Carrying Forward Our Deep Seeds of Knowledge: Indigenous Field of Study 20th Anniversary Wholistic Healing Conference

Opening Ceremony: Anishinaabe Elder, Tina Armstrong, MSW, Doctoral Scholar

Panel Presentation – Carrying the Teachings Forward: 20 Years of Indigenous Wholistic Practice.

Panelists: Nikki Robinson, Pam Plain, Mairi Anderson & Shirley Hunter

Nikki Robinson, MSW, RSW
Shekoli. Nicole Robinson ní yukyáts. Onʌyota'a:ká: niwakuhutsyó:tʌ. Cambridge nú: teknakéhle'. Hello, my name is Nicole Robinson. Oneida is my nation. Cambridge is where I live.

I am a member of the Oneida Nation of the Thames. After spending most of my life in North Bay, I moved to the Waterloo Region in 2006 to complete the Master of Social Work - Indigenous Field of Study program at Wilfrid Laurier University. Since 2008, I have served as the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus with the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB). In this role, I am driven by a deep commitment to expanding Indigenous awareness within educational systems and challenging the systemic colonial structures that shape them. My work centers on fostering meaningful relationships between WRDSB staff, students, and local Indigenous communities, while supporting schools in becoming spaces for genuine, transformative change.

Shirley Hunter, MSW, RSW, is a nehiyaw iskwew (Plains Cree woman) from Whitefish Lake First Nation #128, Treaty 6 Territory, and a proud alumna of Wilfrid Laurier University's Master of Social Work program.

She is the Chair of the Social Work Department at Yellowhead Tribal College and a doctoral scholar at University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills.

Shirley is an Indigenous educator, researcher, and wholistic healing practitioner whose work is grounded in Cree natural laws, ceremony, language, and relational ways of knowing.

Her doctoral research explores *wahkohtowin* (kinship), restoring Indigenous family systems, and advancing Indigenous approaches to child and family well-being.

As a mother, grandmother, and lifelong advocate for Indigenous healing, Shirley is committed to restoring relationships, strengthening families, and nurturing *miyo pimatisowin*—the good life—for future generations.

Pam Plain, **MSW**. Waabshki giizhik naagek kwe, migizi ndodem, Aamjiwnaang dbendaagwas.

Greetings, my spirit name is White Cedar Bark Woman, also known as Pam Plain, Aamjiwnaang is where my roots are. Pam is a registered social worker who has been working in the field in multiple capacities including healing and wellness, since 2007. Pam is considered a natural helper and uses her spiritual intuition and ways of knowing to assist her clients on their healing path, utilizing many cultural practices and traditional medicines embedded throughout her work.

She is very knowledgeable with western counseling theories and intermixes cultural practices with a 2 eyed seeing approach. Pam has been coordinating and facilitating healing and cultural learning opportunities in her community for the past 3 years. Naming ceremonies, sewing, regalia making, spirits journey teachings, grief healing and cedar bath teachings are just a few of the experiences she has shared with her community. She is a registered counsellor with NIHB and provides private counseling/healing sessions with individuals. Pam has multiple gifts that she continues to utilize when working with people.

Mairi Anderson, MSW, is a dedicated Supervisor at Ganohkwasra Family Assault Support Services, where she has provided vital leadership and community support for the past eleven years. Graduating from the Master of Social Work, Indigenous Field of Study program, Mairi integrates culturally grounded, trauma-informed practices into her therapeutic and supervisory work. As a Sixties Scoop Survivor, her profound personal resilience deeply informs her commitment to healing, advocacy, and breaking systemic cycles of trauma. Grounded by her heritage, she balances her meaningful career with her most cherished role as a proud mother to three daughters.

Conference Presentations

Title: Colouring Our Feelings: Art, Storytelling, and Wholistic Healing

Presenters: Merissa Dinner, Shelley Augustine and Melanie Perley

This presentation explores the role of art-based activities and creative expression in supporting emotional awareness, connection, and wholistic healing within social work practice. Grounded in academic literature and course learning, presenters will locate themselves in relation to the topic and consider how creative practices can create opportunities for reflection, self-expression, and connection. Participants will be invited to colour a turtle image while listening to an Anishinaabe creation story. Using a suggested feelings wheel as a guide, participants will have the freedom to assign personal meanings to colours and reflect on the emotions and experiences that emerge through the activity. Drawing on academic literature, the presentation will consider the potential benefits of arts-based approaches, adaptations for different age groups, and considerations for incorporating creative expression into wholistic social work practice. The presentation will also distinguish this reflective arts-based activity from professional art therapy, emphasizing the importance of appropriate training, ethical considerations, and culturally respectful practice. Through experiential learning and collective reflection, participants will consider how creative expression can contribute to relational, emotional, and wholistic approaches to social work.

Title: Harvesting Wellness: Land-Based Practices, Community and Indigenous Wholistic Healing and Reconnecting to the Land

Presenters: Erica Knott, Summer Lavallee, Jay Mohammadi, Ashley Seymour

Abstract: This presentation explores how land-based practices, including harvesting, hunting, and gathering medicines and berries, can support Indigenous wholistic healing for individuals, families, and communities impacted by substance use. Grounded in Indigenous worldviews and scholarship, the presentation considers how relationships with the land, water, plants, animals, ancestors, Spirit, and community contribute to wellness, nourishment, and belonging. Drawing on the Medicine Wheel framework (McGregor, Restoule, & Johnston, 2018), the presentation examines the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental dimensions of land-based healing. It also considers how colonialism has disrupted Indigenous peoples' relationships with the land and how Western individualistic approaches to health can create barriers to collective and wholistic wellness. Through relevant Indigenous scholarship and community-based examples of harvesting and hunting practices, the presentation highlights the potential of restoring relationships with the land to support healing, strengthen connections across generations, and foster individual and collective well-being. Finally, the presentation considers how social workers and other helpers can meaningfully integrate land-based practices into their work in ways that honour Indigenous knowledge, relational accountability, and community-defined approaches to wellness.

Title: Who is in your Circle? A Cultural Triage following Child Removal

Presenters: Cindy Prevost & Carla Devlin

Abstract: How might a wholistic healing plan support Indigenous caregivers and children on their reunification journey? This presentation explores an adapted Cultural Triage Wholistic Treatment Plan/Checklist developed to support Indigenous community members navigating child welfare and family reunification. Drawing on Ardith Walkem, QC's *Wrapping Our Ways Around Them: Indigenous Communities and Child Welfare Guidebook* (2nd ed., 2020), the framework is grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, Spirit, and reciprocity. It challenges colonial structures and practices within child welfare and social work by centring community knowledge, relationships, and culturally grounded approaches to care. Informed by the presenters lived experience in First Nations criminal diversion services, community development, and child welfare and apprehension services, the adapted framework offers a practical resource for social workers seeking to support caregivers through meaningful, relational, and wholistic approaches to reunification. Emphasizing that culture is medicine, the presentation recognizes that effective Indigenous best-care practices must emerge from the communities themselves and reflect their knowledge, priorities, and relationships. Offered in a spirit of reciprocity and relational respect, the Cultural Triage Wholistic Treatment Plan/Checklist is intended to support decolonizing practice and strengthen culturally informed social work. Participants will engage in a Mentimeter

activity and provide feedback to contribute to ongoing reflection and development of this community-centred resource.

Title: *Restoring Broken Threads: Centering Beadwork to Return Indigenous Youth to the Circle of Courage.*

Presenters: Anna Harley, Bobbie Mcculloch, Zoe Logan

Abstract: This presentation explores beading as a culturally grounded practice that can support Indigenous youth and address their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Drawing on the Circle of Courage framework, the presentation examines how reconnecting with cultural practices can foster belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity while creating spaces for relationship-building, self-expression, and healing. Beading offers opportunities for youth to connect with cultural knowledge, strengthen relationships with community and one another, and engage in meaningful practices that affirm identity and hope. By centring Indigenous culture, knowledge, and strengths, the presentation considers how beading can contribute to restorative approaches that move beyond punitive responses to youth involvement in the criminal justice system. The presentation invites social workers and other helpers to consider how cultural practices can create natural transformative spaces that support Indigenous youth in reconnecting with themselves, their communities, and their cultures.

Title: Impacts of Colonization on Two-Spirit Identity, Community & Worldview

Presenters: Pasha Saulis, Tasha Madore, Jonathon Nolie

Abstract: This presentation explores the impacts of colonization, including the influence of the church, shame, and the erasure of Indigenous identities, on Indigiqueer individuals and our relationships with ourselves, our communities, and our ways of knowing. Through sharing our stories and experiences, we will explore how we understand and name our identities, including Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and the broader 2SLGBTQIAA+ identities, while recognizing the importance of defining ourselves in our own ways. Grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and wholistic practice, we will consider how reconnection and reclaiming identity can be supported through medicine, community, belonging, and the exploration of all parts of ourselves. We will also reflect on our place within ceremony, our sacred roles, and the ways our identities contribute to the strength and continuity of our communities. By embracing who we are without hiding or diminishing ourselves in a colonized world, we create space for Indigenous queer identities to flourish. Finally, we will explore how we can uplift, support, and create pathways of belonging for other Indigiqueer individuals, grounding our practice in relationships, self-determination, and the reclamation of our identities.

Title: **Indigenous Land- and Art-Based Therapy: It Heals and It Feels Good**

Presenter: Susan Ball

Abstract: This presentations explores Indigenous land- and art-based therapy as a way of supporting wholistic healing through creativity and relationships and invites us to engage in activities we love.

Drawing on Auntie Power, community practice, and current Indigenous art therapy approaches such as Life as Medicine, we consider how relational care and creative expression can strengthen service users and communities in a gentle, playful way.

Engaging with petroglyphs, or teaching rocks, with land-based healing experiences such as hiking, canoeing, can enable grounding in the four quadrants of wholistic wellness. These practices create opportunities for inviting Spirit, learning, connection, and healing. We will also consider how community-based art projects and post-vention can sustain relationships, inspire ongoing creativity, and connect communities through shared experiences.

The Teachings We Carry

Presenters: Anishinaabe Elder, Tina Armstrong & Anishinaabe Elder, Mary Anne Caibaiosai

In this closing conversation, Anishinaabe Elders Mary Anne Caibaiosai and Tina Armstrong reflect on twenty years of the Indigenous Field of Study (IFS) and the deep seeds of knowledge it has helped to plant. Speaking from their roles as Elders within the IFS, they will share how ceremony, teachings, and relationship have been woven into the program, and what it has meant to walk alongside students as they come to know themselves as Indigenous helpers. They will also share their own experiences within the IFS, including the learning, healing, and responsibilities that have shaped their paths. The conversation honours the impact of IFS alumni, who carry wholistic healing practices into Indigenous communities across Turtle Island as helpers, healers, advocates, and leaders.

Closing Remarks – Giselle Dias, MSW, RSW, PhD