

**INTRODUCTION TO INDIGENOUS
EVALUATION: JANUARY 22-23, 2020**

Follow-Up Report for Participants

May 2020

HOTIÌ TS'EEDA: NWT SPOR SUPPORT UNIT



Hotiì ts'eeda
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
SPOR SUPPORT UNIT

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CONTACT INFO

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BACKGROUND

In January 2020, Hotiì ts'eeda sponsored a workshop on Indigenous Evaluation. The session was delivered by Larry Bremner ([Proactive Information Services Inc.](#)) and held in Fort Simpson, NWT. The 22 participants included staff and leadership representatives from the following organizations:

- Aboriginal Sport Circle of the NWT (Jordee Reid)
- Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation (Dr. Nicole Redvers, Wilbert Cook, William Greenland)
- Dehcho First Nations (Violet Jumbo, Kristen Tanche, Dahti Tsetso)
- Government of Northwest Territories (Nina Larsson)
- Gwich'in Tribal Council (Sharon Snowshoe)
- Hotiì ts'eeda (Debbie DeLancey, Sara Komarnisky, Dawn Ostrem, Jennie Vandermeer, John B. Zoe)
- Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (Jimmy Ruttan)
- Łı́ı́dlı́ Kųę First Nation (Chief Gerry Antoine, Roslyn Firth)
- NWT Literacy Council (Kathryn Barry Paddock, Coleen Canney)
- NWT Recreation and Parks Association (Rachel Cluderay)
- NWT Seniors' Society (Martina Norwegian)
- Țehdzo Got'ıne Gots'ę Nákedı-Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (Alexa Scully)
- Tı́chq Government (Itoah Scott-Enns, Tammy Steinwand)

The two-day session was designed to provide participants with an overview of western evaluation approaches, provide more in-depth training on Indigenous evaluation approaches and methods, and give participants an opportunity to work on specific projects or programs that they want to evaluate.

HIGHLIGHTS

The sessions covered basic principles of program evaluation from a western perspective, introduced participants to foundational concepts of Indigenous evaluation, and provided opportunities for participants to workshop their own evaluation questions and projects. Workshop materials included a variety of research methods that are considered valid in western evaluation and may be appropriate in an Indigenous evaluation context as well.

Participants broke into groups to workshop several projects from their respective organizations, including:

- developing a visual program story;

- working through the basic components of an evaluation framework for each project;
- generating evaluation questions from the perspectives of program participants, staff, funders, and the community; and,
- proposing evaluation methods to answer those questions.

The results of this group work are captured in the attached photographs (see Appendix A).

In the closing session and workshop evaluation forms, participants indicated that they enjoyed the interactive sessions. Ideas for future training focused on more practical applications, drilling down into specific evaluation approaches and research methods, and providing opportunities for support and mentorship on specific evaluation projects.

RESOURCES

Participants received a number of handouts during the session. Copies are not attached to this report but all PowerPoint presentations and documents are on file with Hotii ts'eeda and can be provided upon request.

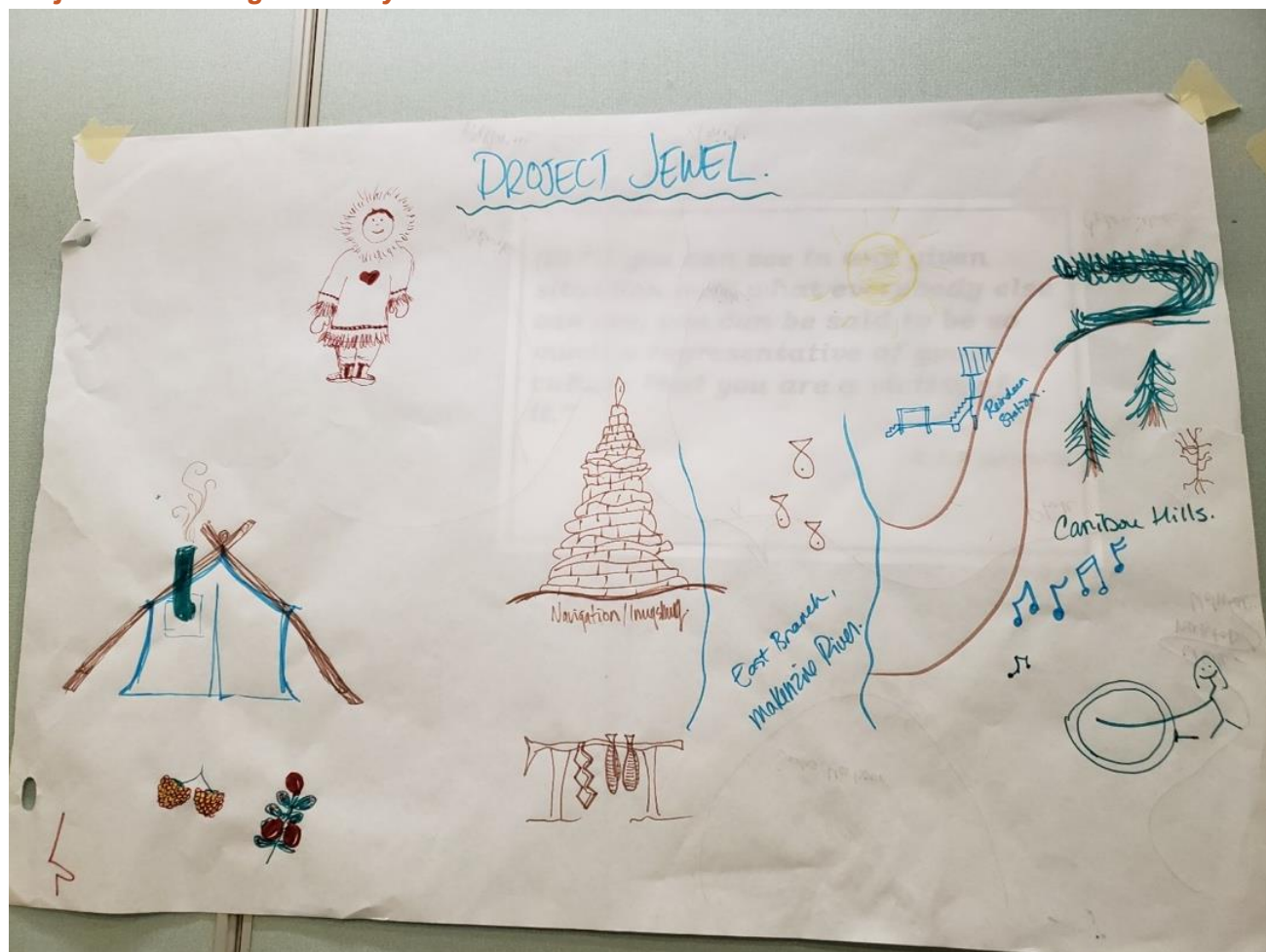
A list of additional resources is attached (Appendix B).

NEXT STEPS

Hotii ts'eeda is committed to continued efforts that support and promote Indigenous evaluation in the NWT, with a focus on health and wellness programming. Participants in the workshop provided concrete recommendations for further training opportunities. Hotii ts'eeda is currently in the process of determining how best to proceed with continued training and support during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak public health restrictions.

APPENDIX A: WORKSHEETS FROM SESSION

Project Jewel Program Story



Project Jewel Evaluation

Staff.

- How much will I get paid?
- Is it on the weekend?
- Can I get flex time?
- Who else do we need to support the program (cooks, drivers, etc.)?
- What's the plan?
- What are safety protocols?
- What is the risk management plan?
- What worked last time?
- What can we learn from?
- How long is this going to take me?
- How am I going to be supported?

Participant.

- Who is it for?
- Will I get paid?
- What about my kids?
- Where do we go?
- How long is it?
- Where is it gonna be?
- Who's gonna be there?
- Is there power?
- Can I bring my cell phone?
- What will we be doing?

- Self-refered
- only comes with
- self-refered
- 12 per program / camp
- 11 per program

Photovoice

Sharing
Circles

One-on-one
Interviews

Informs
Program Development
Implementation.

Elders, Staff, Past
Participants, evaluator.

discuss, review & determine themes from all so. & interviews, & report back to DJ/RC Admins.

Moccasin Making Project Program Story



Moccasin Making Project Evaluation

COMMUNITY

- What were the results?
- How will we get the info?
(ways that work for community)
- What were (will be) the program activities?

FUNDERS

- Depends on which of many different funders?
- #1's
- What activities took place (same as proposal)
- (future impacts of leadership activities?)
- how was \$ spent & on what?

STAFF

- stories from the program
- were there issues?
(e.g. w/ external researchers)
- if so, how were they resolved?
- [in program design] - clear roles & responsibilities

PARTICIPANTS

- now what?
(will program be cont'd)
- understanding what will happen in the program
- based on their experience, what how could program be improved?

Sticky Notes:

- Facebook
- Radio Station
- news letter
- posters
- mail boxes
- providing info to leadership bodies to share w/ public
- informal conversations, anecdotal data "learning walls"
- After - did people know about program? Would they participate if offered again?
- how do validate -> (e.g. w/ external researchers)
- GTC provide print-out of financials
- Review program documents (funding proposals, job descriptions)
- staff group/circle de brief - & record / take notes
- Individual interviews (anonymous) by evaluator (conversation)
- Ask if project should continue?
- hold regular sharing circles (participants)
- Ask participants to share their stories - photos or other methods

Circle Program Story



A JOURNEY ^{OFF to} OPTIMUM Mental Physical Emotional
 + Spiritual
 GOOD HEALTH.

WILBERT
 SARA
 ROSLYN

Circle Program Evaluation

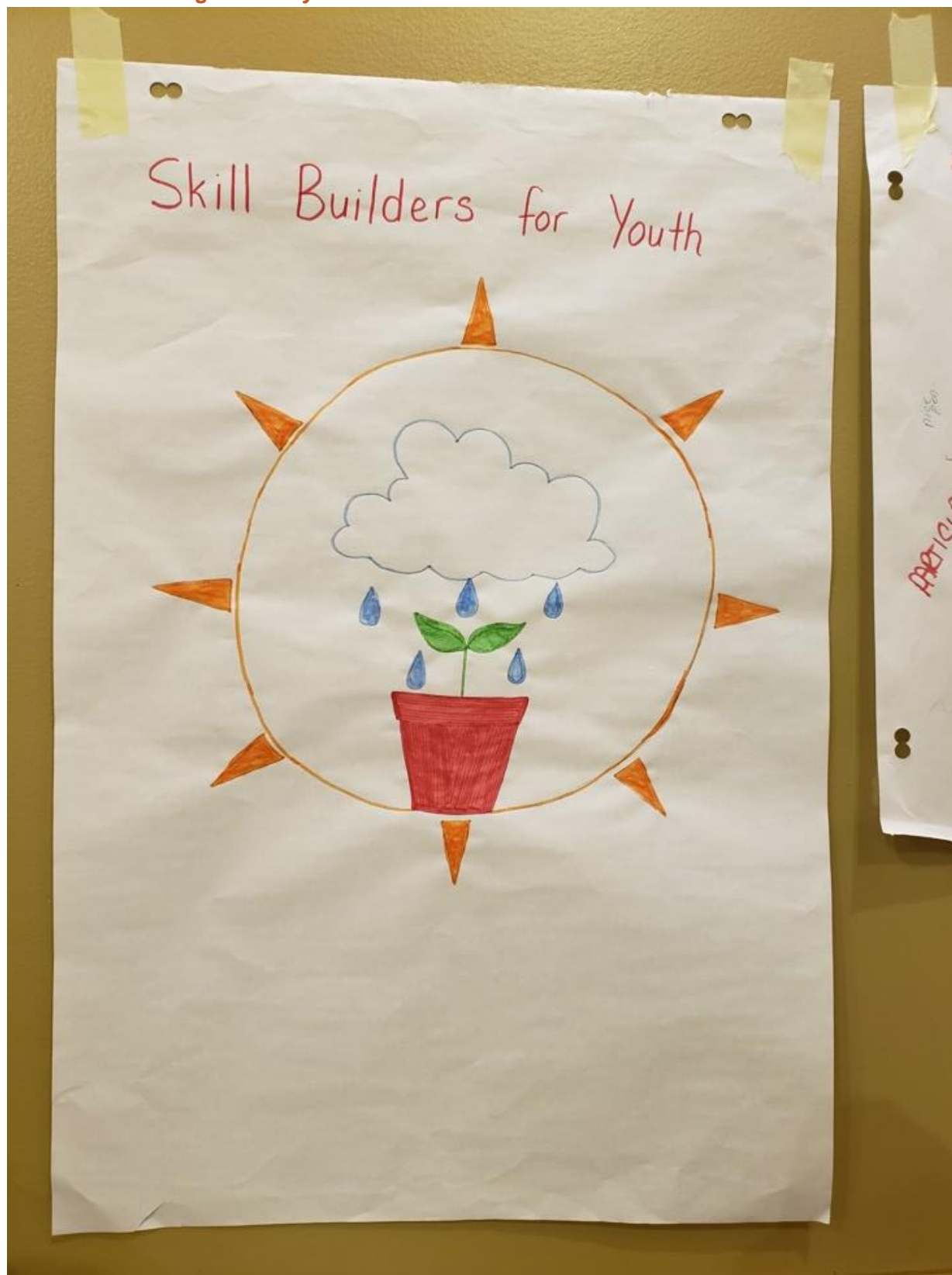
STAFF	PARTICIPANT
<p>WHAT IS THE VISION?</p> <p>WHAT WILL WE BE DOING (OUR JOB) RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>WHAT ARE OBJECTIVES/STEPS/ HOW DO WE GET THERE</p> <p>WHAT WILL OUR SCHEDULE(S) LOOK LIKE</p>	<p>HOW DOES THIS AFFECT ME?</p> <p>HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE</p> <p>WHAT CAN I EXPECT?</p> <p>HOW WILL THE PROGRAM AFFECT MY FAMILY/COMMUNITY</p> <p>Who is it for?</p> <p>Who is doing this? Where is the money?</p>
<p>ME</p> <p>MAIL/SHARE</p>	<p>Who is it for?</p> <p>Who is doing this? Where is the money?</p>
<p>COMMUNITY</p> <p>How will the program affect the community? Short term/long term</p> <p>Will it be ongoing?</p> <p>Who is it for?</p> <p>What community organizations will be involved?</p> <p>Age groups?</p> <p>Elder involvement</p> <p>Indigenous based?</p>	<p>FUNDER</p> <p>What are the results?</p> <p>Did you follow the terms + conditions of the CA?</p> <p>How did you spend the money?</p> <p>How many participants?</p> <p>How many completed</p> <p>" " withdrawn etc...</p> <p>Statistics</p>

Doula Program Story

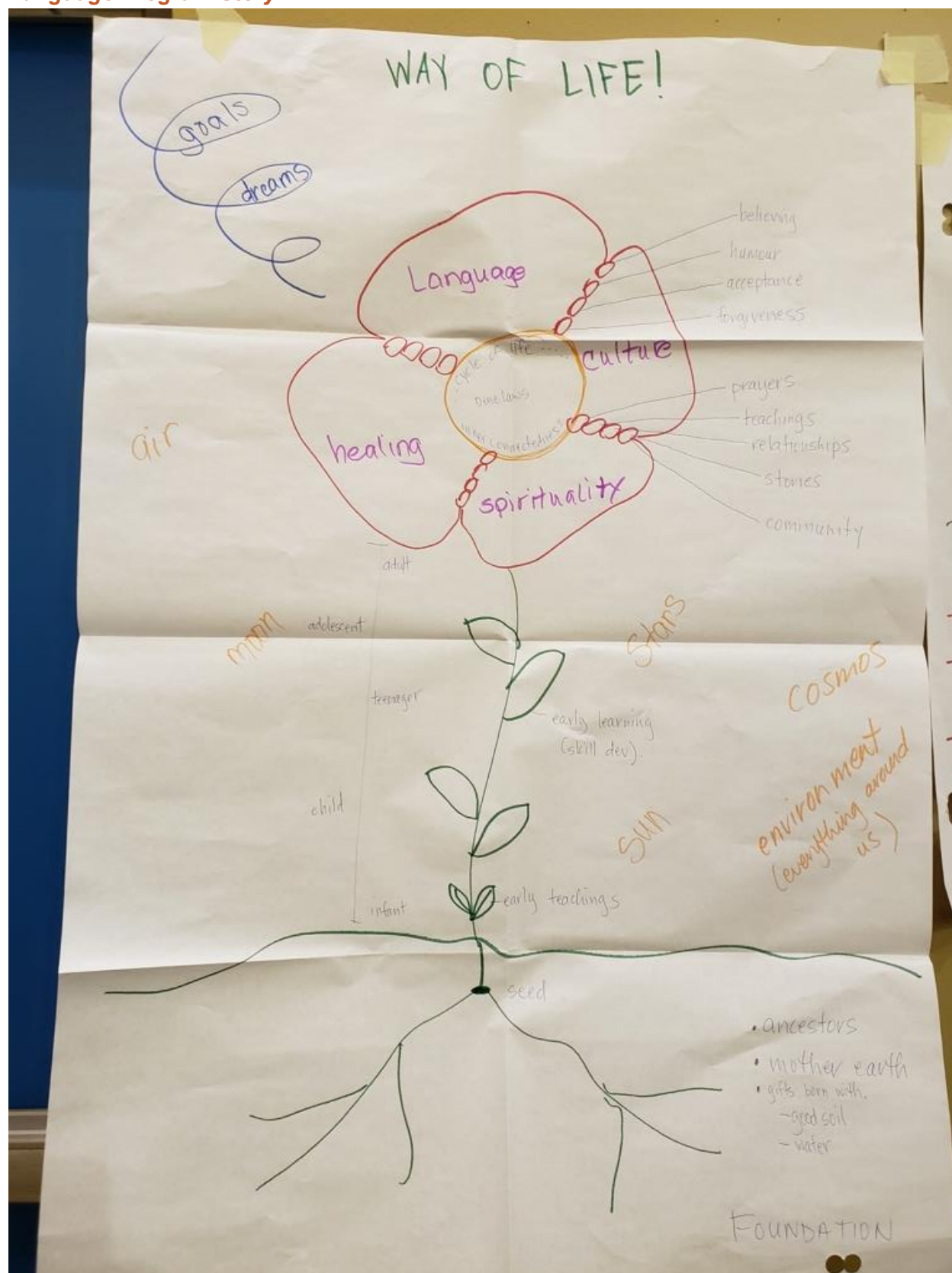




Skill Builders Program Story



Language Program Story



Language Program Evaluation

Staff

- What are my student's outcomes
- Were the roles and responsibilities clear
- did we give enough support
- Do you feel there is enough staff
- was it the right location for services

• One on One
• focus group
• case study

Community

- Is the program successful?
- How was the awareness of the program for the community?
- Who is the staff?
- What is the duration?
- Who is the target group?
- How can we help?

• Survey
• Learning Walks

Mentor Apprentice Program (Language Learning Focus).

Participant

- satisfaction with programming
- strengths & weakness
- did we give enough support
- was the program long enough
- was there enough resources for support
- was it the right location for services

• Interviews
• focus group
• case study
• Learning Walks
• Photo Journal

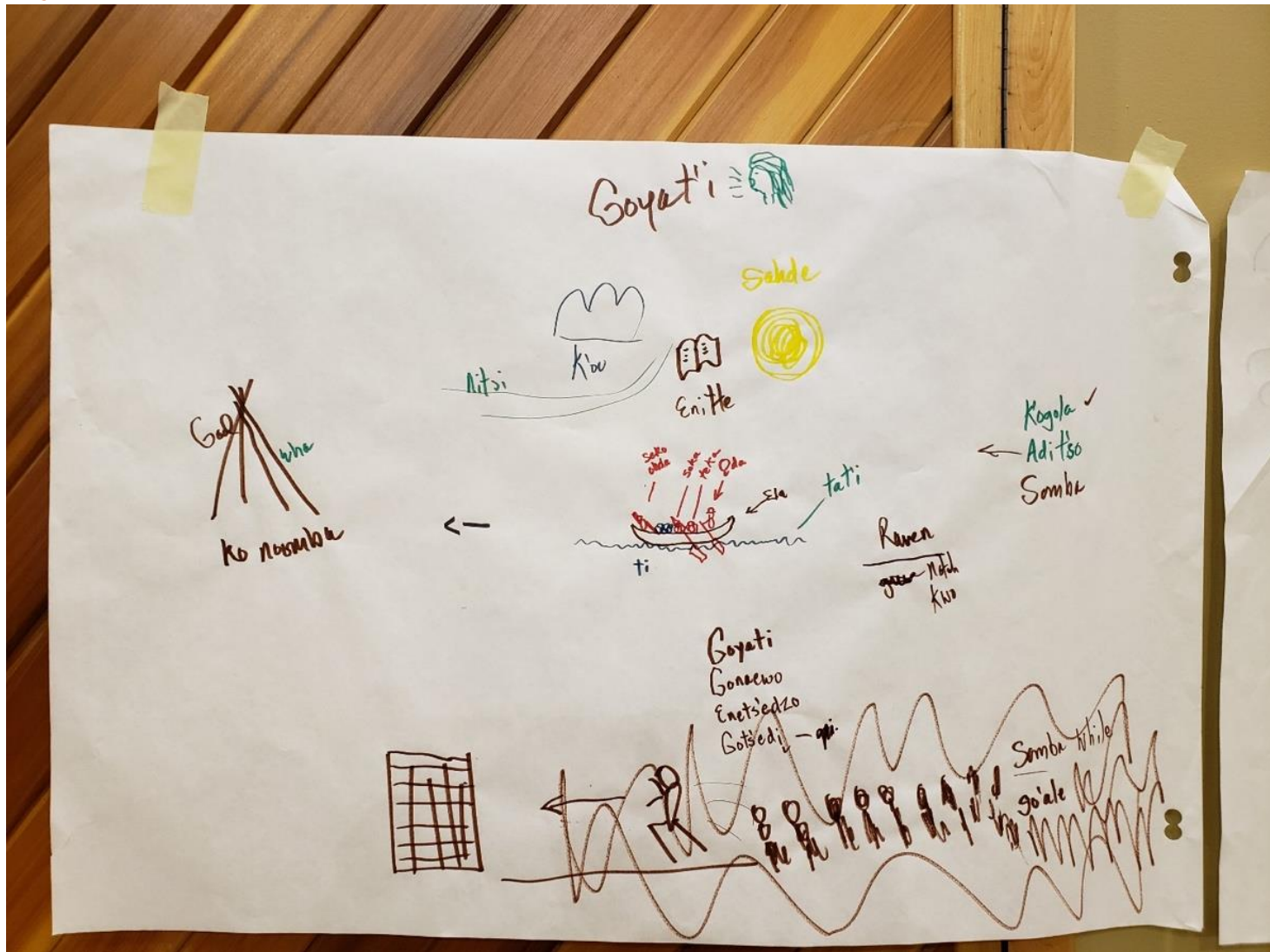
Funder

- what are outcomes?
- what was the cost?
- Reporting deadlines met?
- # of participants?
- other partner's?
- provide example of end product. (photo journal)

• Report format to
• also need back to
• funder

• Violet
• Nicole
• Tammy

Goyat'i



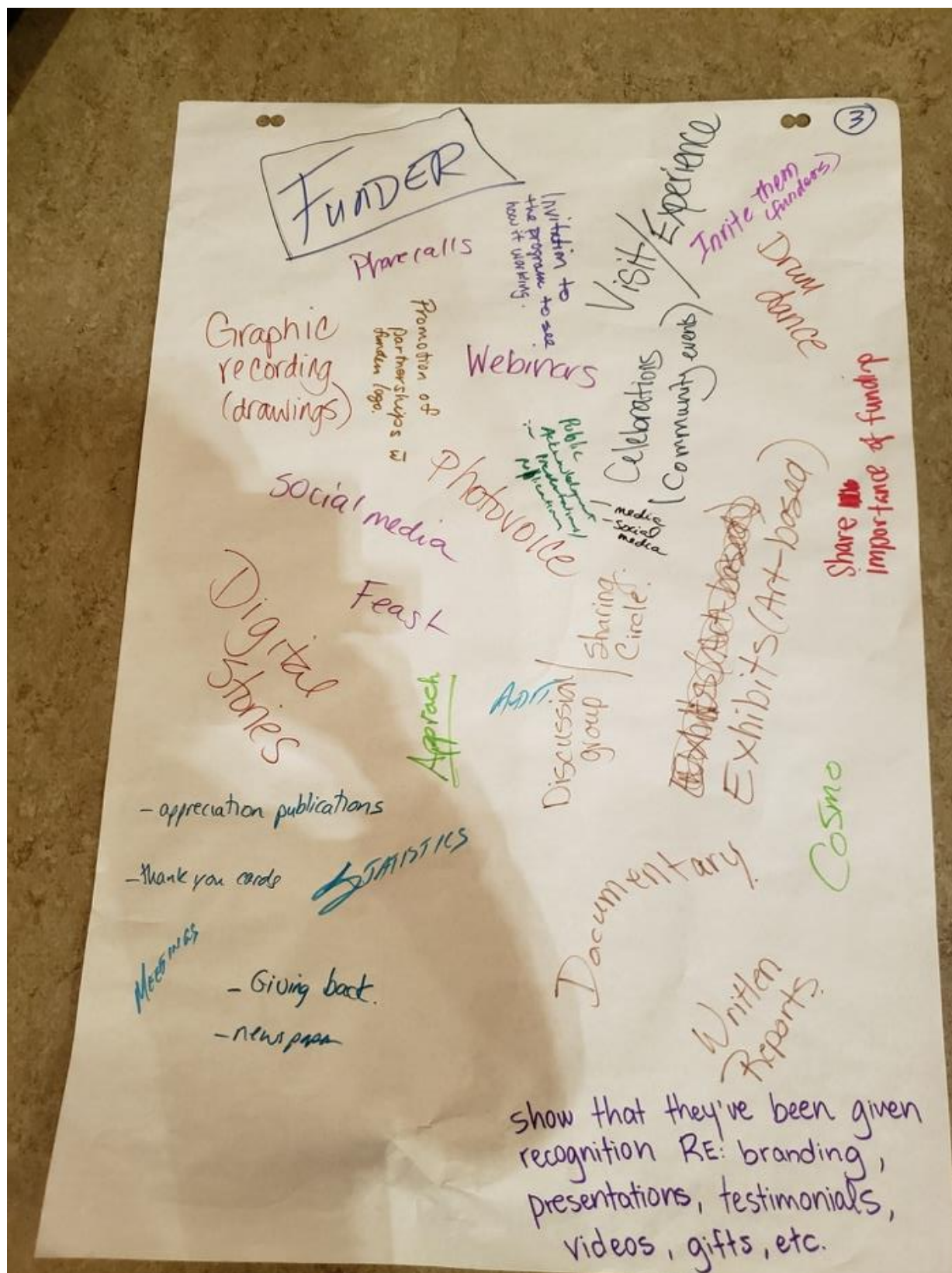


Group Brainstorming: Methods for Community Engagement

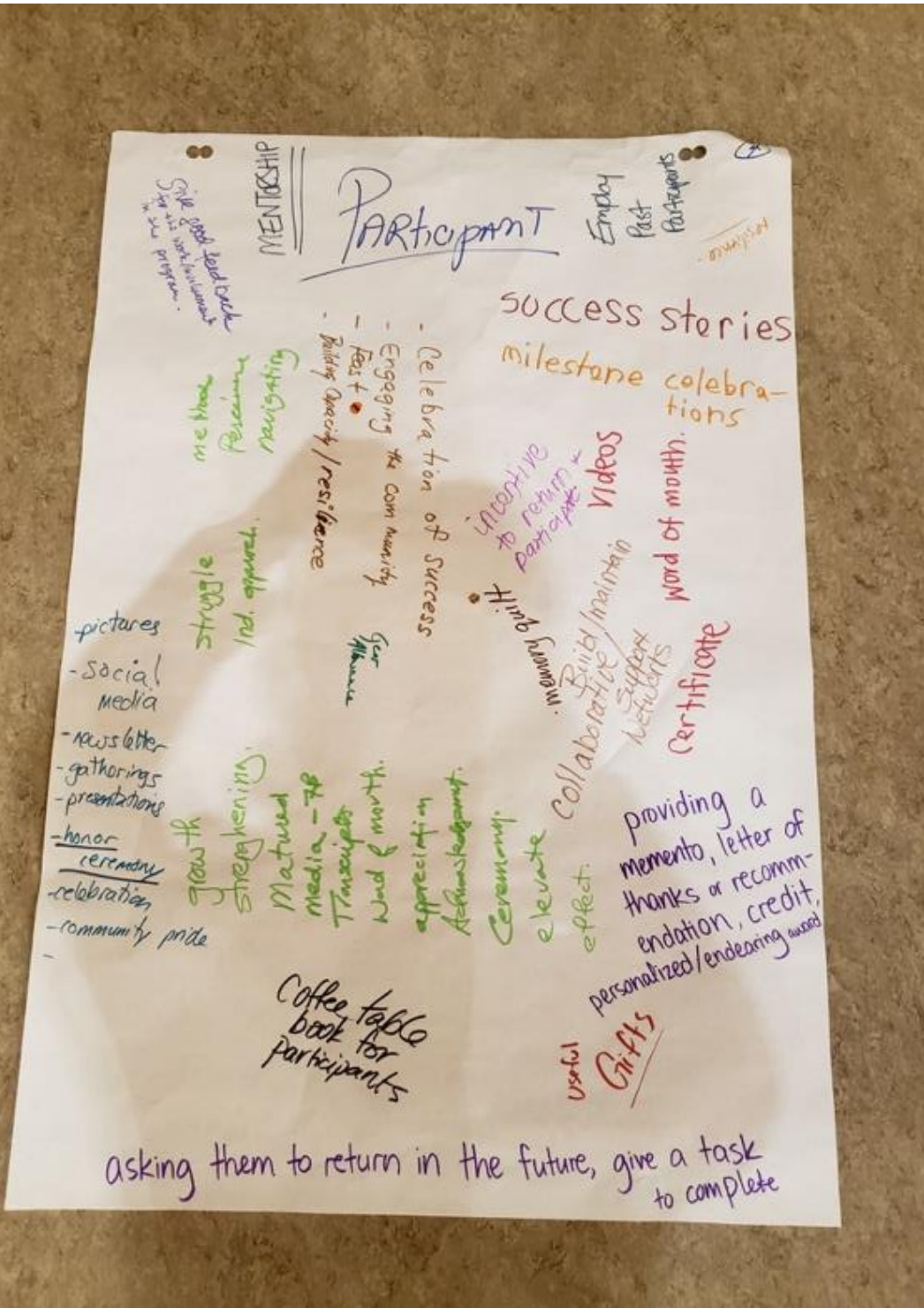
Community.

- SEND REPORT TO COMMUNITY + PARTICIPANTS
- Presentations to community - open!
- Community Event - slide show presentation
- Feast
- Social media
- Report + audio recordings available at Band Office
- participants do a presentation to the community
- ask those involved if they would be interviewed by the news / radio (ie CKLB, CBC, Cabin Radio, APTN, other local news/radio)
 - congrats message on radio - Northbeat
 - GRAPHIC recordings / DESIGN OF SUNNIST
- Ask community how they want to be engaged.
- Newsletter.
- Photobooks
- Digital Stories
- Visiting
- Brochure / one-pager
- Performance
- ceremony
- community consultation
- Feast
- drum dance
- networking / partnerships
- translation of knowledge) KT
- congrats message on public message board
 - electronic board
 - theatre
 - rotating screens
 - posters

Group Brainstorming: Methods for Funder Engagement



Group Brainstorming: Methods for Participant Engagement



APPENDIX B: EVALUATION RESOURCES

Useful evaluation websites:

This information was taken from the NWT On The Land Collaborative website:

<http://www.nwtontheland.ca/evaluation.html>

Many organizations have produced evaluation resources and toolkits, and there are numerous examples available online. Here are a few that are user-friendly and helpful.

Better Evaluation

Better Evaluation is an international collaboration to share methods and approaches. This website is an excellent resource for all things evaluation! In addition to explaining different approaches, describing methods, and providing examples, it will provide a definition for any term you might come across and provide links to further reading. <https://www.betterevaluation.org/>

Evaluation Building Blocks

Evaluation Building Blocks is a new guidebook prepared by the Kinnect Group in New Zealand. It is a simple, clear, straightforward guide to conducting an evaluation in 21 pages, put together by a team of world-respected evaluators based on their collective experience. http://kinnect.co.nz/to/wp-content/uploads/EvaluationBuildingBlocks_A-Guide_FINAL_V1.pdf

Indigenous Guardians Toolkit

The Indigenous Guardians Toolkit was created to provide communities interested in designing and implement Indigenous Guardian programs with easy-to-access information. The toolkit includes resources on [monitoring and collecting data](#), and conducting research. <https://www.indigenousguardianstoolkit.ca/>

Program Evaluation Toolkit: Planning, Doing, and Using Evaluation

The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health has a Program Evaluation Toolkit available online that walks you through all the phases of an evaluation with simple checklists and suggestions. <https://www.cymh.ca/Modules/ResourceHub/?id=6d1cdf70-8a99-4432-aba6-e19862da6857>

Evaluation Toolkit for Youth Programs

This evaluation toolkit for youth programs out of Ontario (an initiative of the Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange) is fun and informative. It has a particular focus on evaluating youth well-being but the overall evaluation tips are useful for all programs. <http://toolkit.youthrex.com/>

Sage Advice

This guide was produced by Reciprocal Consulting to support program evaluation within and by northern, remote, and Indigenous communities.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5763a7c5893fc07fb7f03a38/t/577172a9893fc09ddd5517b6/1467052722328/2-Sage-Advice-English.pdf>

Videos

Here is a link to a panel discussion held at the 2018 Canadian Evaluation Society conference, on "Reconciliation and Culturally Responsive Evaluation: Rhetoric or Reality?". Larry Bremner is one of the panelists:

<https://c2018.evaluationcanada.ca/program/keynote-plenary-sessions/>

Here is a link to a one-hour webinar covering the basis of program evaluation, geared to an NWT audience:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plah7xtdZso&feature=youtu.be>

Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation

The CJPE recently published a special issue devoted to Indigenous evaluation in Canada, which can be found here: <https://evaluationcanada.ca/canadian-journal-program-evaluation/volume-34-2019/special-issue>

Other articles on Indigenous evaluation

Clara Anderson, Malinda Chase, James Johnson III, Debbie Mekiana, Drena McIntyre, Amelia Ruerup, and Sandy Kerr, "[It Is Only New Because It Has Been Missing for so Long: Indigenous Evaluation Capacity Building](#)," American Journal of Evaluation, 2012.

Jane Gray Grover, "[Challenges in Applying Indigenous Evaluation Practices in Mainstream Grant Programs to Indigenous Communities](#)," The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 2010.

Katie Johnston-Goodstar, "[Decolonizing Evaluation: The Necessity of Evaluation Advisory Groups in Indigenous Evaluation](#)," New Directions for Evaluation, 2012.

Alice J. Kawakami, Kanani Aton, Fiona Cram, Morris K. Lai, and Laurie Porima, "[Improving the Practice of Evaluation Through Indigenous Values and Methods: Decolonizing Evaluation Practice--Returning the Gaze from Hawai'i and Aotearoa](#)," Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being, 2007.

Joan LaFrance and Richard Nichols, "[Reframing Evaluation: Defining an Indigenous Evaluation Framework](#)," The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 2010.

Joan LaFrance, Richard Nichols, and Karen Kirkhart, "[Culture Writes the Script: On the Centrality of Context in Indigenous Evaluation](#)," New Directions for Evaluation, 2012.

Hayley Marama Cavino, "[Across the Colonial Divide: Conversations About Evaluation in Indigenous Contexts](#)," American Journal of Evaluation, 2013.

National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, "[Indigenous Approaches to Program Evaluation](#)," 2013.

John Scougall, "[Reconciling Tensions Between Principles and Practices in Indigenous Evaluation](#)," Evaluation Journal of Australasia, 2006.

APPENDIX C: Winnipeg Youth Gang Prevention Fund Evaluation Circle of Courage Program Case Study

Winnipeg Youth Gang Prevention Fund Evaluation Circle of Courage Program Case Study

Prepared For:
Circle of Courage
Ka Ni Kanichihk



Prepared By:

proactive
INFORMATION SERVICES INC.



"Helping Clients Make a Difference ... Since 1984"

Spring 2011

Acknowledgements

This case stands not only as a celebration of those youth who want to make positive changes in their lives, but also to all those who support them on their journey.

This case study would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Circle of Courage staff. The staff at Circle of Courage have not only provided their insights, but also assisted with arranging interviews, focus groups and other data collection opportunities. Their openness and dedication were greatly appreciated. In particular, thank you to the project Team Leader for his patience and ongoing support of the case study and the entire evaluation process.

Gratitude is also extended to the partners and community members who took time to contribute their perspectives to the case study. Their contributions help to tell the story.

Finally, a special thanks to the youth and their family members who spoke passionately and openly about the importance of Circle of Courage and how it has affected their lives. On a personal note, it was a delight to get to know some of the youth; particularly those whose humour and spirit brighten my day whenever I visit Circle of Courage.

- Linda Lee

>>>> <<<<

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Circle of Courage – The Power of the Drum

On an unusually warm fall afternoon, I leave my vehicle parked a couple of blocks away from Ka Ni Kanichihk so I can enjoy the walk. I've been invited to attend Jared's graduation from Circle of Courage.

As I reach Ka Ni, a few people are standing outside the building in the fall sunshine talking and waiting for the ceremony to begin. Once inside the building I see Circle of Courage's Team Leader greeting people at the entrance to the large classroom where the walls are lined with computers. Greeting guests along with the Team Leader is a tall man in a sports jacket. I am rather surprised to discover he is Winnipeg's Chief of Police.

I take a seat near the front of the room so I will not miss any of the celebration. Two men, who I assume are Elders, are sitting on the floor facing the rows of chairs set up for family and community members. They have medicine bags, tobacco and pipes laid out in front of them on the buffalo skin they are sharing. Also sitting at the front of the room to one side are six young men and a couple of Circle of Courage staff. They form a circle around the large drum which is directly in front of me.

Slowly the room fills up. Probably about 40 people are in attendance, many of whom are young people, friends and relatives of Jared and the other young men from Circle of Courage. The ceremony begins with a smudge, followed by introductions, and then a pipe ceremony.

Jared is given his graduation certificate by the Circle of Courage Team Leader. Both are smiling. Then Jared presents gifts to the supporters of the program and I am surprised – and pleased – to find myself, as the evaluator, included. Jared then speaks of his experiences and feelings in a soft but strong voice.

The boys seated around the drum begin to sing a song that they have recently learned for the big drum. Everyone is silent while the drum gives a communal heartbeat to the gathering.

Speeches follow, including the Chief of Police who expresses his willingness to listen and learn from Aboriginal youth, like the boys who sit around the drum. Then, as the Executive Director of Ka Ni Kanichihk is giving the closing remarks, I look down and see a young child – about a year old – crawling past my chair towards the front of the room. Then I realize he is heading directly for the drum. He crawls to the circle of young men surrounding the drum. One of the staff helps him to his feet and places a drum stick in his hand. Without a moment's hesitation, he begins to beat the drum. All eyes turn to him as he begins to sing. The faces of the young men soften and their eyes smile. The next generation has answered the call of the drum.



A. Background

As part of the National Crime Prevention Strategy, the Youth Gang Prevention Fund (YGPF) has funded five community-based projects in Winnipeg. While each project is tailored to the unique needs of particular Winnipeg neighbourhoods and populations, all projects are part of an overall evaluation that includes the collection of youth and project specific data. While the YGPF has four wide-ranging objectives, one in particular is noteworthy in the context of case studies:

- ✿ Support knowledge and evidence-based community interventions that target gun violence and gang-related issues by tackling their root causes.

Case studies are included in the evaluation in order to build on the body of knowledge gathered by quantitative methods. Each case is intended to contribute to the understanding of the project by telling a unique story. In addition, the case can add to a more universal understanding of gang-involved and at-risk youth in Canada and to the issues they face in seeking to move toward positive life choices.

The **Circle of Courage Program** (COCP), delivered by Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. and located in Winnipeg's inner city Centennial Neighbourhood, uses an intensive approach focused on providing Aboriginal male youth with opportunities and social interventions to develop skills and resiliency. Accomplished through cultural reclamation programming, education, counseling and support, and advocacy, the project builds community, as well as enhances skills and independence. In addition, the Circle of Courage programming model seeks to instill pride in being Aboriginal, combined with knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture.



This project uses the Circle of Courage model outlined by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern in their book *Reclaiming Youth at-risk: Our Hope for the Future*. This model provides a framework for healthy, holistic culturally authentic alternatives that will build a sense of identify and community (belonging) as well as provide opportunities to enhance skills (mastery), develop a sense of independence, and support youth to practice generosity.

B. Methodology

By their very nature, case studies emphasize storytelling. In terms of methodology, they are holistic in approach in order to collect the perspectives of those involved. Case studies emphasize the unique nature of the story being told and, therefore, are not generalizable to larger population:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research.¹

The choice of a case study subject is focussed around what can be learned through sharing a unique story. It also seeks to document the experiences from which a deeper understanding of practice could be gained and lessons learned. To develop the focus for the case, an emergent design was used. After a number of discussions with the team leader and staff of Circle of Courage, the focus for the case study suddenly seemed obvious - the Circle of Courage.

Through interviewing the youth, parents, staff, and community members the case study began to take shape. The first step was to have a conversation with the youth in the spring of 2010. Fourteen boys participated in the discussion. In addition, the case study included;

- ✚ Interview with the Circle of Courage team leader,
- ✚ Focus group with Circle of Courage staff,
- ✚ Interview with an Elder,
- ✚ Interviews with two school principals,
- ✚ Interviews with two agency partners; Intensive Support and Supervision Program worker (ISSP) and a Probation Officer,
- ✚ In-depth interview and a letter of support from a parent,
- ✚ Conversations with three parents at a family evening,
- ✚ Conversation with a group of neighbours,
- ✚ Letters written by four of Circle of Courage youth.
- ✚

As well, evaluators attended the graduation of one of the youth, a family evening, a session with Elders, and a Christmas dinner with youth and staff.

¹ Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass.

C. Context for the Case Study

Although youth participants may live outside the geographic area, the Circle of Courage program operates in the Centennial neighbourhood of Winnipeg's inner city. The Centennial neighbourhood epitomizes the characteristics of urban poverty. According to the 2006 Census:²

- ✦ The average employment income in Centennial neighbourhood was \$17, 416 as compared to \$33,518 for the City of Winnipeg as a whole.
- ✦ The incidence of low income in 2005 before taxes was 63% in Centennial neighbourhood as compared to 15% in the City of Winnipeg.
- ✦ In Centennial neighbourhood, 85% of female lone-parent families are in the low income (before taxes) category.
- ✦ The unemployment rate for those 15 and over was 14% in Centennial as compared to 5% for the City of Winnipeg.
- ✦ The unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 years of age was 22% in Centennial as compared to 11% for the City of Winnipeg.
- ✦ In the Centennial neighbourhood, 53% of those 15 years and over did not have any educational certificate, diploma or degree (including a high school certificate or equivalent), as compared to 23% for the City of Winnipeg.
- ✦ In the Centennial neighbourhood, 42% of the population was of Aboriginal ancestry, as compared to 11% for the City of Winnipeg as a whole.

In the Manitoba context, Aboriginal peoples are particularly affected by poverty and inequality, with adverse effects on health outcomes. Violence is viewed as a health issue with crime-related violence related to elevated levels of poverty.³ As observed by Denis Raphael (quoted by Silver in "Fast Facts: The social and economic conditions that produce poor health") "one of the most consistent findings to emerge from the literature is that poverty is a key determinant of whether one falls into a life of crime." It is within this context of poverty and violence that so many male Aboriginal youth find themselves.

² While recognizing that demographics have likely shifted since 2006, the data still provide a picture of the neighbourhood.

³ Silver, J. (2010). "Fast Facts: The social and economic conditions that produce poor health." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. See: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/fast-facts-social-and-economic-conditions-produce-poor-health>

Furthermore, Aboriginal youth, particularly those in Winnipeg's inner city, are subject to labelling by authorities, in addition to the pressure to become involved with gangs. Mercredi's *Report to the Correctional Service of Canada on Aboriginal Youth Gangs in the Federal Corrections System*, as well as the work of Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson discuss the issue of labelling as one that particularly affects Aboriginal young people. Regardless of actual gang involvement, these youth are frequently labelled as gang members by authorities.

Labelling may also contribute to groups on the periphery of criminal behaviour being "pushed" to the criminal stage by labelling them as criminal by the community.⁴ A recent report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives speaks specifically to this issue in Winnipeg: "Policing in the North End has recently been intensified to the point where 'it is like the

Erika, a single Mom, speaking about her son, Matthew. . .

Matt started getting into trouble when he was 12 years old. He started to try alcohol and use marijuana. Then once he jumped out a second story window and took off. I knew I needed help. I couldn't handle him by myself. . . I got into trouble about that same age and my mother said 'now it's all coming back at you.' Then I found out about Circle of Courage from someone I knew who had worked at Ka Ni. I don't know what I would have done without the program.

military in the North End now' and anyone who 'fits the description' is being targeted. This strategy...is likely to aggravate the problem, not solve it."⁵

The youth in Circle of Courage live within an environment where societal and institutional factors contribute dramatically to increasing risk of gang affiliation. Thus, the issue of 'youth gangs' must be situated within this broader systemic context:

Children and young people are doing the best they can in the face of structurally rooted troubles largely beyond their control, including poverty, addictions, family problems, difficulties in school, lack of employment opportunities, and racism and discrimination.⁶

As the Circle of Courage team leader simply reminds us:
"all Aboriginal youth in this area are at high risk of gang involvement."

⁴ Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. *Alter-natives to Non-Violence, Aboriginal Youth Gangs Exploration: A Community Development Process*. (2003), pp. 16-17.

⁵ Comack, E., Deane, L., Morrisette, L., & Silver, J. (2009). *If You Want to Change Violence in the 'Hood, You Have to Change the 'Hood: Violence and Street Gangs in Winnipeg's Inner-City*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, p. 1

⁶ Curran, A., Bowbess, E. and Comack, E. (2010). "Fast Facts: Meeting the Needs of Youth – Perspectives from Youth-Serving Agencies." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. See: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/fast-facts-meeting-needs-youth>

D. Circle of Courage Program

The Circle of Courage project serves Aboriginal male youth aged 12 to 17 in gangs or at-risk of gang involvement. After approximately two and a half years of operation the project had exceeded the number of youth it was expected to serve (68 as compared to a projected 45). The project also had a waiting list of 38 youth.

As previously noted, the program is built around the four aspects of the Circle of Courage as described by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern.

The Spirit of Belonging:

The universal longing for human bonds is cultivated by relationships of trust so that the child can say, "I am loved."

The Spirit of Mastery:

The inborn thirst for learning is cultivated; by learning to cope with the world, the child can say, "I can succeed."

The Spirit of Independence:

Free will is cultivated by responsibility so that the child can say, "I have the power to make decisions."

The Spirit of Generosity:

Character is cultivated by concern for others so that the child can say, "I have a purpose for my life."

- Source: Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern

While the circle can be viewed as a progression, youth may be exhibiting characteristics of all aspects of the circle at different times and to varying degrees.

The circle begins with the Spirit of Belonging, which is the foundation for programming at the Circle of Courage project. Belonging is central to youth's engagement with the other aspects of the circle. As trusting relationships are built and youth begin to believe they are loved, the spirit of belonging is fostered.

Youth can then engage in learning – particularly the process of cultural reclamation - which builds their confidence. With confidence comes the ability to act responsibly and make positive decisions. The final element of the Circle of Courage is the spirit of generosity which is manifested in concern for others and purposeful action.

1. Belonging

Many of the youth who come to the Circle of Courage program are searching for a place to belong; something which is often satisfied 'on the streets' through gang affiliation. Circle of Courage is able to fulfill this need through creating a sense of belonging for the boys on two levels. Almost to a person the boys say *"these guys are my family"* or *"I have met a lot of boys and they have become brothers"* or *"it feels like a family here."*

The Spirit of Belonging: Family Night

On a cold evening in late November, I attended Family Night at Circle of Courage. A table laden with food was set up in the back room. The boys served the food to the adults who were in attendance, waiting until everyone was served before they ate. Later the boys cleaned up without being prompted to do so.

About 10 parents were in attendance. A few came to eat and then left, but most stayed for the conversation. One father played the drum and sang along with one of the boys.

As the evening progressed, I watched one of the boys modelling positive discipline with his younger brother and sister who were in attendance. He spoke gently, as he placed his arm around them and hugged them, calming them down whenever they started to get rambunctious.

Two Elders joined the group and after supper spoke, telling their own stories. Afterwards the Circle of Courage's Team Leader talked about the program, emphasizing how the boys were learning to make positive choices, including the choice to attend school. Then he asked the boys to speak about what Circle of Courage meant to them.

As I had heard them say before, the boys spoke of learning respect for self, for others, and for Mother Earth. They talked of the cultural aspects – drumming, crafts – at which one Mom proudly displayed the beaded earrings her son had made.

Most powerful was when the boys talked about what they would be doing that evening if not for Circle of Courage: *"I would be home alone," "I would be on the streets," "I would be in trouble and I would be getting into trouble tonight," "without Circle of Courage, I would be lost."*

As they were leaving, parents confirmed that being in Circle of Courage had kept their sons *"off the streets and we are really appreciative of that."* Or as another Mom explained to me, *"before he was being picked on and pressured at school to join a gang, now that has all changed."*

I left Circle of Courage that evening with a sense of community and a feeling of hope.

They also recognize that the staff have created that atmosphere: *"[Circle of Courage staff] treat you like family."* Jeremy,⁷ who is with a foster family in Winnipeg hundreds of kilometres from his home community, says *"Many things make me sad, like when I hear news from home. [But] I don't feel alone when I'm here."*

Staff talk about themselves in the roles of *"auntie, uncle, or older brother."* They clearly recognize the importance of the family atmosphere at Circle of Courage: *"They see us everyday in a family setting . . . we help them along like a family. Some boys don't really have a family setting and family values, so we also help instil a sense of those values."* Staff tell the story of one boy who wanted his spirit name. Not only did he want his own family there for the occasion, he also wanted Circle of Courage staff to go in as family: *"the teaching is that we are all an extended family."*

Given the uncertainty of future funding, the boys are expressing fears of losing their connection to staff. Staff recognize how difficult it will be for the youth if the program does come to an end. *"Because they see us every day in a family setting, it would be like losing one of their family"* (staff member). While staff understand how difficult it will be, they reassure the boys: *"I try to explain that we're still family. 'When you are away from your reserve, isn't your auntie on the reserve still family?'"* (staff member).

⁷ All names used in this case study are fictitious.

The cultural teachings play a large role in this aspect as well. *"I am teaching the sacredness of the feather, medicines, the medicine wheel . . . when they [the boys] say something negative I bring it up in a teaching and help them along as if they were in a family"* (staff member). As one of the Elders explains: *"We talk about the real stuff too [in addition to cultural teachings], why they are here, the reality. And I try to love them back so they have a chance."*

A probation officer, who had been connected with some of the boys, used one example where he explained that *"the success is that [the youth] was connected with the people at Circle of Courage. They were there for the kid. When he completed his probation order but got into trouble again, they were there for support. They didn't just dump him."*

Related to the sense of belonging is the feeling of safety youth have at Circle of Courage. When asked if he wished there could be anything

Devin: The Story of Running Grey Fox

Devin, whose spirit name is Running Grey Fox, has participated in Circle of Courage for nine months, rarely missing a day. Devin has a twinkle in his eye and always greets me with a smile, and often with a good-natured wise-crack as well. However, the Team Leader at Circle of Courage explains that while Devin has learned a lot, he struggles to transfer the skills he's learned at Circle of Courage to other environments; *"sometimes he will push back at rules [at school] and push back hard."*

Devin has an older brother who is believed to be gang-affiliated. His Mom and Step-Dad have younger children who take up a lot of their time and energy.

Devin's school principal confirms that they have had some challenging times with Devin in the school setting. She explains:

"Sometimes I can't keep a kid like Devin in school because of his behaviour, but suspending these kids to the streets isn't the answer. So sometimes I call [Circle of Courage Team Leader] to take Devin to Circle of Courage for the afternoon. I wish this could be done in a more structured way. Devin is really connected to [Circle of Courage Team Leader]. He is firm, fair and very consistent. If it weren't for Devin's connection with him, Devin would definitely be on the streets and gang involved. I hear his older brother in the hall, telling him not to go to the program – 'it's for babies' he says. So far Devin has ignored him and goes to the program, but it's a hard choice for him."

It is Devin's own words that speak most profoundly:

I think if this program was shut down I would probably be on the street being bad or doing what other people do, such as stealing cars. I wouldn't be living with my parents if it wasn't for [Circle of Courage staff]. They helped me talk to my parents. I was able to go to a powwow and volunteer with handing out things such as hand sanitizers, which help keep our community clean for our people. I learned how to pick medicines, how to treat people respectfully, how to keep our culture going. I even have a spirit name, which is "Running Grey Fox." The only reason why I'm in this program is because it is the best one anyone can go to. The program treats you like you're their children. Being in this program changed my life around because most of my friends are bad influences to me. These friends like doing bad things such as pills and stuff that could kill you. When [Circle of Courage Team Leader] came to my school the first time, I knew I would change my actions. He helped me in so many things like showing me how to smudge and how to make a drum. When I first tried making a drum, I gave up, but when [Circle of Courage Team Leader] helped me it made me happy and I really wanted to finish that drum."

different about Circle of Courage – anything to improve the program – he replied *“put another Circle of Courage somewhere else [in the city] so other kids could be safe too.”*

A principal, who has boys from her school attending Circle of Courage, confirmed the importance of Circle of Courage as a place of safety: *“It gives one more safe place for our students. It’s a connecting point, a safety point for them.”*

Belonging at Circle of Courage is also related to the youth exploring and discovering their Aboriginal identity. As one mother noted: *“[through traditional teachings] Aboriginal identity replaces gang identity. I’m someone; I belong.”* And while this sense of identity is deeply connected to belonging, it is also a step into openness to learning.

2. Mastery

Mastery begins with learning. While learning has to do with understanding the importance of making positive choices – going to school, helping keep

The Team Leader at Circle of Courage explains about decision-making:

The boys are resisting peer pressure and making positive choices. They choose to come to program, rather than to go and get high.

the community clean, resisting the pressure to be involved in illegal activities - at Circle of Courage much of the learning is centred around Aboriginal culture.

The cultural piece is *“building a foundation under the youth’s feet. They come here with*

shame and no connection with identify. But when they have the foundation, if they fall they don’t fall very far and they can get up more easily” (staff member). Boys participate in cultural activities at the Circle of Courage site which have included making crafts, drumming, and listening to the teachings of the Elders. Youth also have opportunities to participate in sweats and sun dances.

However, learning about their culture is not the only aspect of learning. One mother, who really valued the cultural component of the program for her son (*“he is getting his spirit fed”*), also commented on the work experience her son got as a result of being in Circle of Courage. Her son worked at Safeway during the summer, but left the job because when school started *“it was too much. But now when he wants to*

How Circle of Courage helped me:

I like to come here because I like the teachings as well as going to the sweat lodge. I also like to meet the Elders. It is hard to change and be normal. [Circle of Courage staff] help me by talking to me and teaching me to stay out of trouble and work hard . . . I have made many mistakes and try to learn from them . . .

I like listening to the Elders and it’s nice to hear my language. In the classroom I am learning Math. ~ Jeremy

work he will have a reference. It is very hard for young Aboriginals to get a job, so it was great this worked out for him."

The boys work at academics. The Team Leader tells the story of one boy who could not read or write when he entered the program: *"he has some kind of learning disability . . . He gradually started to try books and now, two years later, he was able to write a letter about what Circle of Courage means to him."*

A number of boys wrote such letters. One of the boys explains his involvement and what he has learned at Circle of Courage.

One day I got a call from [someone] asking me if I wanted to come help and build a tepee. Then I started coming on my own for Cultural Teachings and Medicine Pickings. Circle of Courage helped me stay out of trouble and also finish my probation and community service. What I've learned at Circle of Courage is how to talk to people in a respectful way, not littering on Mother Earth, helping with the younger boys, cooking . . . without Circle of Courage I think I would have ended up in jail or smoking again. I would like to see the program go on for other boys.

While he speaks about the importance of the cultural teachings, he also reflects on skills such as cooking, helping the younger boys, and changes to his own personal behaviours. His words speak to the holistic and inter-connected nature of learning at Circle of Courage. As one of the Circle of Courage staff notes, *"every day they have grown in some way. They now practice the teachings on a daily basis and don't even realize they are doing it."*

3. Independence

Circle of Courage seeks to support youth in making positive changes toward different decisions and behaviours. Problem-solving skills are emphasized daily. As the Team Leader explains: *"they often have to go through a reactive piece first [when they are angry about a situation]. They react, then they sit and think, and then start to deal with it."* The staff also tell stories of boys making difficult decisions; for example, a few who have had breaches of parole made the decision to turn themselves in.

The structure of Circle of Courage is the foundation for youth learning to make these positive choices and move towards independence. As the Circle of Courage Team leader explains:

When they come to program, they know what happens; there is no fighting. Everyone knows what they can and can't do here. They know the process of being picked up, come into program, have something to eat. Then into the classroom, smudge, journal. And there is an adult there all the time who is not yelling or judging. There is structure, rules and boundaries, as well as nurturing embedded in the program . . . No matter where the youth is at, they can grow and learn. We allow them to do just that.

Independently, one of the Elders echoes the Team Leader:

Amanda has four children, three boys and one girl. Her second oldest son, Daniel, is a participant in Circle of Courage. In the summer of 2010, she wrote a letter of thanks to Circle of Courage. Her letter speaks to her son's learnings, independence and generosity.

Daniel's desire to complete his chores has increased. He even cooks supper for us from time to time. I was very surprised the first time he made us dinner. I was so tired when I came home from work, I laid down on the couch and fell asleep. Daniel woke me up and told me supper was ready. We had spaghetti . . . I felt blessed that day. I love that.

Daniel is learning more about our heritage. Previous to being involved in this program, Daniel's traditional experiences were next to nil. I always wanted my children to be knowledgeable in their traditional culture and speak their traditional tongue but didn't know where to start. Daniel is proud of his culture. He has a traditional name and has been to a sun-dance. He has been privileged to be a Fire Keeper at the sun-dance. I am very proud of him. He is more traditional than me. . . .

Daniel is currently learning employment skills to add to a resume as a result of this program. He is learning valuable public relations skills in conjunction with work experience. Another shining example of why this program is very beneficial.

The most important thing for these boys is consistency, being here every Tuesday, being a present, positive role model. We are talking about the richness of the culture that is present with them, to feel confident, to feel safe, to feel empowered. We are empowering each other. I empower them with my knowledge and they empower me with their young lives . . . in the beginning they are an infant, so it is nurturing and loving them so they can stand up and start walking . . . I prepare them as they crawl along, learn to walk, to run and then to fly.

The presence of Aboriginal male role models is a key aspect of the boys' development and growth towards independence. As one of the Circle of Courage staff explains: *"In the early years it is women's teachings they follow and as they grow older they move towards looking to men for direction. It is a rite of passage . . . so many boys will be moving over to [male staff member] when they are ready to become men."* The ISSP worker who had interacted with a number of the youth from Circle of Courage concurred that *"a lot of times for these boys this was something important that was missing for them – a strong male role model in their lives – and when this person is Aboriginal it made more of a difference."*

When attending cultural ceremonies and events, such as sweats, the boys show their skills. Seven boys volunteered at Manito Ahbee and received certificates recognizing their contribution. Youth from Circle of Courage also served tea at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

How Circle of Courage changed my life:

Before I came here I was in a gang, smoking weed, drinking, and all that stuff. I never met my Dad, and I wish I had a dad, that's why I'm mad all the time. But one day my buddy showed me this program. I started coming and I had some fun, but I was a little shy. But after getting used to the boys, I felt happy, going to sweat lodges, learning about the seven teachings, drumming. I slowly started feeling like I had a family that likes laughter and fun. The Elders make me feel like I'm loved and I can change. I feel better about my life. That's how I feel I have changed. . . .

~ Bobby

Staff give the example of one boy *"who is still going to school every day. He is more and more involved in culture; he is learning about the pipe and carrying the pipe for Circle of Courage."* The boys who have been attending the program longer mentor the new boys, teaching them the routine and expected behaviours while at Circle of Courage: *"It's not a drop-in centre. It's a learning centre. It's for family and cultural identity. They teach each other these things"* (Circle of Courage Team Leader).

4. Generosity

The Team Leader at Circle of Courage explains how boys are making positive choices that involve helping others: *"two boys actually realized that work experience was interfering with school, affecting their school work . . . I offered them weekend work, but not at this time. They prefer to volunteer in their community."*

As previously mentioned, the boys with stronger academic skills also help those who are struggling at school. When one of the boys brought his report card to the program, showing he was on the honour roll, all the boys congratulated him, celebrating his academic accomplishments and showing their solidarity and generosity.

One of the mother's, Erica, also tells a story of her son's generosity. She explains:

I really noticed a difference the program was making when I took my children swimming. There was a group of boys making fun of a boy who appeared to be mildly disabled. The boys were throwing toys at him and saying things. When one of the toys landed our way, one of the boys came to retrieve it. Matthew told him 'it wasn't nice to do what they were doing and they wouldn't like it if someone did that to them.' The boy left and stopped teasing the other boy. I told Matthew I was proud of him. He had never done [something like] that before.

Finally, it is not only Circle of Courage staff and the boys' parents who have recognized the emergence of the boys' generosity. A group of neighbours were more than willing to talk about the difference having the Circle of Courage program in their neighbourhood had made for them.

What a change since we have been here [because of Circle of Courage starting up]! Before you would drive by and the street was gross and dirty. But the boys pick things up . . . they are friendly. They come to your door and ask 'do you need your walk done [shoveled]?' . . . look at the garbage on the other side, compared to here . . . some people drink in the field [across the street] and the Circle of Courage kids put on gloves and clean up the field because the little kids play there.. . . if something happened and the program was shut, they would be missed.

E. Reflecting Back, Looking Forward

1. A Few Evaluator Observations

As the evaluator on the team who has been most closely connected with Circle of Courage, I have had the opportunity to meet with Circle of Courage staff numerous times. I have heard their stories. I have also had the pleasure of interacting with many of the young men on more than one occasion.

In my encounters with the boys, they have always been polite and respectful; some are more outgoing, some are shyer. But when thinking about the “risk factors” and “characteristics” that have been the basis for their involvement in a youth gang prevention project, I am struck by the fact that, in my dealings with them, they have seemed just like “regular” adolescents. For me, this only serves to reinforce the notion that they need the same things as do all adolescents, a place of safety and belonging, activities that engage them while adding to their knowledge and skills, opportunities to develop their independence and help others and, above all, people who love them and believe in them – unconditionally.

**The Team Leader at Circle of Courage
explains:**

*Whatever we teach our children, their children
will be the second generation of re-learning . . .
there will be less crime, less abuse, more
education . . . we have combated youth getting
involved in gangs, but we have done that and
more.*

2. Reflections of the Circle of Courage Team Leader

When I was a young man my grandfather taught me many lessons that still have meaning for me today. One of the teachings that I always carry in my heart was that “when you start something see it through to the end; never quit in the middle or you will never know what you were supposed to learn for your future. If you do not finish what you start you will know nothing!”

My grandfather's wisdom guides my actions and I always keep it close to my heart. I have passed this teaching on to my boys at Circle of Courage and I try to model the actions that I teach them and expect from them. I promised these young men that I would see them through to the end of this journey no matter what the circumstances were. Many seeds have been planted at Circle of Courage, many seeds have rooted and are beginning to grow and with continued care and nurturing they will blossom! I am optimistic that the boys, with proper care and support, will be able to overcome the daily challenges and temptations they face and that, given the chance, they will grow into strong, independent men and leaders in the community.

I am so very proud of our boys in Circle of Courage, they are true examples of courage and persistence. No matter what they have experienced in their young lives, no matter the trauma and disappointments in their past, they keep trying, striving for excellence. I believe that we, their mentors, role models and teachers, must continue to guide them with honesty and integrity and that we must never mislead them.

F. Learning from the Circle of Courage Story

While the Circle of Courage case study tells a story that is particular to the Circle of Courage program, a number of themes emerge that resonate more broadly. Perhaps one of the themes that Circle of Courage most deeply epitomizes is the importance of "belonging."

Youth do not walk into a program and immediately feel connected. It is only when youth feel safe, loved, and valued can trust be built. Trust is a first step. Many of the boys in Circle of Courage, and the youth in other Youth Gang Prevention Fund Projects, have experienced abandonment, either through family crisis, system failure, or both. While the boys may test the adults at Circle of Courage on certain occasions, over time they come to understand that these adults unconditionally, and relentlessly, care about them.

The other aspect of "belonging" is a "sense of identity." Along with lived values, the cultural teachings and programming provide youth at Circle of Courage with a foundation; that is, a pride in their heritage and their culture. They have a "place" that goes beyond themselves and even beyond their own communities. They are connected to something greater than their daily realities. They have traditions and values that can guide them, providing a basis for making positive choices about their own lives.

The Circle of Courage begins with “belonging” and supports youth as they learn and grow, so that ultimately they can not only act independently, making good choices for themselves, but also connect with others in the spirit of generosity. The journey around the circle is not smooth or easy, but as the stories emanating from Circle of Courage show, all youth can take steps along this journey – and given the lives these boys have lived, those steps should not be considered small ones.

***My dream is to walk up to [Circle of Courage Team Leader] one day
and say . . .***

‘Do you remember me?’

He will say ‘who are you?’

*‘A mentor.’ And I will tell him, ‘you helped me succeed in life. My
name is Bobby; thanks for helping me.’*

Then he will say, ‘I knew you could do it, Bobby, I knew it.’

~ Bobby

***“Tell me and I may not hear,
Show me and I may not follow,
Involve me and I will understand...”***



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