER

Additional Learning Needs

Participants suggested a variety of additional workshop topics to enhance their learning and caregiving roles. Common themes included a deeper focus on neurodevelopmental disabilities, autism, and ADHD, with practical strategies for supporting children with special needs. Several participants emphasized the importance of self-care, mental health, and managing caregiver stress, as well as exploring the cultural dimensions of caregiving further.

Others requested sessions on advocacy strategies, community resources, and peer support networks, alongside more opportunities for sharing personal stories and connecting with other caregivers. A few highlighted the need for culturally specific guidance, such as navigating protocols in Indigenous spaces and teaching cultural traditions to neurodiverse children.



Illustration: Tsista Kennedy

“LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE CULTURE TO
BE ABLE TO SHARE TO MY LITTLE ONES
WAS VALUABLE AS I AM DISCONNECTED
FROM KNOWING MUCH”
-CAREGIVER

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

“PROVIDING RESPITE OR TRAVEL
SUPPORT IN THE FUTURE WILL HELP
MORE PEOPLE TAKE PART.”
-CAREGIVER

Participant Suggestions

Participants provided a range of suggestions for improving both the workshop content and delivery, with many expressing satisfaction and offering minimal recommendations for change. On the content side, several participants suggested incorporating more hands-on activities, additional resources such as booklets or visual aids, and more educational focus on specific topics like autism and neurodiversity. Others emphasized the value of maintaining the balance between listening, interaction, and movement, while some highlighted practical additions like sensory toys at tables for participants or more frequent icebreaker activities.

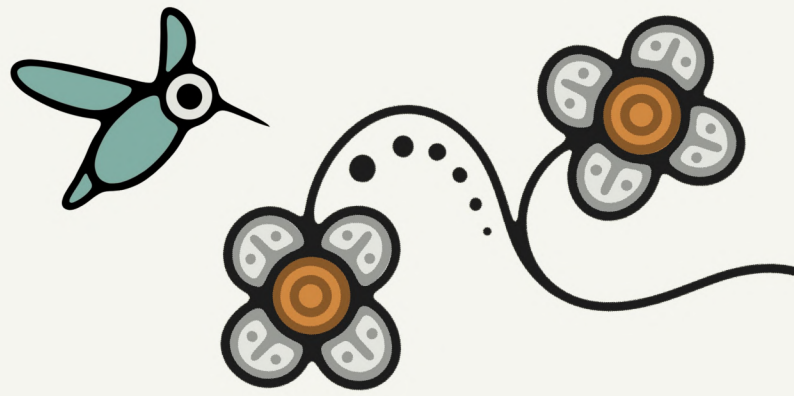
In terms of delivery, participants largely praised the facilitators for their engaging and thoughtful approach, noting that the workshops were well-organized and effectively delivered. Suggestions included making evaluation surveys available online, offering more check-ins for participants, and addressing logistical aspects like providing respite or travel support to enable broader attendance. Many participants felt the workshops were already excellent and required little to no changes, with several commenting on the outstanding facilitation, attention to participant needs, and overall positive experience.



Illustration: Tsista Kennedy

“INCORPORATING MORE OF THESE HANDS-
ON WORKSHOPS AND SPEAKING CIRCLES
WOULD ADD EVEN MORE VALUE.”
-CAREGIVER

PARTNERS



Established in 2020, Petro-Canada CareMakers Foundation supports family caregivers across Canada by providing grants to charitable organizations. Their mission is to empower caregivers through funding, awareness, and community engagement. The Caremakers Foundation provided the core funding that made these events possible.

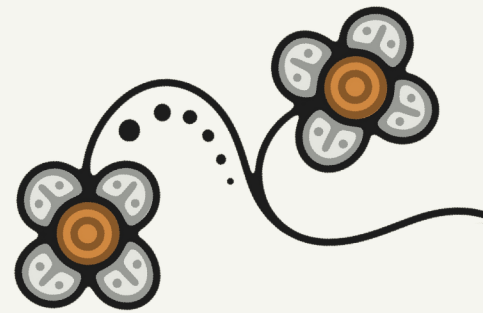


AIDE Canada is a knowledge exchange network funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, providing reliable, evidence-informed resources for the autism and intellectual disability community. AIDE Canada provided funding supports for video and documentation.



Created in 2016, the Kids Brain Health Foundation supports the work of the Kids Brain Health Network, a national research network bringing together Canada's leading researchers to help children with neurodevelopmental disabilities thrive. KBHF provided funding and logistical supports.

PARTNERS



camh



Shkaabe Makwa

The Shkaabe Makwa Centre for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Wellness is part of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, Ontario. Shkaabe Makwa is the first hospital-based centre in Canada designed to drive culturally relevant system initiatives to achieve health equity and community wellness for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Shkaabe Makwa developed the workshop curriculum, co-facilitated, and provided logistical supports for all four events.



ISPIMIHK AWÂSISAK
SKY CHILDREN

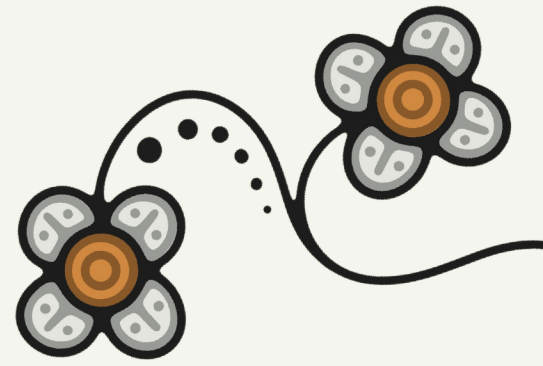
The Ispimihk Awâsisak Program, housed within the Women and Children's Health Research Institute, is dedicated to enhancing the health and well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and their families at the community level. It embraces a community-led research approach to develop, implement, and evaluate impactful health initiatives. The Ispimihk Awâsisak Program supported the development and co-facilitation of all four events.



St. Amant

St. Amant is a not-for-profit organization supporting over 5,000 Manitobans with developmental disabilities, autism, and acquired brain injuries and their families. St. Amant provided logistical support through sharing with community partners, and facilitating event registration. They also provided funding for catering to expand the number of participants that could attend the event in Winnipeg.

PARTNERS



Six Nations Health Services is the health services branch of the Six Nations of the Grand River, providing comprehensive health programs and services to the community, integrating traditional and contemporary health practices. Six Nations Health Services provided logistical supports including registration and event advertising. They also provided participants with support for travel to the events and respite for their loved ones.

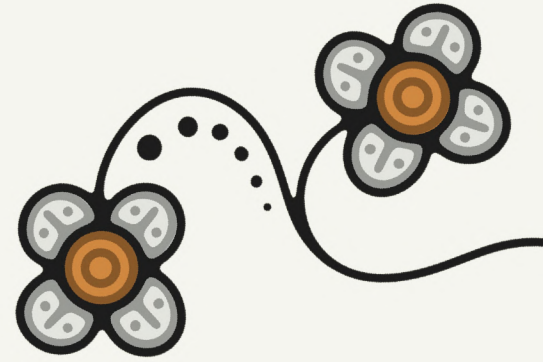


Pacific Autism Family Network is a center of excellence that provides resources for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and related disorders, their families, and professionals, offering assessment, treatment, support, and information services. PAFN provided venue and catering for the event in Richmond, BC.



Autism Community Training (ACT) is a British Columbia-based organization that offers training and resources to support individuals with autism and their families, focusing on providing evidence-based information and promoting best practices in autism treatment and support. ACT provided logistical supports for the event in Richmond, including marketing the events and facilitating registration.

PARTNERS



Oshki-Giizhig is an organization dedicated to providing culturally appropriate health services to Indigenous communities, integrating traditional healing practices with modern healthcare to support holistic well-being. Oshki-Giizhig provided logistical supports including sharing of event with community members.

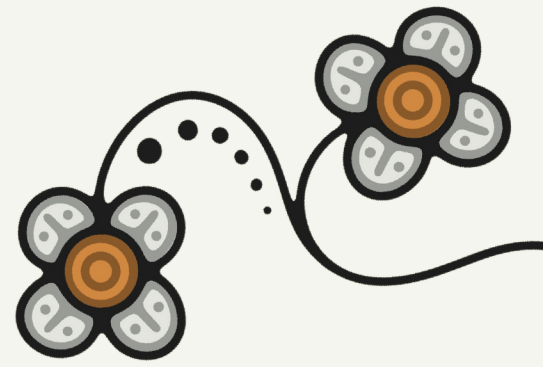


Maskwacis Parents Place is a community-based organization in Maskwacis, Alberta, providing support and resources to parents and caregivers, focusing on enhancing family well-being and resilience. Maskwacis Parents Place provided logistical support including booking venues, facilitating participant travel, and registration.



Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre is part of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities through clinical care, research, and education. The Centre provided support in proposal writing, and has lead successful workshops for non-Indigenous caregivers that provided an effective template for adaptation.

PARTNERS



The Indigenous Caregiving Collective (ICC) is a grassroots organization dedicated to empowering and supporting Indigenous caregivers both locally and nationally. With a foundation of research and evidence-based decision making the ICC will aim to address the unique needs and challenges faced by Indigenous caregivers and their communities. This will be a community specific driven initiative but will look for opportunities to have impact in Indigenous communities across Canada.



**Canadian Centre for
Caregiving Excellence**

The Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence (CCCE) supports caregivers and care providers by fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and driving innovation. Focused on equity and inclusion, CCCE advocates for better systems and policies, ensuring caregivers and those they support are central to decision-making. Together, CCCE is building a future where caregiving is valued and sustainable across Canada.



**women & children's
health research institute**

The Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) is a collaborative research organization that supports and advances studies focused on the unique health needs of women, children, and families. Established through a partnership between the University of Alberta and Alberta Health Services, WCHRI fosters innovative research, provides funding and resources to investigators, and translates findings into actionable health solutions to improve outcomes across generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS



1. CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION

In each province, we received several requests to bring the workshops to other urban centers, as well as rural and remote communities. Given the positive feedback and interest expressed by community, it is recommended that the efforts be made to continue and extend the reach of similar wellness initiatives for Indigenous caregivers.

2. SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM SUPPORT

In addition to continued workshops, we recommend building sustainable caregiver support through follow-up sessions, peer-led groups, and accessible digital resources. Partnering with local Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous clinicians, and caregivers will ensure cultural integrity, while ongoing funding and community collaboration will promote long-term wellness and resilience.

3. ENHANCED TRAINING AND RESOURCES

We recommend enhancing training materials to reflect regional practices by incorporating local Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and artists. This approach ensures workshops remain culturally relevant and resonate with the unique traditions, values, and needs of First Nations communities in each location. Additionally, we recommend expanding the curriculum to include Métis and Inuit perspectives, ensuring representation of the diverse experiences and knowledge of all Indigenous peoples.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS



4. COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

This project offers a unique opportunity to engage in community-based participatory action research focused on Indigenous caregivers and their neurodiverse relatives, two populations that have historically been underrepresented in Canadian research. We recommend embedding research and evaluation practices into future initiatives to better understand the unique strengths, challenges, and needs of this group. These efforts not only generate valuable insights but will also help to inform future policies, programs, and resources that center Indigenous worldviews while addressing systemic inequities.

5. FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIPS

To ensure the continued success and growth of this initiative, ongoing and reliable funding is essential. We recommend pursuing long-term financial support from government agencies, Indigenous organizations, and philanthropic partners. Additionally, fostering partnerships with community groups, regional health authorities, and educational institutions will strengthen the program's reach and impact.

6. ACCESSIBILITY AND OUTREACH

To reach remote and underserved communities, future projects will need to prioritize strategies that make workshops accessible. This may include the development of digital resources such as webinars and online training modules that maintain cultural integrity and provide flexible participation options. Additionally, offering support for travel, accommodations, and respite services for caregivers attending in-person workshops will reduce barriers to participation.

HOPE AND GRATITUDE

The Honouring the Caregiver initiative has shown significant promise in addressing the unique challenges faced by First Nations caregivers of neurodiverse children and adults. By blending modern mental health approaches with Indigenous helping and healing wisdom, the workshops created a powerful and culturally resonant space for reflection, growth, and connection.

The high demand for the workshops and overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores the importance of culturally adapted mental health support that goes beyond conventional frameworks to honor caregivers' identities, stories, and strengths.

This initiative has highlighted the need for community-based solutions that empower caregivers and strengthen cultural bonds. The active involvement of Elders, facilitators, and community partners played a vital role in building trust and fostering a sense of belonging.

As the program moves forward, expanding its reach, integrating region-specific cultural practices, and ensuring sustainability through follow-up support and facilitator training will be key. By prioritizing these efforts, the Honouring the Caregiver initiative will continue to build resilient, connected communities that celebrate the caregiving journey and promote holistic wellness.

This Indigenous-led project stands as a testament to what can be achieved when organizations come together around our shared values of creating inclusive and culturally meaningful mental health supports for Indigenous caregivers.

KINANĀSKOMITIN MIIGWETCH NIĀ:WEN
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