Ksaahkomm Aaapio'tokann
(Mother Earth's Teachings)

By

Stephanie Williams, White Eagle Woman
BCST, Mount Royal University, 2021

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the School of Child and Youth Care

We acknowledge and respect the Lək'ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/ Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'ʷəŋən and W̱ SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This master's project explores how Blackfoot land-based teachings can inform Child and Youth Care Counselling (CYCC) practice within a Western institutional setting. It was developed in collaboration with Niitsitapiwahsi (Indigenous Relations program) at Hull Services in Calgary, Alberta, through relational engagement with Elder Casey Eagle Speaker and Director Susan Bare Shin Bone. A narrative inquiry approach and a Two-Eyed Seeing framework guided the work and position Indigenous and Western knowledge systems as complementary. The four teachings of respect, resilience, humility, and forgiveness were shared by Casey through story and connection to the land. They are presented as living knowledge grounded in relational accountability, identity, and connection. The project also includes practical tools, including an arts-based representation and a framework for requesting cultural support. These teachings are not intended as a template beyond Hull Services, as they are nation-specific and were gifted within this context. However, the relational processes used in this project such as beginning with relationship, engaging community, reflecting continuously, and remaining open to tension may be applied in other settings. This work supports more relational and culturally grounded practice guided by Elder knowledge.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to Casey Eagle Speaker and Susan Bare Shin Bone of Niitsitapiwahsi. This project would not exist without their guidance, teachings, and willingness to share their knowledge. Their patience, generosity, and commitment to this work have shaped not only this project, but my understanding of practice, relationship, and responsibility.

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr. Shemine Gulamhusein, and my committee member, Dr. Shannon Kell, for their guidance, support, and encouragement throughout every stage and direction of this project. Your feedback and thoughtful engagement strengthened this work while allowing it to remain grounded in its relational intent.

I extend my appreciation to the young people and colleagues at Hull Services who continue to shape my learning. A special thank you to Nicole Chalifour for her contribution to the artistic representation of the teachings, which added another layer of meaning to this project.

I am deeply grateful to my parents, friends, my partner, and my cats who have been by my side throughout this journey. Your support, patience, and encouragement carried me through every stage of this work. I especially want to acknowledge my late sister, Kelly, whose connection to the land continues to guide me. She gave me a lifetime of memories on the land, and I carry both that connection and those memories with me in this work and in my life.

Finally, I acknowledge that this project was created on the ancestral lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani Nations, as well as the Blackfeet of Montana. This region is part of Treaty 7 territory, which includes the Tsuut'ina and Îyârhe Nakoda Nations, and is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Districts 5 and 6.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

From the start of my career as a Child and Youth Care Counsellor (CYCC), to the present, I have had a strong interest in finding ways to connect young people with the land and engage with nature. I have spent my career working with young people in therapeutic campus-based care and court-ordered confinement programs with Hull Services in Calgary, Alberta. In these programs, I observed a gap in young people's opportunities to engage with nature. It often felt like it was not prioritized due to the systemic and institutional settings these programs existed within.

I initially aimed to address this by prioritizing nature-based programming and aiming to leave the urban environment, but often I was faced with systemic challenges around organizational policy, staffing capacity, and safety-based risk management processes. Through walking alongside Blackfoot leaders and Elders involved in the agency, I realized that my approach to nature-based practices was grounded in a Western lens (Wilson, 2008). I shifted my approach to focus on Indigenous teachings related to nature and the land as the foundational component of addressing these gaps in access and engagement with nature. I have spent the past year learning from Susan Bare Shin Bone and Casey Eagle Speaker from Niitsitapiwahsi (Indigenous Relations Department) in Hull Services. In the context of Hull Services, we focused on Blackfoot teachings shared from Casey. Through years of being gifted teachings and knowledge from Casey and guidance from Susan, I have realized the immense value of integrating knowledge and learning from the land on a foundational level and having it ingrained in all we do. I was fortunate to learn from Casey as he gifted land-based teachings. My role was not to develop them, but to be a steward of the teachings and the land. Through this I hope to support integrating the teachings in the agency and opening doors for future knowledge as well.

This project follows my journey of identifying this project as my focus in my Master's program and therefore contains prior threads of research or literature related to the broader context of nature and young people. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) guides the methodology and data collection with a Two-Eyed Seeing lens for recommendations and implementation of these Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within the existing Western structures by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Bartlett et al., 2012).

Situating Myself in the Project

I was born and raised in rural Northern Alberta on Treaty 8 territory. My father was born and raised in this community and my mother moved there shortly after high school. Both of my parents are descendants of settlers, being the third generation in Canada. Our family roots are a mixed heritage of English and Polish with family and extended family spread across the Canadian prairies and Vancouver Island. I introduce myself in this manner based on a teaching from Casey, who suggests that introducing oneself through our ancestors and geographical locations increases relationality in initial interactions.

I grew up spending time on the land in a variety of ways. This ranged from visiting my local provincial park to go camping, using an ATV to explore crown land, or walking the shores of our local river to fish every fall. Our family sought connection from the land, but it was often a one-sided relationship in which we focused on enjoyment in a recreational capacity. I did not gain the perspective of how much the land was giving me until later in life. Through my studies and work with Indigenous Elders, I began to see the relationality of time on the land, as opposed to viewing it as a commodity and a place (Wilson, 2008).

My interest in utilizing the land, particularly in Child and Youth Care settings, is deeply personal. As a young person, I witnessed the impact of my sister attending a wilderness-based addiction treatment program. Although her journey ended only a few years after she attended treatment, the way in which she articulated the impact that nature had on her healing has remained with me. This experience has guided my practice as I started working with young people in therapeutic campus-based care and court-ordered confinement programs in Calgary. In these programs, I often found myself connecting the strongest with young people when spending time in nature, whether that was taking a walk in the nearby neighborhood or a hike in the mountains.

While working as a frontline CYCC, I came into the position of Cultural Helper for my program. This role within the agency allowed me to attend monthly meetings with representatives from other agency programs to receive teachings and guidance from Casey. I was invited to share these teachings with the young people I walked alongside, including teachings related to protocol, ceremony, and the history of local Indigenous peoples. These land-based teachings resonated deeply with me and the healing I, too, had felt from the land. In this role I initially struggled with how I, as a white settler, could uphold and pass along this knowledge. Based on this, I often operated from a place of fear and limited my engagement due to not wanting to offend or tread too heavily. One of the most important teachings I learned from Casey during this time was that I was centering myself rather than my responsibility to learn. Instead, I was encouraged to engage humbly, ask questions, and accept feedback as a part of the learning process. More recently, I was invited to join the Hull Indigenous Advisory Committee (HIAC). Through my roles on both committees, I have continued to deepen my knowledge and relationships. These roles and relationships have guided me towards this project.

In writing and reflecting throughout this project, I observed instances where my language reflected my Western upbringing and way of life. For example, in the section above, I refer to "utilizing the land". Terms and themes like this appear throughout my writing and are indicative of instances where I view the land as a commodity, and not a relational space. My initial instinct was to edit over places where more colonized language is used but instead kept it as a reminder of places where I am still learning and unlearning. These moments represent the ongoing process of this journey and are reflected throughout my writing. While at times I may tread off the path I intend to walk, I use these moments to step back, reflect, and learn to move forward *in a good way.* This teaching of *moving in a good way* is one I carry from Susan and Casey and aspire to bring into all I do[1]. Susan describes this as doing things with good intentions, a willingness to learn, and reflections to right any wrongs we may make.

Shifting Language

This work is grounded in the lens of a Child and Youth Care Counsellor (CYCC). Although the term *youth* is utilized in my professional title, as well as in my graduate and undergraduate studies, I was guided to stray from language such as *youth, child, adolescent*, and *kid.* Casey has gifted me teachings regarding using the term *young person* instead. This teaching emphasizes the importance of recognizing young people as equal members of our communities. This language reinforces their inherent value and contributions to society at a level equal to that of older members of the community. While my formal title and much of the research I reference use differing terms from young people, I will strive to use young person and young people

[1] Teachings from Susan and Casey will be shared throughout as they naturally appeared through relationship over the course of this project.

throughout this project. I will also avoid adding any adjectives typically applied to young people in these CYCC-supported settings, such as at-risk, high-risk, complex, challenging, vulnerable, entrenched, or marginalized. While these descriptors may indicate what experiences have happened to or are presently occurring, these are not indicative of their whole selves. This shift in language reflects the broader Blackfoot and Indigenous teachings that inform my practice. These teachings have been gifted throughout my professional and academic journey and inform how I refer to, see, and support young people.

Organization Background

Hull Services has been supporting young people since 1962 in Calgary, Alberta. The agency currently operates 28 different programs that support young people and families in a variety of ways, including specialized school classrooms, community-based supports, and therapeutic campus-based care programs (Hull Services, n.d., About Us). The agency operates from a main campus in Southwest Calgary, as well as a community programs hub in the city's southeast, with additional community and individual supports available across the city. Hull works closely with organizations across the city and provincial systems such as Child and Family Services and Recovery Alberta for program funding and placement management. The agency operates under the overarching framework of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT), developed by Dr. Bruce Perry (2006). NMT focuses on supporting young people who have experienced trauma by understanding how early experiences shape brain development and regulation. This framework guides many aspects of practice across programs at Hull Services.

Within several of Hull Services' campus-based and intensive programs, Indigenous young people are represented at disproportionately high rates. Across 2024–2025, the proportion of young people identifying as Indigenous ranged from approximately 30% in one program to

73% in another, with some previous years reflecting even higher proportions. This aligns with broader provincial patterns. Across Alberta in 2023, Indigenous young people represented approximately 74% of youth in care despite accounting for only 10% of the province's youth population (Government of Alberta, 2023). These realities are rooted in the ongoing impacts of colonial policies, including residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and systemic inequities within child welfare systems. Within the context of Hull Services, this overrepresentation underscores the necessity of culturally grounded supports and consistent access to Niitsitapiwahsi. Ensuring meaningful connection to Elders, ceremony, land-based teachings, and culturally specific knowledge is not an enhancement to service, but an essential component of equitable and trauma-informed care within the agency.

As mentioned above, this project was conducted in collaboration with Niitsitapiwahsi (Indigenous Relations Department). While the department is small in structure, its influence extends across all programs and levels of the agency. Niitsitapiwahsi consists of Casey Eagle Speaker, a respected Elder of the Kainai (Blood Tribe) Nation and Susan Bare Shin Bone. Casey oversees the department, and greater agency, culturally. Susan Bare Shin Bone, of the Piikani and Siksika Nations, is the Niitsitapiwahsi Director and oversees the administration and facilitation of the program within the agency. As I did for myself above, the backgrounds of both Casey and Susan will be shared bellowing, showing who they are and what journeys have led them to their roles at Hull.

Casey Eagle Speaker (Blackfoot name: Sorrel Horse) has been connected to Hull Services since the late 1990s. From the outset of his time at Hull, Casey focused intentionally on building relationships with staff across all programs. He attributes much of the progress within Indigenous Relations over the past three decades to these relationships. Casey speaks to the

continued support of staff and their willingness to listen, learn, and remain open to change as instrumental in advancing both his vision and the work of Niitsitapiwahsi within the agency. Casey's leadership is grounded in ceremonial knowledge and lived experience. At four years old, he was taken from his family and placed in a residential school, where he remained until the age of fourteen. He has described this experience as "taking the childhood out of him." During this time, he was separated from his siblings, family, traditions, language, and cultural teachings. Like many residential school survivors, he later experienced struggles with mental health and addictions, alongside disconnection from community and culture. Years later, reconnecting with his community and cultural practices became central to his healing journey. This reconnection informs his work at Hull. Through teachings shared with staff and young people, Casey emphasizes the importance of understanding one's history and building pride in cultural identity. As he shares:

> It is really important to have that pride in culture and perhaps even find a role model within their community. When you know where you come from and you build that connection with your community, it can give greater pride in who YOU are.

Casey carries ceremonial rights within the Blackfoot community and has been gifted the responsibility to conduct ceremonies such as pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, and participation in the Sun Dance. His role at Hull includes advising leadership, facilitating ceremony, offering one-to-one support, and providing Indigenous Teachings trainings across the agency.

Working alongside Casey is Susan Bare Shin Bone (Blackfoot Name: Blue Bird), who is from the Piikani and Siksika Nations and is married into the Kainai (Blood Tribe). Susan resides in Calgary with her husband and family, while maintaining strong relational ties to the Blood Reserve, where several of her children and extended family live. Regular travel between Calgary

and community reflects the continued importance of kinship and ceremony in her life. Susan holds a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Calgary and completed specialized training as an Expressive Arts Facilitator through the Prairie Institute of Expressive Arts in 2021. Her professional practice is shaped by both formal education and lived experience. As a Sixties Scoop survivor, Susan brings a personal understanding of intergenerational trauma and cultural disconnection within child welfare systems. With the support of community, fellow survivors, and Hull Services, she organized the "Healing Our Spirit" Walk in Calgary in October 2022, grounded in collective healing and reclamation. Susan's role within Niitsitapiwahsi includes administrative leadership, consultation, and direct support to young people and families. While Casey carries specific ceremonial rights, Susan's role within Blackfoot ways is different yet equal. She emphasizes daily practice of humility, courage, respect, and kindness in her work and continues to learn from Elders, colleagues, and the families she walks alongside. Her personal philosophy of "Live life today" reflects a commitment to presence and relational accountability.

Niitsitapiwahsi operates from a Blackfoot lens while supporting young people and families of diverse backgrounds. When supporting Indigenous young people from other Nations, Susan will research specific teachings and knowledge related to their communities to avoid homogenizing Indigenous cultures and to strengthen culturally specific connections. When possible, Niitsitapiwahsi seeks to bring in Elders and Knowledge Keepers from other Indigenous Nations. They also invite local community members and skilled artists who facilitate traditional crafts and cultural teachings, to ensure supports are grounded in the appropriate community context. For non-Indigenous young people who express interest, teachings such as smudging or discussions about cultural values may be shared in ways that are respectful and appropriate. This approach aligns with the department's broader goal of increasing cultural capacity across the

agency so that all CYCCs may feel more confident engaging in culturally grounded relational practice, regardless of their own identity.

The department supports two key committees within the agency: the Cultural Helpers Committee and the Hull Indigenous Advisory Council (HIAC). The Cultural Helpers Committee includes representatives from programs across the agency who bring teachings and learning back to their teams. Membership is not restricted to Indigenous staff, as the goal is to build agency-wide capacity and reduce strain on the small population of Indigenous staff who already carry significant cultural labor. HIAC was created to elevate Indigenous staff voices and bring those voices directly to senior leadership, creating a formal space for advocacy and systemic reflection.

Project Objectives

Through engagement and observing trends when working within the agency and Niitsitapiwahsi, the following project objectives have been set collaboratively at the request of Casey and Susan. The overarching goal is to create a foundation for Niitsitapiwahsi grounded in land-based teachings, informed by Casey's guidance and his focus on addressing gaps in knowledge within the agency. This foundation is relationally constructed and provides a starting point and guiding base for staff, programs, and future cultural facilitators to engage with Indigenous teachings in a meaningful and culturally respectful way. At the same time, this foundation is designed to navigate the realities of a Western agency, which often requires tangible forms of knowledge, documentation, and frameworks for funding, evaluation, and reporting. By sharing a written form of the teachings, this project aims to walk in both worlds, as Susan often reflects. It honours Niitsitapiwahsi's teachings while providing practical, accessible tools for staff within organizational systems.

My role within this project was to support the journey of holding oral stories and carrying their meanings into written form. An additional benefit that came from this was a written document outlining how to request these kinds of knowledge and support**.** Through these interactions and sharing of teachings, ideas for further implementation of this knowledge and integration into the agency were sparked. The four main objectives that came out of this project were: (1) Increased Knowledge of Blackfoot Land-Based Teachings across the agency, (2) Creation of a framework outlining requests for Elder teachings, (3) Establishment of foundational land-based teachings, and (4) Recommendations for integration alongside existing systems.

Increased Knowledge and Awareness Across the Agency

In alignment with the agency's strategic goals, this project will establish teachings intended to be shared throughout the agency, increasing overall knowledge and awareness for all employees. The foundational teachings identified in Objective 3 are intended to serve as the primary entry point for this increased knowledge and awareness. These teachings and the recommendations drafted from them support the agency's strategic priorities regarding Indigenous Relations.

Creation of Framework Outlining Requests for Elder Teachings

Through the natural progression of this process, a framework and flowchart for how to request teachings and support were drafted. This aims to reduce cyclical interactions when requests can be streamlined through existing structures like the Cultural Helpers committee. Additionally, it builds capacity and asks for non-Indigenous staff to engage in doing the work, instead of placing that process on Indigenous peoples.

Initially in this project I brought the notions of Susan and Casey being over-worked, spread too thin, and their "plates too full." I had carried these assumptions and wanted to be responsive to them in my articulation of my role in the project. I was corrected by Casey who asked why I would think his plate isn't large enough to carry all he does. My role and perspectives were reframed following this feedback. I shifted my perceptions surrounding capacity and workload to one of streamlining processes and adding written forms of knowledge behind so that Casey's plate is always present at Hull, even if he is not the one holding it. Casey resonated with this articulation, and our approach was aligned. Interactions like this informed the creation of the framework and allows space for correction from Elders and Knowledge Keepers that is rooted in respect.

Establishment of Foundational Land-Based Teachings

The establishment of a focused set of land-based teachings gives a starting place for a collective understanding. While many land-based teachings are shared within Niitsitapiwahsi and the broader community, these teachings were gifted by Casey as the primary ones to begin with. These teachings form the core foundation upon which agency-wide learning can expand, with the intention that all staff continue deepening their understanding beyond this initial entry point. These are not the only land-based teachings to be gifted and shared from Niitsitapiwahsi and external Elders, but these have been selected as the foundational teachings that align with CYCC practice and the population we serve. From this, further development and integration can occur, ranging from individualized plans for young people to agency-wide initiatives. These teachings are gifted to staff at Hull Services to be used in their practice with young people and families. To ensure authenticity and gratitude to Casey for sharing this knowledge, please respect protocol and consult Casey for any application of the teachings outside of Hull Services.

Recommendations for Integration of Knowledge Alongside Existing Systems

The recommendations from this project will fall into three broad categories: care planning and cultural connection, staff training and competency, and organizational culture. Covering these three areas will meet the needs of young people by integrating a comprehensive and holistic understanding layered through all aspects of Hull Services. The goal is to increase this knowledge and foundational teachings for frontline CYCCs, while also providing broader recommendations that support the agency's overall growth in Blackfoot land-based understanding.

Summary

This project emerged from my own shifting understanding of nature and from moving beyond a Western lens toward seeing land through Indigenous teachings and recognizing how this shift shapes my work with young people at Hull Services. My positionality as a settler has been continually examined throughout this process. With Susan's guidance, I have also reflected on how my relationships with these teachings evolve over time, leaving space for mistakes, correction, and ongoing learning. This project has created space to examine language, relationality, and the importance of centering young people within practice, while situating the work within Hull Services' strategic and cultural realities.

The length and depth of this introductory chapter are intentional. Within Indigenous research paradigms, positioning oneself relationally is foundational, not supplementary (Wilson, 2008). Sharing ancestry, geography, and lived experience establishes accountability and makes visible the lens through which the work unfolds. Knowledge is relationally constructed, and this contextual grounding reflects that commitment.

With this foundation established, Chapter 2 turns to the literature, examining research on nature and well-being, Indigenous land-based understandings of healing, and approaches to integrating cultural teachings into CYCC practice and within Hull Services.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature related to nature-based practices with young people. It begins with a Western perspective that examines urban and rural young people's perceptions and interactions with nature, focusing on mental health and overall well-being. It then reviews land-based work being done by Indigenous peoples, followed by an examination of CYCC training implementation. Lastly it reviews Hull Services' policies related to staff training and supporting Indigenous young people and families. The inclusion of the broader understandings of nature and its connection to well-being is intentional, as it provides foundational context for the land-based teachings and CYCC practice described later.

Nature & Well-being

When reviewing literature related to young people and their engagement with and perceptions of nature, several themes were identified. Studies indicated that there is an impact on young people's physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being when engaging with nature. Many studies contrast urban and rural young people, with their perceptions of nature influencing their willingness to engage with it. Urban young people are highlighted in much of the research, as this population may have less access to the wilderness as a form of nature due to their geographic and/or socioeconomic circumstances (Lekies et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2022). A brief focus on these two populations connects to many of the young people supported by Hull Services. Often the level of care provided in these types of specialized settings, like at Hull, is only available in urban centres. This may require young people and families to relocate or remain in urban environments, potentially increasing disconnection from land and community.

Lekies et al. (2015) and Cohen et al. (2022) both examined the impact of nature from an urban young person's perspective, though through different lenses. Lekies et al. (2015) explored

shifts in young people's perceptions of nature following repeated exposure within a multi-week, group-based program. In contrast, Cohen et al. (2022) examined the long-term impact of significant outdoor experiences in childhood and found positive associations with adult well-being. Together, these studies suggest that repeated outdoor exposure can shift attitudes toward nature, even when initial apprehension is present.

Mainella et al. (2011) wrote about a concerning lack of outdoor play-oriented time for young people. This was linked to "play deprivation" was linked to negative developmental outcomes, attributing it largely to increased technology use and parental safety fears (Mainella et al., 2011, p. 91). Similar to the parental safety concerns identified by Mainella et al. (2011), CYCC settings may prioritize liability management over the potential developmental benefits of nature-based activities. Conversely, Tillmann et al. (2019), focused on rural young people's perceptions of nature. Tillmann et al's (2019) study differed in that safety concerns and supervision were not a highlighted concern. Instead, it stated that rural young people had greater access to nature and rated it as a preferred activity over their urban counterparts who often cited nature as 'wild' and 'unclean' (Tillmann et al., 2019). Further research is needed to explore how rural young people's perceptions of nature might inform the adaptation and implementation of nature-based practices in urban CYCC contexts.

Nature and its direct correlation to positive mental health were highlighted in several studies. Tillmann et al. (2018) completed a systematic review of 35 pieces of literature relating to the connection between nature and children/adolescents aged nine months to 18 years old. The results showed a positive benefit to nature, most prominently in the areas of overall wellbeing, stress levels, resilience, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The papers reviewed by Tillmann et al., covered nature in a variety of contexts across the globe ranging from

greenspace time to wilderness experiences from across the globe; however, the research was primarily conducted in the United States. Bratman et al. (2012) also completed a review of nature-based studies supporting nature's positive impacts on wellbeing, highlighting three distinct approaches as to why this connection occurs. The approaches comprised of people's perceptions of nature impacting the effect it has on them, physiological responses to nature in Ulrich's stress reduction theory, and relief from attention in Kaplan and Kaplan's directed attention theory (Bratman et al., 2012).

Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that nature has a positive impact on some form of psychological and/or emotional wellbeing but emphasized that these reviews were a starting point and that further research pertaining to this needed to be completed. Accessibility and the context influenced the extent of engagement and outcomes. For CYCC practitioners, these findings also support the integration of these practices when working with young people and can be a supportive tool in promoting well-being, resiliency, and growth.

Cultural & Land-Based Teachings

This section examines recent studies related to land-based teachings with applications related to young people's well-being and cultural connections. Although land-based teachings have historically been difficult to study due to a lack of Western, peer-based research, recent studies have begun to address these challenges. Much of the land-based work in Canada occurs in rural settings, with researchers residing in urban areas, possibly influencing research design and accessibility.

Price et al. (2025) completed the most recent and extensive scoping review of outdoor and land-based programs for Indigenous young people in North America with a broad inclusion

criterion to ensure as many programs as possible were captured within this study that may have typically been overlooked academically. This review guided much of the research due to it covering both Canada and the United States, whose international borders separate many Indigenous groups, including the Blackfoot. A key theme across the programs reviewed was the central and guiding role of Elder knowledge in land-based program design and implementation (Price et al., 2025, p. 15).

Evaluations of land-based practices with urban Indigenous young people were also conducted in central Canada by Hatala et al., (2024). This study focused on determinants of health and wellness for Indigenous young people through access to land and nature. Unlike the Western studies in the sections prior, Hatala et al. (2024) focused on the broader impacts of land and nature for health outcomes for Indigenous youth, rather than perceptions of nature. Key pathways for the land serving as a determinant for health included the promotion of cultural belonging and identity, connection to community and family, and spiritual health and relationships (Hatala et al., 2024, p. 10).

Victor et al., (2019) completed a review of a program aiming to increase cultural connection for unhoused Blackfoot people in Lethbridge, Alberta. This program connected with adults, but many similar themes are echoed in supporting young people in similar circumstances navigating addiction, like those being supporting by the various programs at Hull Services. This focus on connection to values is associated with a greater connection to their sprit and increased resiliency (Victor et al., 2019, p. 54). Often culture is not prioritized when working with young people in crisis; this shows that although prioritizing culture comes with its challenges, it can support healing. This use of cultural teachings highlights recent and relevant applications in urban contexts. Many studies and programs take place in rural areas, emphasizing the importance

of integrating culturally responsive land-based programs for urban young people in CYCC settings.

Trainings for Indigenous Knowledge and Practices

Post-secondary CYCC programs at all levels recognize the disproportionately high Indigenous population within these settings. These programs often aim to expose students to Indigenous cultural practices throughout their education. In my experience, the knowledge transmission into practice is not explored or done so in a way that leaves practitioners feeling confident in their role as a non-Indigenous person. Frameworks like the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Children's Services *Indigenous Cultural Understanding Framework (*2023), highlights the need for Child Intervention Practitioners to acquire the skills and knowledge to provide cultural support. The document mentioned above introduces a framework and Government policy, but not how to acquire this knowledge and how to do so specifically for individual nations. The objectives focus on meeting training deadlines, but not on forming relationships with community. This is mirrored in what I have seen in many social service frameworks for Indigenous people. This is further supported by an expansive review of Indigenous cultural safety interventions completed by Hardy et al. (2023). This review revealed that substantial evidence was lacking for the effectiveness of cultural safety training programs, and actual impacts on Indigenous people's health and well-being from the current costly and Western-led evaluation processes (Hardy et al., 2023, p. 11). The recommendations were that reviews of existing trainings and creation of new training systems need to be Indigenous led in all aspects including program design, evaluation, and implementation (Hardy et al., 2023, p. 11). These two reviews cover a multitude of studies related to trainings for supporting and engaging

with Indigenous people, aligning with the need for Indigenous-led and culturally grounded initiatives to be fostered.

In Hull, training for Indigenous teachings and knowledge is completed internally by Niitsitapiwahsi. They facilitate the following trainings yearly: Introduction to Indigenous Teachings, Spirituality, Values and Beliefs, Traditional Roles, Current Events, Trauma Through an Indigenous Lens, Truth and Reconciliation, Residential Schools, and a monthly sweat lodge open to employees, young people, families, and community. Introduction to Indigenous Teachings is required for all agency employees, including support staff from all departments, within the first year of employment. Employees providing direct care and service are required to take one of the trainings listed above every two years as outlined in *Policy 624.00 Indigenous Teachings (2025)*. All other agency employees are encouraged but not required to take any other Indigenous Teachings trainings. Support staff include operations, housekeeping, and administration. While these roles are not direct client care and support, these individuals may still engage with young people and families within their role and represent the agency to external stakeholders. As such, limiting mandatory training to direct-care staff may inadvertently weaken broader organizational cultural competence.

When speaking about gaps in knowledge, it was highlighted at an agency level by both Susan and Casey that further knowledge of Indigenous teachings, specifically Blackfoot land-based teachings, would be supportive and that biennially was not sufficient to maintain and build upon knowledge. A focus on land-based teachings was highlighted again here due by Casey due to the strong cultural and spiritual ties Indigenous communities have to the land. When reviewing agency policy related to overall goals and directives, *Policy 100.40 Agency Goals and Directives* states under its Indigenous Relations section that the agency wants to “Increase

awareness and understanding of Hull's Indigenous practice approaches both internally within the Agency and externally in the community" (2025). The policy also speaks to wanting to increase the capacity of the resources in place to support Indigenous communities, as well as increase cultural connections for Indigenous people.

Summary

This section followed my path of researching nature and young people, then moving to land-based teachings and young people and lastly reviewing CYCC's trainings and implementation of Indigenous practices with young people. The journey and broad scope emphasize the positive benefits for all young people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and the ways in which it supports both young people and the agency's goals. The literature reviewed was intentionally selected, as it reflects the progression of inquiry that shaped this project. It also provided a contextual, broad overview that grounded the project in existing scholarship. A comprehensive review was beyond the scope of this project, but there is a growing body of research that affirms the benefits of nature and land-based learning in holistic care practices.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks & Methodology

This project emerged through relationship. What began as a research proposal examining urban and rural young people's access to nature-based practices evolved into a relationally grounded initiative focused on integrating land-based teachings within Hull Services. The shift in focus was shaped through ongoing conversations and guidance from Susan and Casey. This chapter first presents the Western and Indigenous frameworks informing the work, specifically the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) and a strength-based framework rooted in Indigenous culture and land. It then examines how these frameworks are integrated through a Two-Eyed Seeing approach that honours both knowledge systems as distinct yet complementary. Following this, the chapter outlines the project's narrative design, the relational process through which teachings were gathered, and the analytical approach used to interpret them. Finally, it addresses the ethical considerations, tensions, strengths, and limitations inherent in conducting this work within institutions such as Hull Services and within the broader colonial structures shaping the CYCC profession.

Theoretical Frameworks

The frameworks included below align with Hull Services' overarching framework from a Western lens of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) (2006), and an Indigenous lens of a strength-based framework grounded in culture and land. These two frameworks align with teachings from Susan and Casey around walking in both worlds, Western and Indigenous. The relational integration of these teachings creates a holistic understanding that weaves pre-existing systems like NMT with Indigenous knowledge, specifically Blackfoot land-based teachings. While NMT is an approach and clinical application, it often aligns with land-based

practices based on the regulatory impact land-based activities such as gardening and recreation can have. The sections below will give an overview of the frameworks.

Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT)

The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics is a therapeutic approach developed by Dr. Bruce Perry (2006) that provides a neurobiological understanding of trauma. It explains how experiences shape brain development and functioning (Perry, 2006). This model is not a specific clinical approach, but an overarching framework meant to guide caregivers working with young people that have experienced trauma (Perry, 2006). Hull Services uses this theoretical framework across the entire agency to complement the various other therapeutic practices being utilized. It is implemented as a tool for understanding how the experiences of the young people have impacted their functioning today and to create targeted interventions to support in reorganizing parts of their brain impacted from trauma. This framework views brain development in a hierarchal structure, with a focus on regulating the brain from a bottom-up process, beginning with the brainstem and moving to the cortex (Perry, 2006).

The application of this framework focuses highly on regulation at the brainstem, which at Hull is often supported through patterned-repetitive movements, and high levels of sensory integration. Brainstem regulation is essential for all people, but specifically supportive for young people who have experienced immense amounts of trauma and often have sensitized stress response systems. These regulation needs can be met through nature-based practices which may overlap with land-based teachings, although the cultural connection and teachings are often not explicitly stated. Niitsitapiwahsi's understanding is that this is based on lack of CYCC knowledge or even an apprehension to pass along learned teachings.

On the main campus, Hull Services has a large-scale market garden project, called Subnivean Farm. Young people from the on-site school can access this space and support with all aspects of gardening, from prepping the ground, watering the plants, and harvesting the garden. The processes of working in the garden engage a high level of repetitive, patterned, activities and sensory integration with the various objects. On a basic level, this regulates the brainstem and allows for higher level thinking to occur (Perry, 2006). In the garden, traditional medicines are also grown to supply the agency with sweetgrass and sage for cultural practices. This is one example of several instances where an NMT recommended intervention and a land-based practice overlap, and further learning and teaching could be provided.

Strength-Based Framework

This approach connects with relational accountability within CYCC practice, as the practitioners are in a position of privilege and power over the young people they support. Although work has been done to shift this, these imbalances persist to this day. This writing and subsequent research will be grounded in an approach that is founded on relational accountability between this body of writing and the young people it speaks of. To have any sense of integrity within this work, there will be accountability that takes into consideration the young people, their experiences, and communities from a strength-based lens (Reich et al., 2017, p. 10). Recognizing the value and strength these young people and their communities bring furthers the emphasis to see them beyond the ‘othered’ label that may come with having adversity and being supported in a CYCC context. The aim of this is for a narrative shift when referring to these young people and not focusing the research on their struggles, but to embrace the whole of their being in advocating for nature-based practices to be accessible and utilized more frequently. Often, their strengths are not considered when evaluating the use of nature, so this perspective is key to this

narrative shift. Berger (2010) explains that while nature-based practices may have many questions surrounding what theoretical stream they align with, they can be adapted to suit the strengths of an individual's physical and/or psychological needs (p. 75)**.**

Building on these general strength-based principles, it is important to consider frameworks that are specifically informed by Indigenous contexts. McKenzie et al's (2016) strength-based framework, which focused on Indigenous detriments of health, provides a deeper look at applying strength-based approaches with Indigenous communities. Strength-based approaches and modalities are typically taught within CYCC spheres, but in my experience, they are taught through a Western perspective. By integrating Indigenous perspectives, this framework emphasizes the centrality of cultural connection, storytelling, and land-based practices in fostering resilience and well-being including the understanding of land itself as a source of knowledge and teaching (Simpson, 2014). The literature, informed by Indigenous peoples in Canada and supplementary information from Australia and New Zealand, highlights how this framework is integral to Indigenous culture and nature-based practices (McKenzie et al., 2020). McKenzie et al., highlighted the adverse outcomes of substance use, a common concern amongst young people in CYCC contexts, being reduced through connection with Indigenous culture (McKenzie et al., 2016). This culture includes traditional practices such as storytelling and spending time on the land.

These principles of Indigenous-informed, strength-based practice are enacted through storytelling and engagement with Elders, which serve as both cultural practices and a lens for interpreting lived experiences. Indigenous teachings and stories are traditionally shared orally, from Elders and leaders of one generation to the next (Wilson, 2008). Engagement with Elders is essential for any knowledge dissemination of Indigenous teachings (Kennedy et al., 2022, p.

435). Taking stories and integrating them into institutions like Hull Services, acknowledges the colonial harm and impacts of these organizations, while centring Indigenous voices and giving credit for their contributions to systemic change (Kennedy et al., 2022). These contributions from Elders fall beyond the category of teachings or relationships. The stories are deeply woven relational interactions that explore cultural knowledge, generational wisdom, and a relational process that extends beyond the conversation and into the stories themselves (Wilson, 2008). Susan further emphasized that Indigenous storytelling holds layered meaning, describing stories as teachable moments that relate to the land and animals while also carrying moral guidance. Through these stories, individuals are invited to reflect on consequences and consider how the teachings apply within their daily lives. Sharing deeply meaningful stories provides a gateway to cultural connection and understanding Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, which are new learnings for many young people in care. Within this project storytelling serves as both a cultural practice and an analytical lens that provides insight.

Integration of Frameworks

A Two-Eyed Seeing approach is used to conceptualize the integration of the Western NMT and an Indigenous strengths-based framework rooted in culture and land. In this approach, Elder Albert Marshall describes bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to leave the world better for young people and future generations (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336). This approach is created by Mi'kmaw Elders but has been accepted by diverse communities of Indigenous people. While it is an approach to integrating the two forms of knowledge, specific Blackfoot teachings, gifted by Casey, remain the project's focus.

This guiding approach was chosen for its acknowledgement of diverse forms of knowledge and the overarching goal of these teachings holding equal merit alongside other

guiding approaches within the agency, like NMT. While Western approaches have traditionally been privileged in institutional settings like Hull, this framework will challenge these norms and integrate them holistically into practice. A strengths-based framework rooted in culture establishes that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing hold knowledge in scientific areas as well as spiritual. Utilizing these frameworks alongside one another can provide more tools for CYCCs to use to support the young people and families they work with. CYCCs can work within these frameworks to provide relationally and culturally comprehensive care, that is cognizant of the developmental and regulatory needs of young people and families served.

Methodology

Project Design

This project utilizes a qualitative, narrative approach in gathering Blackfoot land-based teachings from a Blackfoot Elder embedded in the context of an agency providing support to young people and families. This approach was grounded in a strength-based perspective of Indigenous storytelling and the gifting of land-based teachings. It is supported from a Western lens of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) to emphasize the importance of land-based teachings and spending time in nature from a Western perspective alongside an Indigenous Cultural one. This project collects stories of land-based teachings from Casey Eagle Speaker to create a written document outlining these oral teachings that frontline Child and Youth Care Counsellors, within Hull Services, can use in their practice when supporting young people and families. This is a starting point and a part of a foundation to be built for further knowledge mobilization within the agency. The project also outlines how to engage with Elders and these teachings in a good way and recommendations for further implementation within Hull Services to build capacity and knowledge of land-based teachings.

Teachings

The teachings collected for this project all came from the agency Elder, Casey. As this project was done at the request of Niitsitapiwahsi, Casey's teachings are the focus and are used to form this foundational set of land-based teachings. When formally meeting about the project, I brought tobacco as an offering for the teachings and knowledge being shared with me. Susan as Director of the department and a cultural facilitator, was present for these teachings as well. Her presence was one as a learner, alongside me. Susan's goal was to also hear the stories again as she too was growing on her journey of carrying teachings and traditional knowledge. I met with Casey and Susan several times to narrow the focus of this project and teachings and met once for 80 minutes to be gifted several teachings. While we did not specifically discuss teachings in the meetings prior, Wilson (2008) highlights the importance of these interactions bridging people relationally within an Indigenous research paradigm (p. 87). Alike the relationships we aim to strengthen with the land and our understanding of it within the agency, I had to continue to build my relationship with those gifting me these teachings. These teachings were then held by me and translated into a written format that was responsive to the needs of the Niitsitapiwahsi and the greater agency. The teachings are not written word for word, to protect the integrity of the oral tradition. Instead, they are reflected upon by Casey and me to relationally capture the themes from many stories and teachings where meanings overlap. This document was reviewed by Susan and Casey who were consulted throughout the process. They also reviewed my recommendations to ensure they were appropriate and aligned with the intent of bringing forth Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Carrying Teachings into Practice

This project was constructed relationally and informed by both Indigenous strength-based and NMT concepts of regulation and resilience. Themes and meanings were co-constructed with Casey and Susan as we listened and reflected upon the teachings shared. I leaned into some of my own tensions that exist as a settler being asked to hold and transfer these teachings and stories. A challenge was found when balancing making the stories simple enough to integrate into practice for CYCCs from all backgrounds, without diminishing the meaning behind them to make them more palatable. The balance was found by ensuring the document created was a foundation and starting place, and not the sole source of information regarding these teachings. This project intends to spark curiosity and start conversations, with recommendations of further implementation to increase understanding.

When I heard the stories and teachings that were shared with me, I explored themes related to both an Indigenous strength-based and NMT lens. These lenses highlighted regulation, cultural connection, and relationality within the stories. I initially noted when themes related to resilience, emotional regulation, and connection to the land were present, with a focus on how these factors can support the young people at Hull Services. However, as I reflected more deeply and met again with Casey, I recognized that I had initially leaned too heavily into a clinical Western interpretation of the teachings. I found myself highlighting regulation and sequencing in ways that aligned closely with NMT frameworks. Through returning to the stories relationally and engaging in further dialogue, the themes shifted. Rather than regulation being central, respect emerged as the core teaching present throughout the stories. This element of respect was the foundation upon which all the teachings rested, and as Casey shared, it is central to all that

Niitsitapiwahsi does. Branching off from respect was humility, forgiveness, and resilience, all grounded in relational accountability to the land, others, and oneself.

The stories that connected the most with these themes were selected for foundational teachings, with guidance from Casey throughout this process. His engagement and guidance allowed for the teachings to be interpreted in a culturally competent way, maintaining the integrity of the traditional Blackfoot knowledge being shared. The connection to NMT remained relevant, especially when paralleled with the role of nature in supporting emotional well-being and self-regulation. The connection to NMT shifted from serving as a primary lens for interpreting the stories to functioning as a bridge to implementation. My role was also reflected here as I grappled with not wanting to interpret or analyze these teachings but instead support in highlighting the meanings from them. My own shift required a level of intentional reflexivity to ensure I was not trying to shape these teachings into a Western therapeutic construct but instead allowing them to exist in their own form.

Analysis occurred during storytelling through a process of relational listening, dialogical reflection, and iterative meaning-making. A Western form of analysis was not completed, but a relational and Indigenous oriented one transpired instead. Rather than coding transcripts after the fact, I listened for places where meanings within the stories appeared. These transpired through recurring metaphors and emotional emphasis while teachings were shared. Initial interpretations were reflected to Casey in the moment to ensure alignment with the meaning of the teaching. Themes were then co-constructed rather than independently derived. Following meetings, I listened to the audio and reviewed my notes numerous times to identify patterns across stories. These themes were brought back to Casey and Susan for confirmation or clarification, ensuring

that interpretation maintained cultural integrity and did not impose Western therapeutic constructs onto Blackfoot knowledge.

When sharing teachings around specific elements of the land, I drew connections to some of the way CYCCs were already guiding young people, without the land-based connection and cultural context. One example is when speaking about resiliency. Often CYCCs speak to young people about their resilience through adversity. In these teachings provided by Casey, resiliency can be connected to the leaves of a tree and how they can be fragile but also withstand harsh weather and many do not fall off the tree. By adding in this Blackfoot connection and relationship with an aspect of the land, a bridge to connection with culture can be formed. The CYCC does not have to go into further detail but can walk alongside the young person with curiosity if they would like to understand more. Interactions like these are the ones Casey and Susan aim to have occur frequently throughout Hull Services.

Limitations

The biggest limitation within this project and the methodology was the timeline. While conversations to start this project started in June 2025, I did not take into consideration the personal and community obligations that may come up for Elders and leaders like Casey and Susan. As an Elder and respected leader in his family and community, Casey was called to support and guide on numerous occasions. This was a stark reminder of the amount of loss many Indigenous communities face, as well as reflections on future considerations for practitioners wanting to do this work in a good way. Sitting with these stories and co-constructing meaning from them takes time, and as many stories were shared and heard as possible within the given timeframe. This was not rushed or condensed to ensure that the project was still completed in a good way.

Limitations in terms of application would be that these stories are from one Indigenous cultural perspective, Blackfoot teachings and guidance. While this is the direction of the agency and Casey is the Agency Elder, young people from a variety of backgrounds and diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit groups may be supported at the agency. This limitation is mitigated by Casey and Susan's openness to supporting all young people, regardless of Indigenous identity and doing research on young people's specific backgrounds to bring forward knowledge from their community and culture.

Strengths

The strengths of these teachings are that they align with the agency in their overarching therapeutic approach of NMT and support the strategic goals of increasing Indigenous practices and knowledge within the agency. Grounded in Indigenous ways, this project has graciously been gifted to all CYCCs at Hull Services supporting young people and can be applied to all young people. This generality of application broadens the scope of who these teachings can support, and alongside NMT, strengthens practices within the agency aimed at supporting young people emotionally and spiritually.

Ethical Considerations

Early on, when exploring nature and especially nature in the context of supporting Indigenous people, I sought a framework that made space for articulating my ethics in doing this work. While this is not a research study, there are still aspects of community engagement, and I aimed to adhere to a model of ethics to support the process. To ensure that this project is conducted in the most ethical manner possible, the tensions addressed by Keikelame and Swartz (2019) in decolonized research will be utilized. While completing research in South Africa, Keikelame and Swartz identified the following components as focal points when researching

alongside marginalized populations, which include power, trust, culture, and cultural competence, respectful research practice, and recognition of individual and community assets (p. 3). These tensions are explored further below to highlight the ongoing process of evaluating one's work with and alongside Indigenous communities as a settler.

Power.

Due to the collaborative and relational nature of this project, the power and guidance of this project is by Susan and Casey. This was intentional with a goal of walking alongside and connecting with Keikelame and Swartz's concept of 'power with' as opposed to 'power over' (p. 3). This 'power with' is relational and a natural process that is strongly rooted in Indigenous research paradigms that emphasize relational processes that are collaborative in nature (Wilson, 2008). Grounding allows for relationality to be at the forefront and for the natural power structures of an Elder, being a leader, to guide the progression of the project and the knowledge within it.

Trust.

Trust was identified as essential when working with groups of people that have been colonized and as a non-Indigenous person (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019, p. 3). Similar to Wilson's (2008) Indigenous research paradigms, reciprocity and relationality create conditions for trust and respectful research. I established this through transparency in my writing, with open access to my progress for both Susan and Casey. I also made it a priority to build relationships before beginning this project in order to have a foundation prior to doing this work in an academic way.

Cultural Competence.

A tension that is understated in the early stages of this project is the utilization of nature on stolen land of Indigenous peoples, and this project being conducted by a settler on these lands. While recognition of this tension is an initial step, further exploration of what this means is necessary to ensure that these principles of decolonization spoken about by Keikelame and Swartz (2019) are integrated. The project was sparked by my passion for nature and work with young people but has drawn inspiration and sacred knowledge from teachings regarding the value of nature gifted by Blackfoot Elders. Tensions like these are significant in a colonized country like Canada. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Alberta has a disproportionate number of Indigenous young people in care. This demonstrates the continued cultural genocide occurring for Indigenous peoples. It shows the need to do more than attach the label of 'culturally competent' to those seeking a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing beings, and doing, but to recognize the traditional connections to the land that have been severed for these young people and the tension of a white settler conducting this research. The project maintains cultural competence by being conducted at the request of Indigenous people and not outside of that request.

Respectful and Legitimate Research Practice.

While this is a project, and not a research study, these principles still apply. Often, those being researched do not receive follow-up or see the results of their contributions to research put into practice. Shifting this practice to sharing the knowledge and process throughout the research is essential to respectful practice (Keikelame and Swartz, 2019). Execution occurred through the knowledge mobilization process that is directed by Niitsitapiwahsi. The project documents also

remain with Niitsitapiwahsi, as it is Casey and Susan's knowledge, and any future practice with it outside of my professional role would be consulted prior to use.

Strength-Based Practice.

This review and subsequent research will be grounded in an approach that is founded on relational accountability between this body of writing and the young people it speaks of. This accountability takes into consideration the young people, their experiences, and communities from a strength-based lens (Reich et al., 2017, p. 10). This lens was brought in as a theoretical framework to demonstrate the deep connection of culture, community, and the land to young peopled and families it supports.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the processes and theoretical frameworks that shaped the project. The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT**)** provides a structure that is consistently used across Hull Services for understanding trauma and its impact on development in CYCC practice. Alongside this, Indigenous strength-based approaches rooted in land and culture offer a relational understanding of healing grounded in reciprocity and connection to the land. These two frameworks, when viewed through the lens of the Two-Eyed Seeing approach, offer complementary rather than competing systems of understanding**.** Understanding trauma from both clinical and spiritual perspectives allows CYCC practitioners to engage in the work of walking in both worlds and offer holistic care.

The teachings shared by Casey shifted my expectations from an intervention model toward a context of collective responsibility. This responsibility is grounded in respect for ourselves, those around us, and the land. These teachings are filled with possibility in supporting us to move forward with deeper knowledge and accountability**,** but they also bring forward

tensions when viewed in the context of Western systems. These realities of both possibility and tension will be explored in the following chapter.

With the context provided in these chapters, the next will move into the teachings. These teachings will serve as a system of guidance as opposed to a prescribed approach. The recommendations based on the teachings will offer actionable ways to weave them deeper into the agency.

Chapter 4: Land-Based Teachings, From Relationship to Practice

The teachings described below are not a model I have created, but stories shared by Casey Eagle Speaker, a respected Blackfoot Elder and Agency Elder for Hull Services. I had the privilege of holding these teachings and reflecting them back in written form for Niitsitapiwahsi (Indigenous Engagement). They were shared relationally, through time, dialogue, and connection to the land. While written here in structured form, they are not fixed or complete. The teachings remain living and grounded in Elder guidance and relationship.

This document was developed in relationship with Niitsitapiwahsi as part of a master's-level project by me, Stephanie Williams. I am a non-Indigenous staff member who has been on my own journey of understanding what decolonizing my practice means in Child and Youth Care Counselling (CYCC). I have been with the agency since 2019 and continue to grow in my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. This project was developed through my relationship with Susan and Casey, and through my involvement as a member of the Cultural Helpers Committee and the Hull Indigenous Advisory Council (HIAC).

Susan Bare Shin Bone, Director of Niitsitapiwahsi, often speaks about walking in both the Indigenous world and the Western institutional world. Within Hull Services, many practitioners primarily operate within Western frameworks of child and youth care, while Indigenous staff members are often expected to navigate both. This document does not seek to merge these worlds or translate one into the other. Instead, it is guided by Two-Eyed Seeing, a concept first shared by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall and further described in academic literature (Bartlett et al., 2012). Two-Eyed Seeing encourages us to see with one eye the strengths of Indigenous knowledge systems and with the other the strengths of Western approaches.

In this work, this means centering the teachings Casey shared from the land and reflecting on how those teachings may walk alongside current CYCC practice at Hull Services. This framing invites practitioners to notice where cultural knowledge can walk alongside existing systems in meaningful ways, offering its own distinct insight and value. At the same time, it asks us to be mindful not to force connections or simplify the teachings in ways that would water them down or reshape them to fit Western frameworks. When sharing these teachings, practitioners must acknowledge Casey as the holder of this knowledge and the one who has shared it. This maintains relational accountability and honours the source of the teachings. It also ensures that the knowledge is not presented as generalized or universal, but as teachings that have been gifted within a specific relationship and cultural context.

This chapter moves from individual reflections of teachings to organizational responsibility. Each foundational teaching below is described through three lenses: how it was articulated by Casey, how it is demonstrated through the land, and how it may influence relational Child and Youth Care Counselling (CYCC) practice. In addition to the teachings, this document includes supporting materials in the appendices. These provide an arts-based representation of the teachings, guidance for requesting teachings and cultural support, and reflections on how the teachings may be supported within care planning, staff training, and organizational structures at Hull Services. Together, these sections are intended to support both individual practice and broader organizational alignment in ways that are meaningful, sustainable, and non-performative.

Teachings

The four teachings described below and connected to CYCC practice emerged from relational engagement with Casey, Susan, and myself. In the section titles of each teaching is a

quote that stood out to me and encapsulated the teachings in Casey's direct words. Often, he stated these words several times throughout the sharing of the teachings, and when I reflected them back, they were affirmed as holding significant meaning within the stories. When staff are sharing any of these teachings with young people, it is important to note that these are Blackfoot teachings shared by Casey. This recgonizes him as the knowledge keeper and ensures we are following appropriate protocol.

The reflections shared throughout these teachings are grounded in ongoing dialogue with Casey. As understandings emerged, they were brought back into conversation. They were clarified to ensure they remained aligned with the teachings as they were shared**.** In this way, the teachings and reflections were developed relationally rather than interpreted independently. These teachings were shared through extended, back-and-forth conversation rather than in a linear or structured format. Because of this, they are not presented as direct transcripts. Instead, they reflect a piecing together of what was shared over time, with meaning clarified through continued dialogue. This approach also reflects Casey's guidance that documenting teachings word for word can push against their oral and relational nature. As a result, these teachings are not intended to be fixed or exhaustive representations, but rather a starting place. They are meant to support staff in developing an initial understanding before engaging more deeply through training, relationship, and direct connection with Casey. Appendix A provides the teachings alongside an arts-based interpretation created for staff.

Many of these teachings were initially understood as ways we could speak about the land with young people. Over time, I began to recognize that they also shape how CYCCs may understand their own roles, responsibilities, and relationships with young people. When I shifted in my thinking, it was another reminder of the vast teachings we can be gifted from the land and

how those teachings extend beyond a single intended audience. These teachings are gifted to staff at Hull Services to be used in their practice with young people and families. To ensure authenticity and gratitude to Casey for sharing this knowledge, please respect protocol and consult Casey for any application of the teachings outside of Hull Services.

Respect: "For Nature and Our Own Being"

Learning from the Land.

Casey often spoke about respect as a foundation within all his land-based teachings. Respect was interwoven into all his stories and at the foundation of any engagement with the land. He first spoke about respect in relation to the land. In nature, respect manifests itself as reciprocity between all living beings. This was established as the foundation of all other learning from the land because our first step is viewing the land as an equal entity. The land, like people close to us in our lives, can be used as a support, but this should not be a one-sided relationship. Within this interaction, Casey emphasized the need for giving back to the land and thanking it for all that it provides.

Respect was further illustrated through the teaching of the river, a life-giving force. It gives life to all and is guided by the unique banks that surround it. Ultimately, all water leads to one great body of water. This teaching reminds us that there is no prejudice or discrimination between bodies of water. Some rivers may be muddier than others, but they all arrive at the same place. Once joined, it is impossible to tell where the water came from. Rivers also contain rapids and waterfalls. The rapids reflect the hard moments in life, and waterfalls may represent the lowest points in a journey. Calm stretches offer space for self-reflection where energy can be gathered before continuing forward. Every bend in the river becomes a new direction and a new part of one's journey. Casey spoke about how we often only see a small stretch of someone's

river. We may meet someone in the rapids or just after a waterfall, without knowing the calm waters or long journey that came before.

Relational Meaning.

Respect extends beyond the land and into how we view those we encounter. Respect invites us to apply this understanding to ourselves, others, and the land. We are reminded that we never fully know what a person's journey has looked like before arriving at Hull Services. The waters may have been muddy and filled with rapids, yet we may never see those parts of the river. This teaching calls us to hold respect for the unseen journeys of our colleagues and the young people who we support. It asks us to move away from assumption and toward curiosity. Respect becomes not only a value but a stance, and one that shapes how we enter relationships and how we respond when things feel turbulent.

Connections to Practice.

Within CYCC practice, this may look like pausing before responding to behaviour and asking oneself what part of the river a young person may be navigating. This can also be applied to colleagues who may be navigating their own rivers. Respect may also be demonstrated by slowing down when on the land, expressing gratitude aloud, or inviting young people to notice what the environment is offering. These actions are small, yet they shift the tone of interactions. If a young person is feeling overwhelmed, dysregulated, or experiences personal barriers or triggers related to culture, they may not be ready to engage in this way. In these moments, practitioners can model respect themselves**,** emphasizing through their actions why these practices matter.

Casey also emphasized that respect for the land includes protocol. One Blackfoot teaching shared was the offering of tobacco in gratitude for what the land has provided. He

emphasized this when engaging in practices such as collecting sage or taking medicines from the land. Respect may also be expressed by thanking the land out loud and, when appropriate, offering a prayer. Speaking gratitude audibly acknowledges the land as a living relative rather than a silent resource. Including this teaching reminds practitioners that respect is not symbolic alone but demonstrated through intentional and culturally grounded practices.

Resilience: "Standing Without Shame"

Learning from the Land.

The land demonstrates resilience daily. Resilience was shared through the teachings of the tree. Trees of all shapes and sizes withstand changing seasons and are impacted by the environments around them. This may leave them scarred, missing pieces of bark, and changed. Strong winds may even blow some of the leaves away, while others remain. The leaves that remain show their strength, but the leaves that fall are not considered weaker. Casey shared, *"*there are no dead trees, only fallen ones." A fallen tree continues to grow, supporting new life and sustaining entire ecosystems.

The mountains were also shared as a teaching of resilience. The Rocky Mountains are the backbone of Mother Earth in Blackfoot culture and a source of strength. Mountains can be weathered, shaped by wind, snow, and erosion, yet remain standing. Their surfaces carry evidence of every storm they have endured. They do not attempt to smooth their edges or conceal their markings. They carry on and remain standing. Mountains show us that with all the weather, they are still powerful and a source of strength for those around them.

Relational Meaning.

Resilience was spoken about in relation to shame. A tree with missing bark does not hide its scars or apologize for them. It simply continues. While it may not remain standing, it still is

full of life and giving life in whatever form it is in. Strength, as Casey describes it, “is not about large muscles and a physical presence. It is resilience in heart and spirit.” He speaks to this spirit as what guides a person through difficult times. Like the mountains, resilience is not about remaining untouched; it is about remaining present in oneself and the strength that comes from within. Weathering does not diminish worth and the marks of survival are not something to conceal. Falling does not signify failure. It signifies movement within a larger cycle, and life continues past falling.

Within systems of care, moments of relapse, rupture, or regression can unintentionally become defining. When a young person falls, there is risk not only of shame, but of relational loss. Engaging with this teaching can invite us to consider if we treat falling as final or if we remain steady in our support when young people and families try again. Like a fallen tree, this is not the end of their journey and new life can continue from where they may currently be. For many young people and families supported by Hull Services, they are actively navigating a lot of challenges. Choosing to try again means risking falling again and carrying shame that may follow. Remaining in relationship can support resilience through wherever their journey may take them.

Connections to Practice.

Many young people supported within Hull Services may see themselves as broken or defined by adversity. When appropriate, practitioners may gently introduce the teaching of the tree or mountain to reframe scars as evidence of survival rather than failure. Resilience can also be modeled by practitioners who remain steady during challenging moments, adapt when plans shift, and acknowledge their own growth. Like mountains that hold steady through seasons, practitioners can become consistent points of safety. Stability does not mean rigidity but

demonstrating consistence presence. The sharing of these teachings is not meant to correct behaviour, but to offer a different narrative; one where youth are not defined by what led them into care but are supported in authoring what comes next.

Humility: "We Don't Know It All and Never Will"

Learning from the Land.

Humility was also shared through the teachings of the tree, most focused upon its roots. "The height of a tree mirrors the depth of its roots," Casey shared. It is emphasized that knowing your ancestors and who came before you will help to shape who you are. This demonstrates to us that as much as we see in front of us, there is equally as much beneath the surface that helped create the tree before us. What we see above ground is sustained by what exists beneath. Through their roots, trees share resources and support one another beneath the surface. Above ground, they provide shade and protection without demanding recognition, reflecting humility in how they give.

Humility was also reflected in the stars in the night sky. Each star shines uniquely, holding its own place within the vastness. Yet the stars do not boast about their brightness, they simply shine, existing in relationship and forming constellations without competition. Humility is not shrinking oneself. It is understanding one's place within relationship to other beings, including the land.

Relational Meaning.

Many young people in care have experienced disrupted relationships. Often, we see young people being removed from their families and communities and being guided away from those whom professionals deem unsafe. For some, most of their relationships have been professional ones. While these professional relationships can be meaningful, these relationships

are often structured and imbalanced. Humility invites practitioners to recognize these imbalances. Access to documentation, clinical language, and institutional authority can create an illusion of knowing. Yet reading a file does not equate to understanding a lived experience.

Like the stars, young people carry their own light, even when it is not immediately visible. They do not need to perform their worth. Our role is not to overshadow that light, but to create conditions where it can shine safely.

Connections to Practice.

Humility in practice may involve inviting young people into conversations about goals, and not assuming we as practitioners know what is best for them. It can be acknowledging when something did not land well, and demonstrating our own mistakes when they come up. The practice of humility can be consulting cultural supports when needed and not framing ourselves as the experts. Humility, and the teachings of the tree, can guide young people in discovering their own roots. Understanding themselves on a deeper level may help them understand their family and community history, and how it may have impacted who they are today. When practitioners approach the land with humility they put these teachings into practice. This can look like offering tobacco and thanking the land. For young people who have primarily experienced professionalized relationships, witnessing humility from adults in positions of authority can be a corrective relational experience. This teaching invites practitioners to consider how they position themselves in moments of decision-making particularly when power, authority, and advocacy are at play. It adds reflection to how we advocate for those we support and if we are speaking for young people or walking alongside them.

Forgiveness: "A Place of Learning, Not Re-Living"

Learning from the Land.

Forgiveness was shared through the teachings of the grass. Grass may be stepped on or flattened, yet it does not hold onto that feeling. It forgives and rises again. It grows through cracks in sidewalks and pushes through compacted soil, showing its strength. Casey shared that "us as human beings may be able to pick up a blade of grass and snap it off, but we cannot do that with the cement. That shows the power of forgiveness." He further explained the uniqueness of each blade of grass alongside its ability to forgive. No two blades are identical, and each holds their own strength.

The river also teaches forgiveness. You can only step into a river once. With each step, you are standing somewhere new and engaging with a new part of the river. The water that touched you before has already moved on and is not holding onto what has happened.

Relational Meaning.

Forgiveness was spoken about as a place of learning, not re-living. Many young people internalize labels or moments and begin to see them as fixed truths. Forgiveness does not excuse harm. It releases a young person from defining themselves solely by past moments. Through this, we can support young people in recognizing that every step is a new one, even when it feels as though they have been there before. Each step in the river moves through new waters.

Within systems, documentation and professional supports may unintentionally hold onto moments long after young people are trying to move beyond them. This teaching invites practitioners to consider how long we let moments of crisis define the identity of those we support.

In this way, forgiveness is not about forgetting what has happened, but about how we continue to hold a young person in relationship after those moments. When we hold young people in relationship while maintaining accountability, we create space for forgiveness to occur. Through this, young people may begin to shift how they see themselves and move toward forgiving themselves, rather than continuing to carry shame.

Connections to Practice.

Practitioners can support forgiveness by separating behaviour from self and framing documentation around growth rather than permanence. This may look like naming the behaviour without attaching it to identity. This keeps the focus on the behaviour as something that happened, rather than something the young person is. Based on documentation requirements, it can be easy to focus on moments of crisis or risk. This teaching invites practitioners to also look for opportunities to engage in strength-based practices, such as relaying successes to natural and professional supports. CYCCs can also consider how engaging with culture may support a young person's journey of forgiveness, including opportunities to connect with or reconnect to culture after a period away.

Creating opportunities for young people to step into new roles or responsibilities can become a tangible expression of forward movement. Forgiveness becomes an action, not just a concept. Forgiveness is not something we grant, but something we make space for. We can do this by honouring agency and recognizing that growth is rarely linear. Like the river, movement continues, and we are invited to walk alongside rather than hold young people in the waters they are trying to leave.

Engaging with the Teachings

Early in the development of this project, Casey and Susan identified that a visual component could support engagement with the teachings in another way. While the teachings are shared through story and reflection, the inclusion of art offers an additional way for staff to connect with and understand them.

Through consultation with Casey and Susan, Art Therapist Nicole Chalifour was invited to contribute to this aspect of the project. She was selected based on her existing relationship with Niitsitapiwahsi and prior collaboration on arts-based work within the agency. Nicole is a non-Indigenous practitioner who has experience working within Hull Services and engages in art-based practice with young people in the Safe Directions programs. She is also actively exploring how to approach her work in a decolonizing way and how to engage with the land within her practice. Rather than being given specific direction, Nicole was invited by Casey to sit with the teachings and create a representation based on her own understanding. This process was intentional. Casey emphasized that meaning is strengthened when individuals engage with the teachings in their own way, rather than following prescribed interpretations.

The resulting artwork is not intended to define the teachings, but to offer one way they may be understood and expressed. It serves as a visual component that allows staff to engage with the teachings beyond written form. This approach reflects the broader intention of this work. The teachings are not fixed, and engagement with them is not prescriptive. They are meant to be explored through reflection, relationship, time on the land, and practice.

Figure 1: Painting of teachings done by Nicole Chalifour, Safe Directions Art Therapist

The artwork above reflects one interpretation of the teachings and invites ongoing engagement in different ways. As these teachings move from understanding into practice, attention must also be given to how they are supported within the broader structures of the agency. The following section offers considerations for how this work may be carried forward within Hull Services.

Recommendations for Implementation

The previous sections described relational shifts in CYCC practice when engaging with land-based teachings. Sustaining these shifts requires organizational alignment. This section moves from individual practice to agency-level structures that can support the teachings within Hull Services.

I initially used the phrase “integrated within the agency.” Upon reflection, I approach “integration” with caution. It can imply that Indigenous teachings must be reshaped to fit Western systems. That is not the intention. The goal is not adaptation but creating space for

teachings to exist alongside frameworks without dilution. A Two-Eyed Seeing approach can support this by guiding practitioners to recognize where Indigenous and Western ways of knowing can walk alongside one another, each offering distinct value, without forcing alignment or reducing one to fit the other.

The following recommendations were developed in relationship with Niitsitapiwahsi and are offered as guidance rather than directive. The recommendations will require further consultation for meaningful application. They build on practices already underway, including land-based initiatives, Elder presence in programs, and ceremonial gatherings. As living teachings, continued Elder guidance and community voice remain essential.

Care Planning & Cultural Connection

A Two-Eyed Seeing approach can serve as an additional lens when developing young people's support plans. Practitioners can identify where respect, humility, resilience, and forgiveness already exist within support plans and practice. Rather than adding new interventions, staff can name and strengthen what is present. Cultural connections can be made explicit within current goals or used as entry points for deeper engagement.

Many young people experience disrupted cultural ties as a result of being in care. Cultural supports may be offered but not actively accessed. When cultural connection is embedded into daily practice rather than offered passively, it becomes woven into program structure. This may include regularly scheduled cultural activities, community-based engagement in ceremony and cultural events, and the presence of Indigenous artwork reflected in the environment.

Cultural considerations are already documented in assessments and planning. The next step is action. This may include structured land-based opportunities, connection to ceremony

when appropriate, integrating teachings into reflective conversations, or consulting Niitsitapiwahsi when questions arise. The aim is not increased paperwork, but meaningful enactment. Cultural supports may also be invited into intake, case planning, and program transitions in collaboration with young people and families. In some cases, referring Nations have requested Niitsitapiwahsi's presence at intake. Early involvement signals that cultural connection is foundational to care and these connections strengthens shared understanding from the outset.

To support this work, internal training can build staff confidence in sharing teachings appropriately. CYCCs regularly speak to frameworks such as NMT without being clinical experts. Similarly, practitioners do not need to be cultural experts to share foundational teachings respectfully and within scope. Staff can also consult the Cultural Helpers Committee as an initial step. Cultural Helpers can provide guidance and help determine when direct engagement with Niitsitapiwahsi is appropriate. This strengthens internal capacity while maintaining relational pathways for seeking knowledge.

Staff Training & Competency

Hull Services has an internal department, Learning and Employee Development, responsible for organizing training and supporting staff development. This department is responsible for organizing internal agency trainings and ensuring staff members are provided with knowledge that will support the work they do with young people and families. Many of the trainings are outside curriculum, being taught by internal agency trainers like First Aid, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, SafeTALK, Natural Supports Framework, and NMT. This department also supports with organizing Indigenous Teachings trainings with Niitsitapiwahsi. These trainings, outside of those led by

Niitsitapiwahsi, cover topics such as crisis management, reflective practice, diversity, and family-based supports.

Often trainers will try and draw connections to aspects where trainings overlap, highlighting shared skills between the models. A Two-Eyed Seeing approach can also help ease uncertainty among staff when it comes to sharing Indigenous teachings in practice. Similar to frameworks such as NMT, engaging with these teachings requires ongoing practice, curiosity, and a willingness to continue learning. Practitioners are not expected to be experts, but to approach the teachings with care, respect, and openness. These teachings are shared with intention and are meant to be used in relational practice, not to remain solely within training spaces. Through reflection, consultation when needed, and continued engagement, staff can begin to incorporate these teachings into their interactions with young people in ways that are appropriate and meaningful.

For example, concepts of regulation and support can be expanded to include the land as a regulatory and relational support. Time on the land may be understood not only as a stand alone activity, but as a meaningful space for connection, reflection, and grounding. While this is a simplified example, it demonstrates how Two-Eyed Seeing can deepen understanding and support more holistic approaches to care. The intention is not to dilute the teachings or alter training content, but to enrich learning by bringing in additional perspectives.

Another concern, highlighted in the introductory chapter, was the frequency in which Indigenous Teachings training is required, and which agency employees are required to take it. To continue to build upon one's knowledge, maintaining training on a yearly level for all employees could aid in this process. This consistent and regular training keeps knowledge fresh in minds and gives more opportunity to build upon it, versus reteaching the same content every

time. The emphasis of all employees is also important. Support staff such as administration, maintenance, and housekeeping interact with the young people in their roles as well, and at times may provide teaching or support informally. Having Indigenous knowledge available for all staff members helps build awareness and capacity on an organizational level.

Organizational Culture

Overall, Hull Services has gradually shifted toward a greater understanding and incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. These shifts are ongoing and reflect both relational work within the agency and structural considerations at the leadership level.

Casey has also shared his goals and vision for the campus' physical space. These conversations are currently being addressed by senior leadership and remain in the planning phase. Hull Services' main campus contains significant open green space, and there is potential to reimagine these areas in ways that move beyond colonized landscaping toward spaces that include native plants and culturally meaningful land-based elements. The intention is that young people could experience authentic time on the land in ways that reflect Indigenous teachings, rather than solely engaging with manicured or decorative green spaces. This also eliminates barriers of needing to leave campus to gain this rich experience.

Other visible indicators of the agency's stance may also be considered. These could include incorporating a Treaty 7 flag as an acknowledgment of being situated on Treaty land, installing signage that names and honours the physical space, and displaying a written land acknowledgment in prominent areas. Several of the agency's programs have been gifted Blackfoot names by Casey, and that too has broadened the understanding of Indigenous culture.

While symbolic gestures alone are insufficient, when paired with relational and structural commitments, they can contribute to a broader culture of accountability and recognition.

Organizational shifts may include prioritizing openness to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within onboarding processes and ongoing professional development. Recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff members represents another important area of growth for Hull. While the agency does not currently track the number of Indigenous staff members, it is in the early stages of developing processes to begin doing so. Strengthening this capacity may support more intentional recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff, which is particularly important given that many programs at Hull serve a high proportion of Indigenous young people and families. Increasing Indigenous representation within staffing can support culturally responsive practice, strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities, and help ensure that programs reflect the needs, perspectives, and strengths of the young people and families who they serve. As such, there is an opportunity to more explicitly recognize the agency as serving Indigenous communities and to align language, practice, and staffing accordingly.

Requesting Teachings & Building Cultural Capacity

As part of this process, a document was created outlining pathways for requesting teachings and cultural support within the agency. Currently, staff often approach Susan and Casey directly to ask about process and protocol. With ongoing staff turnover, this results in repeated questions about how to engage appropriately.

The document aims to provide clarity while building internal capacity. It encourages staff to first reflect on what knowledge is being sought and why, consult Cultural Helpers when appropriate, and prepare for engagement in a thoughtful and relational manner. Direct connection

with Niitsitapiwahsi remains important, but clearer pathways help ensure requests are grounded and aligned with agency structures.

This document was reviewed and collaboratively refined with Susan and Casey to ensure it reflects appropriate protocol and intent. Its purpose is not to restrict access to teachings, but to strengthen respectful engagement and reduce reliance on informal, repetitive processes. Over time, this structure supports sustainability and shared responsibility within the agency. The framework is organized into steps, including reflecting on a request, accessing internal knowledge and Cultural Helpers, submitting a request, preparing for engagement, engaging in person, and reflecting after the teaching. The process begins and ends with reflection, encouraging practitioners to move away from transactional requests and toward a more relational approach that prioritizes receptivity and capacity building. The full framework, developed in collaboration with Susan and Casey, is provided in Appendix B.

Institutional Tensions

Tensions exist throughout this work. They surfaced in my own practice as I shifted from a desire to interpret and formalize teachings toward co-creation and relational accountability. As a non-Indigenous practitioner, I grappled with how to hold and reflect these teachings in a way that honours their origin while working within Western institutional structures.

At an organizational level, friction remains. Hull Services operates within Western child welfare, funding, documentation, and risk-management systems. These structures shape how young people are supported, how staff are trained, and how authority functions. Land-based teachings ask for relational pacing, reciprocity, and accountability that do not always align with outcome-driven or time-bound frameworks. This tension cannot be eliminated, but it can be engaged intentionally.

Personal tensions may also arise. Staff come from diverse cultural, spiritual, and personal backgrounds. Some may feel uncertainty about ceremony, language, or engaging with practices outside their worldview. Others may fear overstepping or making mistakes. Discomfort does not signal incompatibility with the work; it signals learning. The role of a CYCC includes working respectfully within cultural and relational contexts that may not mirror one's own. This is not optional but is foundational to ethical practice. Practitioners are not asked to abandon their identities, but to approach the work with humility and accountability.

Leadership responsibility exists within this tension as well. To meaningfully support frontline staff, leaders must also develop a grounded understanding of the teachings and their implications for practice. Capacity cannot rest solely with Niitsitapiwahsi or Cultural Helpers. Ongoing learning at supervisory and leadership levels is necessary so that guidance and decision-making reflect relational commitments alongside Western accountability structures.

The aim is not to prescribe a uniform model of care. Doing so would contradict the integrity of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Instead, the agency must create conditions where these teachings are supported through leadership, training, and everyday program culture. Walking within multiple systems is complex work. Naming that complexity is part of doing it in a good way.

Summary

This chapter held land-based teachings and shared how to align them within practice at Hull Services. The teachings of respect, resilience, humility, and forgiveness were presented as living knowledge grounded in Blackfoot worldviews and Elder guidance, not as a model to be replicated but as principles to deepen relational CYCC practice. Each teaching was explored

through its grounding in the land, its relational meaning, and its implications for engagement with young people and colleagues.

The chapter then moved from individual reflection to organizational responsibility. Recommendations were offered to support the teachings across care planning, staff training, leadership development, and agency culture. Emphasis was placed on Two-Eyed Seeing, capacity building, and creating space for teachings to exist alongside Western frameworks without dilution. Pathways for respectfully requesting teachings were outlined to strengthen sustainability and shared responsibility.

Finally, institutional and personal tensions were acknowledged as inherent to this work. Rather than positioning tension as a barrier, the chapter framed it as part of walking within multiple systems with accountability, humility, and relational integrity. Together, the teachings and recommendations provide a foundation for continued growth within Hull Services while remaining guided by Elder knowledge and community voice.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This project began with exploring access to nature in CYCC contexts and has evolved to a deep exploration of how land-based teachings can support young people and families in CYCC settings. Through relationship, Susan and Casey guided me along a journey of reflection on practice within Hull Services. The focus slowly shifted in this journey from intervention strategies, to understanding internal strengths through culture and connection to the land. The teachings of respect, humility, forgiveness, and resilience already exist within CYCC praxis, but connecting them to the land and culture can support in deeper understanding and providing holistic care. Within Hull Services, the intention behind these teachings was to deepen therapeutic processes, not replace them. Conceptualized through the Two-Eyed Seeing lens, strength centered, land-based teachings are presented in a complimentary way alongside Western approaches like the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT).

For others looking to engage in similar processes outside of Hull Services, these teachings are not intended to be used as a template. The teachings in this project are nation specific and gifted for sharing within Hull Services. The processes that occurred during this project such as starting with relationship, connecting with local Indigenous communities, responding reflexively, and being open to tension can be adopted. Something to be conscious of is who is initiating the process. This project was created at the request of agency Elders and leaders, with my role supporting in co-constructing some elements. It also arose through relationship. Those wishing to create similar programs or learning within their organizations should start with relationship. Creating space for relationships with local Indigenous communities will open doors for learning to occur and internal needs to be addressed. This may not occur if voices are not heard and intentional spaces are not created.

Addressing the tensions that may come up in this process is essential. One must be mindful of the Western structures many organizations are built on that consist of outcomes, efficiency, liability, and policy. These land-based teachings challenge these structures because they are relationally constructed and fluid in nature. Ultimately, this project invites reflection on how practitioners and organizations position themselves in young people's healing journeys. Land-based teachings are not strategies to implement, but relational responsibilities to uphold. They ask practitioners to examine how they show up, how they hold power, and how they walk alongside young people and families with dignity and accountability.

The work does not end with this document. The teachings remain guided by Elder knowledge and community voice. The responsibility moving forward is not to perfect the alignment of systems, but to continue learning, listening, and creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing to exist without compromise.

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Appendix A

The teachings described below are not a model I have created, but stories shared by Casey Eagle Speaker, a respected Blackfoot Elder and Agency Elder for Hull Services. I had the privilege of holding these teachings and reflecting them back in written form for Niitsitapiwahsi (Indigenous Engagement). They were shared relationally, through time, dialogue, and connection to the land. While written here in structured form, they are not fixed or complete. The teachings remain living and grounded in Elder guidance and relationship.

This document was developed in relationship with Niitsitapiwahsi as part of a master's-level project by me, Stephanie Williams. I am a non-Indigenous staff member who has been on my own journey of understanding what decolonizing my practice means in Child and Youth Care Counselling (CYCC). I have been with the agency since 2019 and continue to grow in my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. This project was developed through my relationship with Susan and Casey, and through my involvement as a member of the Cultural Helpers Committee and the Hull Indigenous Advisory Council (HIAC).

Susan Bare Shin Bone, Director of Niitsitapiwahsi, often speaks about walking in both the Indigenous world and the Western institutional world. Within Hull Services, many practitioners primarily operate within Western frameworks of child and youth care, while Indigenous staff members are often expected to navigate both. This document does not seek to merge these worlds or translate one into the other. Instead, it is guided by Two-Eyed Seeing, a concept first shared by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall and further described in academic literature (Bartlett et al., 2012). Two-Eyed Seeing encourages us to see with one eye the strengths of Indigenous knowledge systems and with the other the strengths of Western approaches.

In this work, this means centering the teachings Casey shared from the land and reflecting on how those teachings may walk alongside current CYCC practice at Hull Services. This framing invites practitioners to notice where cultural knowledge can walk alongside existing systems in meaningful ways, offering its own distinct insight and value. At the same time, it asks us to be mindful not to force connections or simplify the teachings in ways that would water them down or reshape them to fit Western frameworks. When sharing these teachings, practitioners must acknowledge Casey as the holder of this knowledge and the one who has shared it. This maintains relational accountability and honours the source of the teachings. It also ensures that the knowledge is not presented as generalized or universal, but as teachings that have been gifted within a specific relationship and cultural context.

Teachings

The four teachings described below and connected to CYCC practice emerged from relational engagement with Casey, Susan, and myself. In the section titles of each teaching is a quote that stood out to me and encapsulated the teachings in Casey's direct words. Often, he stated these words several times throughout the sharing of the teachings, and when I reflected them back, they were affirmed as holding significant meaning within the stories. When staff are sharing any of these teachings with young people, it is important to note that these are Blackfoot teachings shared by Casey. This recognizes him as the knowledge keeper and ensures we are following appropriate protocol.

The reflections shared throughout these teachings are grounded in ongoing dialogue with Casey. As understandings emerged, they were brought back into conversation. They were clarified to ensure they remained aligned with the teachings as they were shared**.** In this way, the teachings and reflections were developed relationally rather than interpreted independently.

These teachings were shared through extended, back-and-forth conversation rather than in a linear or structured format. Because of this, they are not presented as direct transcripts. Instead, they reflect a piecing together of what was shared over time, with meaning clarified through continued dialogue. This approach also reflects Casey's guidance that documenting teachings word for word can push against their oral and relational nature. As a result, these teachings are not intended to be fixed or exhaustive representations, but rather a starting place. They are meant to support staff in developing an initial understanding before engaging more deeply through training, relationship, and direct connection with Casey.

Many of these teachings were initially understood as ways we could speak about the land with young people. Over time, I began to recognize that they also shape how CYCCs may understand their own roles, responsibilities, and relationships with young people. When I shifted in my thinking, it was another reminder of the vast teachings we can be gifted from the land and how those teachings extend beyond a single intended audience. These teachings are gifted to staff at Hull Services to be used in their practice with young people and families. To ensure authenticity and gratitude to Casey for sharing this knowledge, please respect protocol and consult Casey for any application of the teachings outside of Hull Services.

Respect: "For Nature and Our Own Being"

Learning from the Land.

Casey often spoke about respect as a foundation within all his land-based teachings. Respect was interwoven into all his stories and at the foundation of any engagement with the land. He first spoke about respect in relation to the land. In nature, respect manifests itself as reciprocity between all living beings. This was established as the foundation of all other learning from the land because our first step is viewing the land as an equal entity. The land, like people

close to us in our lives, can be used as a support, but this should not be a one-sided relationship. Within this interaction, Casey emphasized the need for giving back to the land and thanking it for all that it provides.

Respect was further illustrated through the teaching of the river, a life-giving force. It gives life to all and is guided by the unique banks that surround it. Ultimately, all water leads to one great body of water. This teaching reminds us that there is no prejudice or discrimination between bodies of water. Some rivers may be muddier than others, but they all arrive at the same place. Once joined, it is impossible to tell where the water came from. Rivers also contain rapids and waterfalls. The rapids reflect the hard moments in life, and waterfalls may represent the lowest points in a journey. Calm stretches offer space for self-reflection where energy can be gathered before continuing forward. Every bend in the river becomes a new direction and a new part of one's journey. Casey spoke about how we often only see a small stretch of someone's river. We may meet someone in the rapids or just after a waterfall, without knowing the calm waters or long journey that came before.

Relational Meaning.

Respect extends beyond the land and into how we view those we encounter. Respect invites us to apply this understanding to ourselves, others, and the land. We are reminded that we never fully know what a person's journey has looked like before arriving at Hull Services. The waters may have been muddy and filled with rapids, yet we may never see those parts of the river. This teaching calls us to hold respect for the unseen journeys of our colleagues and the young people who we support. It asks us to move away from assumption and toward curiosity. Respect becomes not only a value but a stance, and one that shapes how we enter relationships and how we respond when things feel turbulent.

Connections to Practice.

Within CYCC practice, this may look like pausing before responding to behaviour and asking oneself what part of the river a young person may be navigating. This can also be applied to colleagues who may be navigating their own rivers. Respect may also be demonstrated by slowing down when on the land, expressing gratitude aloud, or inviting young people to notice what the environment is offering. These actions are small, yet they shift the tone of interactions. If a young person is feeling overwhelmed, dysregulated, or experiences personal barriers or triggers related to culture, they may not be ready to engage in this way. In these moments, practitioners can model respect themselves**,** emphasizing through their actions why these practices matter.

Casey also emphasized that respect for the land includes protocol. One Blackfoot teaching shared was the offering of tobacco in gratitude for what the land has provided. He emphasized this when engaging in practices such as collecting sage or taking medicines from the land. Respect may also be expressed by thanking the land out loud and, when appropriate, offering a prayer. Speaking gratitude audibly acknowledges the land as a living relative rather than a silent resource. Including this teaching reminds practitioners that respect is not symbolic alone but demonstrated through intentional and culturally grounded practices.

Resilience: "Standing Without Shame"

Learning from the Land.

The land demonstrates resilience daily. Resilience was shared through the teachings of the tree. Trees of all shapes and sizes withstand changing seasons and are impacted by the environments around them. This may leave them scarred, missing pieces of bark, and changed. Strong winds may even blow some of the leaves away, while others remain. The leaves that

remain show their strength, but the leaves that fall are not considered weaker. Casey shared, *"*there are no dead trees, only fallen ones." A fallen tree continues to grow, supporting new life and sustaining entire ecosystems.

The mountains were also shared as a teaching of resilience. The Rocky Mountains are the backbone of Mother Earth in Blackfoot culture and a source of strength. Mountains can be weathered, shaped by wind, snow, and erosion, yet remain standing. Their surfaces carry evidence of every storm they have endured. They do not attempt to smooth their edges or conceal their markings. They carry on and remain standing. Mountains show us that with all the weather, they are still powerful and a source of strength for those around them.

Relational Meaning.

Resilience was spoken about in relation to shame. A tree with missing bark does not hide its scars or apologize for them. It simply continues. While it may not remain standing, it still is full of life and giving life in whatever form it is in. Strength, as Casey describes it, "is not about large muscles and a physical presence. It is resilience in heart and spirit." He speaks to this spirit as what guides a person through difficult times. Like the mountains, resilience is not about remaining untouched; it is about remaining present in oneself and the strength that comes from within. Weathering does not diminish worth and the marks of survival are not something to conceal. Falling does not signify failure. It signifies movement within a larger cycle, and life continues past falling.

Within systems of care, moments of relapse, rupture, or regression can unintentionally become defining. When a young person falls, there is risk not only of shame, but of relational loss. Engaging with this teaching can invite us to consider if we treat falling as final or if we remain steady in our support when young people and families try again. Like a fallen tree, this is

not the end of their journey and new life can continue from where they may currently be. For many young people and families supported by Hull Services, they are actively navigating a lot of challenges. Choosing to try again means risking falling again and carrying shame that may follow. Remaining in relationship can support resilience through wherever their journey may take them.

Connections to Practice.

Many young people supported within Hull Services may see themselves as broken or defined by adversity. When appropriate, practitioners may gently introduce the teaching of the tree or mountain to reframe scars as evidence of survival rather than failure. Resilience can also be modeled by practitioners who remain steady during challenging moments, adapt when plans shift, and acknowledge their own growth. Like mountains that hold steady through seasons, practitioners can become consistent points of safety. Stability does not mean rigidity but demonstrating consistence presence. The sharing of these teachings is not meant to correct behaviour, but to offer a different narrative; one where youth are not defined by what led them into care but are supported in authoring what comes next.

Humility: "We Don't Know It All and Never Will"

Learning from the Land.

Humility was also shared through the teachings of the tree, most focused upon its roots. "The height of a tree mirrors the depth of its roots," Casey shared. It is emphasized that knowing your ancestors and who came before you will help to shape who you are. This demonstrates to us that as much as we see in front of us, there is equally as much beneath the surface that helped create the tree before us. What we see above ground is sustained by what exists beneath. Through their roots, trees share resources and support one another beneath the surface. Above

ground, they provide shade and protection without demanding recognition, reflecting humility in how they give.

Humility was also reflected in the stars in the night sky. Each star shines uniquely, holding its own place within the vastness. Yet the stars do not boast about their brightness, they simply shine, existing in relationship and forming constellations without competition. Humility is not shrinking oneself. It is understanding one's place within relationship to other beings, including the land.

Relational Meaning.

Many young people in care have experienced disrupted relationships. Often, we see young people being removed from their families and communities and being guided away from those whom professionals deem unsafe. For some, most of their relationships have been professional ones. While these professional relationships can be meaningful, these relationships are often structured and imbalanced. Humility invites practitioners to recognize these imbalances. Access to documentation, clinical language, and institutional authority can create an illusion of knowing. Yet reading a file does not equate to understanding a lived experience.

Like the stars, young people carry their own light, even when it is not immediately visible. They do not need to perform their worth. Our role is not to overshadow that light, but to create conditions where it can shine safely.

Connections to Practice.

Humility in practice may involve inviting young people into conversations about goals, and not assuming we as practitioners know what is best for them. It can be acknowledging when something did not land well, and demonstrating our own mistakes when they come up. The practice of humility can be consulting cultural supports when needed and not framing ourselves

as the experts. Humility, and the teachings of the tree, can guide young people in discovering their own roots. Understanding themselves on a deeper level may help them understand their family and community history, and how it may have impacted who they are today. When practitioners approach the land with humility they put these teachings into practice. This can look like offering tobacco and thanking the land. For young people who have primarily experienced professionalized relationships, witnessing humility from adults in positions of authority can be a corrective relational experience. This teaching invites practitioners to consider how they position themselves in moments of decision-making particularly when power, authority, and advocacy are at play. It adds reflection to how we advocate for those we support and if we are speaking for young people or walking alongside them.

Forgiveness: "A Place of Learning, Not Re-Living"

Learning from the Land.

Forgiveness was shared through the teachings of the grass. Grass may be stepped on or flattened, yet it does not hold onto that feeling. It forgives and rises again. It grows through cracks in sidewalks and pushes through compacted soil, showing its strength. Casey shared that "us as human beings may be able to pick up a blade of grass and snap it off, but we cannot do that with the cement. That shows the power of forgiveness." He further explained the uniqueness of each blade of grass alongside its ability to forgive. No two blades are identical, and each holds their own strength.

The river also teaches forgiveness. You can only step into a river once. With each step, you are standing somewhere new and engaging with a new part of the river. The water that touched you before has already moved on and is not holding onto what has happened.

Relational Meaning.

Forgiveness was spoken about as a place of learning, not re-living. Many young people internalize labels or moments and begin to see them as fixed truths. Forgiveness does not excuse harm. It releases a young person from defining themselves solely by past moments. Through this, we can support young people in recognizing that every step is a new one, even when it feels as though they have been there before. Each step in the river moves through new waters.

Within systems, documentation and professional supports may unintentionally hold onto moments long after young people are trying to move beyond them. This teaching invites practitioners to consider how long we let moments of crisis define the identity of those we support.

In this way, forgiveness is not about forgetting what has happened, but about how we continue to hold a young person in relationship after those moments. When we hold young people in relationship while maintaining accountability, we create space for forgiveness to occur. Through this, young people may begin to shift how they see themselves and move toward forgiving themselves, rather than continuing to carry shame.

Connections to Practice.

Practitioners can support forgiveness by separating behaviour from self and framing documentation around growth rather than permanence. This may look like naming the behaviour without attaching it to identity. This keeps the focus on the behaviour as something that happened, rather than something the young person is. Based on documentation requirements, it can be easy to focus on moments of crisis or risk. This teaching invites practitioners to also look for opportunities to engage in strength-based practices, such as relaying successes to natural and professional supports. CYCCs can also consider how engaging with culture may support a young

person's journey of forgiveness, including opportunities to connect with or reconnect to culture after a period away.

Creating opportunities for young people to step into new roles or responsibilities can become a tangible expression of forward movement. Forgiveness becomes an action, not just a concept. Forgiveness is not something we grant, but something we make space for. We can do this by honouring agency and recognizing that growth is rarely linear. Like the river, movement continues, and we are invited to walk alongside rather than hold young people in the waters they are trying to leave.

Engaging with the Teachings

Early in the development of this project, Casey and Susan identified that a visual component could support engagement with the teachings in another way. While the teachings are shared through story and reflection, the inclusion of art offers an additional way for staff to connect with and understand them.

Through consultation with Casey and Susan, Art Therapist Nicole Chalifour was invited to contribute to this aspect of the project. She was selected based on her existing relationship with Niitsitapiwahsi and prior collaboration on arts-based work within the agency. Nicole is a non-Indigenous practitioner who has experience working within Hull Services and engages in art-based practice with young people in the Safe Directions programs. She is also actively exploring how to approach her work in a decolonizing way and how to engage with the land within her practice. Rather than being given specific direction, Nicole was invited by Casey to sit with the teachings and create a representation based on her own understanding. This process was intentional. Casey emphasized that meaning is strengthened when individuals engage with the teachings in their own way, rather than following prescribed interpretations.

The resulting artwork is not intended to define the teachings, but to offer one way they may be understood and expressed. It serves as a visual component that allows staff to engage with the teachings beyond written form. This approach reflects the broader intention of this work. The teachings are not fixed, and engagement with them is not prescriptive. They are meant to be explored through reflection, relationship, time on the land, and practice.

Figure 1.

Painting of teachings done by Nicole Chalifour, Safe Directions Art Therapist

The artwork above reflects one interpretation of the teachings and invites ongoing engagement in different ways.

Appendix B

Requesting Indigenous Teachings & Support

This document was created to support in building organizational capacity and reflective processes around requesting knowledge and support from Niitsitapiwahsi. While organic and relational means of knowledge sharing will still occur, this is intended to guide Hull Services staff when they are seeking out teachings and support.

1. Reflecting on the Request

Before seeking teachings or cultural support, staff are encouraged to pause and reflect on their request. This step supports clarity, intention, and respectful engagement. Consider the following:

- What am I hoping to learn or understand?
- Why am I seeking this teaching at this time?
- Who is this request for (myself, a young person, a program need)?
- How will this teaching be used in practice?
- Have I taken time to reflect on what I already know or have access to?

Reflection helps ensure that requests are grounded in purpose rather than urgency. Not all questions require immediate Elder involvement, and taking time to reflect is part of engaging in a good way.

2. Accessing Internal Knowledge & Cultural Helpers

Before making a formal request, staff are encouraged to explore existing knowledge within the agency. This helps build internal capacity and reduces repeated requests for the same information. This may include:

- Speaking with a Cultural Helper within your program
- Reviewing previous teachings, training materials, or notes

- Connecting with colleagues who have attended similar teachings
- Reflecting on prior guidance from Niitsitapiwahsi

Cultural Helpers can support in:

- Clarifying whether a request requires Elder involvement
- Sharing existing knowledge or teachings
- Helping shape the request in a respectful and clear way
- Communicating the request to Niitsitapiwahsi at a monthly meeting (if not time sensitive)

If the request remains after this step, it may be appropriate to move forward. If the program Cultural Helper also does not hold this knowledge, include them in the process to support their understanding and growth.

3. Submitting a Request for Teachings

When a request is needed, staff can complete a **Request for Teachings & Cultural Support Form**. This ensures clarity and allows Niitsitapiwahsi to respond in a way that aligns with capacity and protocol.

The request should include:

- Purpose of the request
- Context (program, young person, or situation)
- Type of support being requested (teaching, ceremony, guidance, etc.)
- Timeline (if applicable)
- What steps have already been taken (reflection, consultation with Cultural Helpers, etc.)

Submitting a request in this way supports:

- Transparency
- Thoughtful preparation

- Respect for time and capacity
- Alignment with agency processes

4. Preparing for Engagement

If a request is accepted, preparation is an important part of engaging respectfully. This may include:

- Confirming time, location, and expectations
- Bringing an offering of tobacco
- Preparing yourself to be present, open, and respectful
- Reflecting on your role as a learner
- For engagement with external Elders, Niitsitapiwahsi can provide guidance on honorarium and protocol

Engagement with teachings is relational, not transactional. Preparation demonstrates respect for both the teachings and the person sharing them.

5. Engaging In Person

When meeting with an Elder or Knowledge Keeper, the focus is on relationship, presence, and respect. Consider the following practices:

- Arrive on time and be fully present (limit distractions)
- Introduce self and share your lineage. If sharing work related role, share what you do, not a formal title. (i.e. *I support young people at Grizzly Bear Lodge).*
- Following introduction, provide offering of tobacco (or other medicine as directed) and place your hand over your heart while sharing verbally what you are requesting from the meeting (i.e. *I am offering you this tobacco for you to share the teachings of the tree with me today).*

- Listen without interrupting or trying to direct the conversation
- Avoid note-taking unless it has been discussed or invited
- Be mindful that teachings may not always come in a direct or structured format

Teachings are often shared through story, reflection, and relationship. Being present is more important than trying to capture everything.

6. After the Teaching

Engagement does not end when the conversation is over. Following the teaching:

- Take time to reflect on what was shared
- Consider how the teaching may influence your practice
- Share learning appropriately within your team (if applicable)
- Avoid presenting the teaching as your own knowledge
- Reconnect with Niitsitapiwahsi if clarification is needed

This step supports integration into practice and honours the relational nature of the knowledge shared.

Key Considerations

While these steps are not intended to be prescriptive, they are meant as a guide in engaging meaningfully and ensuring we are maintaining our collective responsibility as an agency. Engaging with teachings is a relational process that extends beyond a single interaction. This framework is intended to support staff in approaching that process in a way that is respectful, thoughtful, and grounded in good intentions.