



Categories of words used to describe the *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions* four-day experiential learning opportunity

ALLYING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: CULTURAL SOLUTIONS TRAINING

Evaluation Report

Submitted to:



Prepared by:



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Acknowledgements

In the fall of 2015, *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions* was adapted from *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: the practice of omanitew*, a four-day experiential learning opportunity for human service professionals working with Indigenous children and families. It was developed as an alternative to eight-hour cultural competency training. The opportunity was designed to provide an *experience* in Indigenous culture and, through that experience, to increase understanding about history, residential schools, intergenerational trauma and current context, and to subsequently impact practice (e.g., how to be an ally, how to provide more culturally relevant support).

Omanitew is a Cree word that refers to the respect shown to visitors in one's home. The *practice of omanitew* is about showing respect for each other (our colleagues, our families, our clients, our communities) and making people feel welcome when they enter a new environment. *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: the practice of omanitew* was developed in partnership between **Dr. Leona Makokis** (Blue Quills First Nations College) and **Dr. Ralph Bodor** (University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work) and was based on the University of Calgary social work course (Social Work with Indigenous Peoples). The learning opportunity – which includes participation in traditional Cree ceremonies – has been delivered numerous times since October 2012. Previous participants have reported significant personal and professional impact as a result of the experience.

The training was adapted by a team of individuals to incorporate traditional Blackfoot epistemology and practice. *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions* was offered for the first time in Airdie (October 2015) and again in Calgary (November 2015 and March 2016). The training was adapted and facilitated by **Dr. Reg Crowshoe, Rose Crowshoe, Adrian Goulet, Liza Lorenzetti** and **Kerrie Moore**.

Funding for the training and evaluation was provided by **Align Association of Community Services**, under the leadership of **Rhonda Barraclough**.

Twenty-seven individuals from the following organizations participated in one of the first two sessions (October and November 2015): **Alberta Health Services (1), Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (2), Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary (1), Children's Cottage Society (2), Enviro (4), Government of Alberta (1), Heritage Family Services (3), Interested Citizen (1), BSW Student (1) Mahmawiatoskiwin (2), McMan Calgary (4), North East Family Connections (1), Wood's Homes (2), YMCA Calgary (2).**

The sharing circles and interviews were facilitated by an independent evaluation team (**Laurie McCaffrey** and **Leslee Mackey**).

1.0 Introduction

Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions was a four-day experiential learning opportunity designed for human service professionals who work with Indigenous children, youth and families. The opportunity was intended to provide an experience in Indigenous culture – specifically incorporating traditional Blackfoot epistemology and practice. Twenty-seven individuals participated in the first two iterations of the learning opportunity, beginning with 11 participants in October 2015 (Airdrie) and another 16 participants in November 2015 (Calgary).

2.0 Evaluation Methodology

2.1 Purpose and Approach

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to find out what difference, if any, the experiential learning opportunity had made in practice. The questions were adapted from the evaluation of the *omanitew* experiential learning opportunity. The evaluation team worked collaboratively with Align and the facilitators to finalize interview questions and coordinate data collection.

2.2 Evaluation Questions

1. What, if any, difference did the experience make for participants?
2. To what extent did the experience impact participants mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and/or physically?
3. How did participants characterize the differences and similarities between “*Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions Training*” and other types of learning opportunities?
4. From the perspective of participants, what key elements of the experience should stay the same? What could be improved?
5. To what extent does the learning opportunity have the potential to impact change in practice in Calgary and Southern Alberta?

2.3 Data Collection Methods

Approximately six months after the training, participants were invited to provide feedback regarding the impact of the experience. The course facilitators sent an email invitation to previous course participants

(n=27) on March 15, 2016. This included participants from the first training held in Airdrie in October 2015 (11 participants) and the second training held in Calgary in November 2015 (16 participants). Of the 27 participants, 21 were available to participate in the follow-up evaluation (April 2016). (See Table 1 for a complete list of participant feedback methods and response rates.)

The group sharing circles in Calgary began with welcoming comments and introductions led by one of the course facilitators (who subsequently left the room for the duration of the sessions). The sharing circles were facilitated by two members of the evaluation team (one serving the role as primary facilitator and one as note-taker). One by one, participants were asked to share their experiences and stories, and to provide examples of things they were doing differently now in their work with Indigenous children and families. Both members of the evaluation team participated in the sharing circle in Red Deer. The individual interviews were conducted by one member of the evaluation team using semi-structured interview questions.

Table 1. Participant Feedback Methods and Response Rates

Participant Feedback Methods	Participants
Morning Sharing Circle (Calgary, April 5, 2016)	2
Afternoon Sharing Circle (Calgary, April 5, 2016)	7
Afternoon Sharing Circle (Red Deer, April 6, 2016)	3
In-person interviews (Calgary-2, April 6, 2016; Edmonton-1, April 7, 2016)	3
Telephone interviews (April 7 – 11, 2016)	5
Electronic (email) feedback (April 6, 2016)	1
Not available/out-of-town/did not respond	6
Total Number of Training Participants	27

2.4 Data Analysis

The evaluation team took detailed hand-written notes to document participant feedback during the sharing circles and interviews. With the consent of participants, the sharing circle and interviews were audio-taped for back-up (to double-check quotes where possible; although audio quality was not always clear). Overall, the data represent close approximations to verbatim comments based on handwritten notes taken during the interviews. After each interview and sharing circle was completed, the notes were entered into standard word processing software. The data were reviewed multiple times, and participant responses were sorted into response categories based on overall evaluation question.

Caution was taken to preserve the meaning of participant feedback, by not reducing their feedback into artificial categories, and to keep their stories intact. Participants were invited to review and provide feedback on the report to ensure that it fit with their experience.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Assessment tools developed by the Alberta Research Ethics Community Consensus Initiative were completed to assess level of risk to participants and to clearly articulate the intended use of personal information. Prior to collecting data, participants were informed about how their data would be used, and who would have access to their responses

3.0 Participant Demographics and Overall Impression

To provide context for the evaluation findings, this section will begin with a brief description of the participants (type and range of experience, years working with children and families) and a summary of feedback regarding their overall impression of the learning opportunity.

3.1 Who were the participants?

The participants (21 individuals who participated in the evaluation) were from a range of backgrounds with diverse personal and professional experiences. There were 17 females and 4 males. Three of the participants identified as Indigenous. The remaining participants either did not state a cultural background or identified with other backgrounds (e.g., Irish, other European countries). Many participants (including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) were inspired to strengthen their own sense of culture and identity, asking themselves “Who am I?” and exploring their family connections, as a result of the experience. This is a deeply personal question, and illustrates the depth of discussion and the importance of understanding who we are and where we come from.

On average, participants had 14 years of experience working with Indigenous children, youth and families (the majority ranging from 2 years to 32 years, with one participant just getting started in the field). Types of roles included the following:

- ✚ Youth worker
- ✚ Social worker
- ✚ Family support worker
- ✚ Addictions treatment
- ✚ FASD prevention
- ✚ Program coordinator
- ✚ Executive director
- ✚ Clinical lead
- ✚ Management/policy
- ✚ Case manager
- ✚ Wraparound facilitator
- ✚ Interested citizen
- ✚ Team lead
- ✚ Registered nurse

Positive Experience

- ✦ *Incredible. It was the best experience I've had into the Aboriginal way of life and culture, and I have done lots of training over the years.*
- ✦ *I loved it. It was experiential, hands on, different kinds of learning-seeing, doing, hearing. It felt like a retreat. I felt rested and restful. I came away positive and hopeful, energized, which is rare. It was a very positive experience.*
- ✦ *I was nervous but it was so welcoming, like a retreat. I felt rested. I would do it again.*
- ✦ *It was a great experience. I didn't know much about Aboriginal culture before.*
- ✦ *It was restful. I liked sharing the experience with people with such varying backgrounds. It felt like a very safe space, very comfortable.*
- ✦ *I felt the spirit of compassion and mischievousness and humour in this training. There was openness to gaps in people's experiences. The pacing wasn't hurried; we were not up in our heads. They encouraged us to bring our whole self into the room.*
- ✦ *I liked how they broke it up. Dr. Crowshoe set the tone of the experiential process. Participants were from lots of different backgrounds and the common theme was of people who wanted to learn more. The psychologist in Calgary – I appreciated her approach through Aboriginal culture. The songs, the explanation of the meaning of them gave me the impression that he wanted the whole group to have connection and identification with the song. I really enjoyed that. It was really positive, a very good experience.*
- ✦ *I thought it was good. It was different for me, not just at a desk with a PowerPoint and someone talking at you. Many times you would just sit and listen to Reg. There was a drumming circle at the end and Adrian sang a song for us. That was really beautiful, that kind of certification. It felt really intimate. Because it was four days, we got to know each other. People were vulnerable. There was a lot of sharing.*
- ✦ *It was extremely powerful. I found it grounding. Really consciousness raising, shifting. It was a privilege and an honour to be there.*
- ✦ *I appreciated how it was run, looking at parallels between the cultures*
- ✦ *I appreciated Reg, Adrian, Rose, Kerrie and the professor, Liza, her perspective in white culture of people opting out. Calling people out on that as part of the training was really important. Kerrie Moore was wonderful on the trauma, drumming.*

Immersive, Inclusive, Experiential, Participatory and Personal

The four-day learning opportunity was described as immersive, inclusive, experiential, participatory and personal. Participants were immersed in ceremony as they deepened their understanding about the history of colonization, residential schools, intergenerational trauma, and how to be an ally.

- ✚ *With the experiential part, it felt like a ceremony for the full time. I'm a heady person, so it was a good way to get me to have a full experience. It felt immersive. I like the diversity of the group. We didn't all do the same kind of work so that was good.*
- ✚ *I went in thinking it would be like any other Indigenous training, facts and history. I didn't expect such an immersive experience and so much participation in a lot of different ceremonies. To me that's where the success of it lied, because it made it a very personal experience of looking through the eyes of their culture.*
- ✚ *It was really inclusive and experiential. Instead of the regular North American way of learning it was amazing to start with the learning circle, to share and learn together. It felt very spiritual and welcoming.*
- ✚ *After leaving I felt sad. As an Indigenous person going through reconciliation, I was sad there's so many Indigenous people who aren't aware or exposed to this knowledge.*

Transformative

- ✚ *It was transformative, personally and professionally. It broke down barriers about beginning to be an ally.*
- ✚ ***I'm not the same as I was before I took the training.** I've known a lot, I've done TRC work, I thought I had a good grasp on this stuff before. It was calming and stimulating. It got me looking back and fitting things in. I felt exhausted in a good way, wishing it wouldn't end. I'm so grateful to reconnect and talk about it. No one else at my agency took the training, and it has changed the way I do my work.*
- ✚ *It changed my life. I learned a lot in terms of information. It was a light bulb moment the whole time. Before the training I was constantly questioning who am I to give leadership to this team of Aboriginal people? My big take away from the training is that it is okay. Here is how you can be an ally. Be open to learning and growth. The parallel model was helpful. The big thing for me was that there is no need to question who am I? **I can be an ally.***
- ✚ *It was life changing. Absolutely. Four of the best days of that year for me. I was very sick the last two days of the training...But I went anyway because I felt so strongly that I could not miss any of it.*

4.0 Perceived Similarities and Differences to Other Training

4.1 Similarities

Overall, participants reported more differences than similarities when asked to characterize similarities and differences between the four-day learning opportunity and other types of training. Some of the similarities included use of PowerPoint (although it was noted that PowerPoint was used sparingly and was not the major focus of the learning experience), some of the structure (e.g., daily agenda), and some of the content (e.g., many participants already knew the history of residential schools).

Illustrative participant comments regarding similarities with other types of training include the following:

- ✚ *Some of the structure felt familiar. The agenda, the Power Point. But other than that – nothing.*
- ✚ *Similar was sitting and listening to someone speak, but this was different because it was more oral. There were some print-outs or PowerPoints but for the most part it was very oral, story-telling, not formal.*
- ✚ *Authenticity of facilitators, I've done trainings with Casey, Reg, Rose, ethical elders, that's consistent. No hidden agendas, no judgement. Also people who are relevant to this area, Blackfoot here, Cree in northern Alberta. It is really important for training to be relevant to the population.*
- ✚ *The residential school information. It was a good refresher to get history and ideas of trauma. But this was more in depth.*

4.2 Differences

The most common response was that **“everything was different”**, when comparing the learning opportunity with other types of training. Differences included both the **process** (how the training was delivered) and the **content** (what was taught). Although some of the content was repetitive (e.g., history of residential schools), participants stated that the immersive learning opportunity strengthened their understanding and added new knowledge. Consistent with responses to the overall impression question, participants described the learning opportunity as immersive, participatory, ceremonial, personal, experiential, non-judgmental, non-hierarchical, spiritual, and in some cases, transformative. Story-telling and the oral tradition were used to share knowledge. The participation of non-Indigenous and Indigenous people together was perceived as valuable. The **duration** (four days) was noted as a key difference compared to other types of training (e.g., 8-hour cultural competency training).

touched on their spirituality and their creativity, I guess on all of the aspects, mental, physical and emotional, to bring that together and see Indigenous theory and philosophy, and place a different value on it...I feel a sense of pride and accomplishment that something has achieved that. Because I certainly know that value and I certainly have pride in who I am as an Indigenous woman, and my spirituality and culture, but it's hard to convey that in mainstream society when there are so many derogatory beliefs and processes. I certainly know it, but it can be hard.

- ✦ It was different in that it really emphasized and shared by example the importance of process in 'how' to learn instead of 'what' to learn.*
- ✦ The fact that we sat on the floor – that put us all on the same level, teaching us that we are all equal.*
- ✦ It felt like a spiritual experience. I felt honoured to be there and to share with everyone. I haven't experienced that before or since.*
- ✦ Nothing was familiar. That was uncomfortable for me. I prefer to watch a documentary, be introverted. The ceremony makes me nervous, but I loved how he did them because he explained what he was doing. I really appreciated how it was approached. I didn't feel the stress of how to be respectful. People could ask how to do it. It was so much more comfortable. The training was so non-judgmental overall, but especially in ceremony.*
- ✦ The training was very profound because other trainings hit the professional level, stuff you need to know, they take an academic look at Aboriginal culture. **This is completely different.** They wanted to engage you personally. So from the start I was engaged in a larger way, brought in and immersed in the experience. I'm careful to call it an experience, not training. One difference from other trainings is that when Reg was talking about residential schools he didn't just crap on it, he acknowledged the intention behind it and then how badly it went.*
- ✦ The sharing circle, sharing in traditional processes, sharing in practices like smudging and pipe, talking about their different traditions. This training was more in-depth, more detail. Reg was a good speaker; they brought more personal experience than most trainings. He explained how their culture differed from our laws. It felt like more aligning with them rather than separating our two cultures.*
- ✦ There was more of a community feel, sitting in a circle, not at desks. Sitting in a circle was really different; you got to see people and listen to them differently. The morning smudges and cultural protocols were different. For the most part, it was very oral. I didn't take notes the entire time. The story telling, the less formal way of speaking was different. My agency wants a presentation but it was all just experiences. I don't know how to share it.*

- ✚ *Everything about it. Being in a small setting, in circle. Reg teaching as doing, doing ceremony and integrating what he was teaching and showing. The relationship between Reg and Rose; their daughter and grandchildren being present. Carly bringing lunch every day. It felt more like a village, so giving. They were being themselves and doing this their way. It was really different. The whole gestalt of it leaves a deep imprint for me.*
- ✚ *The sharing circle, experiencing the smudging, and ceremonial types of things. Being a part of all that was different. It was the stories and everyone's sharing that really came across. It wasn't Reg and Adrian talking like they were professors. It was very egalitarian, everyone learning from each other.*

Duration

- ✚ *A big difference is the length of training. That is so valuable. It wasn't rushed. There was time to process.*
- ✚ *It was different because **it was longer** too. It was a good space. At first I thought, 'Oh no! Four days!' But in the end it was good. I recommend it. It was very respectful. I felt really comfortable. It was organized really well. I felt it moved along really well and kept your attention. We have mandatory training every year but this one was special. It is about aligning with Aboriginal people rather than just being a professional and getting them what they need. It was about inner knowledge and decreasing prejudice. I've done cultural awareness before but it was more surface level. This was deeper and meaningful. It affected me personally. I'm more patient, more understanding, more open. I hope I can build trust now more than I did before.*
- ✚ *How personal it was and the length. It was very personal and intense. Being able to not just see but be a part of it. It took all learning styles together. The feasts brought everyone together. Other trainings are factual, with hand-outs and PowerPoint. This was more about life and experience and I really felt a part of it.*

4.2.1 Content Differences

Content differences refer to “what” was taught. Key content areas characterized as different from other types of training included **parallel teachings** and the knowledge gained from hearing **personal stories** (information not available in written format). This method of teaching helped participants to deepen their understanding of history and current context.

Parallel teaching

- ✚ *This happened in real time, it was real. We participated. We experienced. We learned about tradition. It was so helpful that Reg took a value and a teaching and translated it to my culture. For example: You register, you pay your tuition – I get it!*

✚ *I could find parallels and make it okay. The barriers to learning a new culture were deconstructed.*

Personal stories

✚ *Some things can never be shared in a textbook. His stories about family history, laws, subjugation, threats and violence... That unveils another layer. His family's experience living on reserve. Adrian's stories about his mother and grandmother. Residential schools. When Adrian sings, everything stands still. And the drumming. There was a visceral reaction from everyone. Emotional. It's very humbling to be in the presence of Dr. Crowshoe who is respected, and the humility he has. I learned more about his accomplishments and recognitions through a Google search. He was involved with setting provincial policy. He is not boastful. And he has the best laugh.*

Numerous changes in knowledge, attitudes and awareness were reported by participants – including those who felt they already had a high level of understanding before the experience. For example, participants described increased understanding about residential schools and said it was impactful to hear from Reg’s first-hand experience. Participants learned about history, trauma, and diversity within Indigenous culture. For those who already knew the history, hearing it again and from the personal perspective of an elder was very meaningful and brought a new level of understanding.

The experience contributed to **increased cultural understanding** on many levels. For example, participants said they learned about the importance of the oral tradition (as a result of experiencing it – learning by doing); the role and importance of ceremony (learning the protocols and meaning of ceremonies, song, drumming, how to participate in smudging); understanding of intergenerational trauma; the importance of connection to geographic location and the land; a new lens to look through (Indigenous worldview) and the ability to identify when looking through your own lens and beliefs and not impose them on others. Participants also learned about **parallel teachings** and said that this helped to make a difference in how they approach their work. Finally, the experiential nature of the training helped to **integrate participants’ previous knowledge**. Illustrative participant quotations for each of these categories are presented next.

Increased cultural understanding (including in-depth understanding of Blackfoot culture as well as inspiration to learn more about each individual’s own history and background)

- ✚ *The system has really failed the rest of us in not educating us on residential schools and our shared history. It was ignored, so how can you expect them to know? So I’m more confident now to say something, ask questions, say something about why it’s not appropriate to do that on Blackfoot territory. I have confidence. In grad school you learn theories and methods. This training exposed us to ceremonies but its effectiveness is the theories and the bigger picture learning about the territories before the treaties came. I finally understand the bigger context about how the tribes were relating before the treaties and why some things are sensitive.*
- ✚ *Before, I only knew what schools taught about Indigenous culture. (Shared personal story of aunt being involved in residential schooling but having some redeeming qualities that led to the community honouring her for her work in the end.) So maybe I am a part of those redeeming qualities of non-Indigenous people and it made me want to know more and know how to navigate this. Initially I didn’t want to connect with that history, being related to the villains of history. Reg said you should know who you are and where you come from. It makes me want to know more. We’ve lost that in non-Indigenous culture. We can’t pass it on and I want to pass it on...Reg’s take on the spin of the parallel process was helpful. Sometimes you hear this stuff and you just feel gross. They weren’t there to blame anybody. They really communicated the alliance, the shared process, and that’s definitely how I look at it now.*
- ✚ *Learned about things specific to Blackfoot culture.*

- ✦ *After the training I was driving down the highway and I could see offerings in the trees and I knew what they were! That was impactful. The fact that Reg Crowshoe is a survivor was impactful for me. He didn't appear to be bitter...a little on behalf of his friends. I saw the article today on the feds wanting to destroy the TRC records; I'm more aware now than I was before.*
- ✦ *I learned a new world about Aboriginal culture. I came to Canada 5 years ago and I didn't know about Aboriginal culture. I saw people on the street and wondered why. I started at (the agency) and got more information. This training gave me an understanding of where the issue comes from. I was shocked about residential schools.*
- ✦ *It was pleasant to learn the story of what happens in teepees. Now when I see a teepee, I see all life's details, and know that study, teaching, smudging is all happening in there. It makes me so happy to know about the culture.*
- ✦ *I had known most of the history. The drumming and the song were new to me. I had no idea about the significance of having a song, singing your song, and where you fit into the scheme of things. One of my co-workers who is Aboriginal doesn't have a song, and when I told her she said 'I want that'.*
- ✦ *I took away the importance of the oral tradition. That was very clear.*
- ✦ *I found Dr. Crowshoe very genuine and authentic. I have a lot of different experiences of Blackfoot culture, so the ceremony is what is new to me, singing song, dance.*
- ✦ *The language, song, location and geographical area. From Dr. Crowshoe's perspective, those things are the key of perspective. I feel a lot more confident to engage with people. There was a lot of content; I learned a lot.*
- ✦ *There was great information I had never been exposed to before, especially because the Blackfoot tradition is new, most of my training has been in Cree.*
- ✦ *I learned a lot that was new, especially cultural protocols, and I learned about residential schools more in-depth through Reg's story. It brought awareness about First Nations communities and history...who they are, their stories. There is still some hidden prejudice in me, from being a white person and hearing so much about First Nations people not being grateful or deserving. This helped shift that even more: No that's not it! We're the ones being off in the situation.*
- ✦ *I learned a lot I didn't know before. Even though I'm pretty well educated I really didn't have a good grasp of the history and continuing ramifications of our policies with Native people. I also learned what an amazing moment of history we're in with what is happening now. It changed how I see things. The quote 'We are all treaty people' really impacted me. We were the ones signing the treaty with the Blackfoot.*

- ✦ *I learned about the ceremony. I felt privileged to be a part of it. I'm Irish so very non-cultural.*
- ✦ *This training helped deepen my understanding of how to ask questions and who to ask. Especially if I would like to host something culturally specific. It also helped explain how information needs to be contextualized in oral culture, and to be more sensitive to how and why and when I am asking questions. I understand more now, how culturally the nations might be organized and how different each nation would be. I also have more sensitivity to why some youth might want to opt out of some sweats or ceremonies, and also which ceremonies are more universal.*

Parallel teaching

- ✦ *I was impacted by Dr. Crowshoe's teaching to find **parallels** everywhere instead of melding our beliefs. Just be side-by-side, the idea of ethical space. That really changed my perspective and let everyone take a step back and keep our cultures intact and be together. It gave me a different perspective on anyone's culture. The idea of not trying to integrate.*
- ✦ *It helped me re-evaluate my own beliefs and values and not impose those on anyone. The critical thinking they taught was a big part of that. And understanding what mental health means for Aboriginal kids.*
- ✦ *I did know quite a bit of history. That guessing game we did – I knew these things. The way he told the stories to translate was a really effective piece of knowledge for me.*

The experiential nature of the training helped to integrate previous knowledge

- ✦ *Hard to verbalize. I did know a lot about our history of colonization. The experiential knowledge helped me integrate the impact of colonization on all of us. It affected how I integrated my own spiritual and physical parts.*
- ✦ *This training brought a layer of understanding especially around intergenerational trauma.*
- ✦ *This training provided a lens. Whereas previous training talked about it, this training showed me. Now I have a lens and in the boardroom I can recognize when we are looking through certain lenses.*

- ✦ *I had a huge personal connection and felt extremely emotional because I felt we were finally talking about truth. Usually these things get sugar coated. People don't want to talk about the ugly truths of this situation. It was huge to share this training with others. The only way to make change is to be here, having the hard conversations in a loving way.*
- ✦ *My strongest feeling coming away was hopefulness.*
- ✦ *Reg didn't make me feel shameful and guilty for being a white person. He really connected to everyone. I felt heard and respected.*
- ✦ *I feel overwhelmingly sad about all the stories and exhausted with emotion. After the training I was hopeful and positive. At the same time, I don't think the issue will be solved, but we're going in the right direction.*
- ✦ *Sadness, anger, shame, frustration all came and went. At the end I felt sad; we just got going and now it's over? How can I keep the momentum here? When I got the notice of this evaluation gathering I was like Yes! I don't have anyone to share this with and I feel isolated. I felt validated by being in a group diverse people who share my passion, not so alone and crazy. I feel hopefulness that this is the beginning of a process and it won't die. So many things die because the will or the money isn't there. I don't want to see this die. I want ways to stay involved. I feel scared that it won't happen.*
- ✦ *I don't feel my mother ever recovered from residential school. She withheld it from us and protected her children from it. It feels like there will be no recovery sometimes. What do you do then? You can't save the world. That's the cultural and spiritual realization yet again. This training, the possibility that many more people will participate in it. Because it is so personal, you gain knowledge on how to help in the healing. All we can do is work on ourselves. This training was important. The level of sharing and commitment from Reg was huge.*
- ✦ *My relationship with the people of the south is stronger. I feel like I've come to love them more because they've shared a part of themselves. I can't speak for the south, but I can direct the youth in questions about that culture. It makes me want to have experience with ceremony in different seasons to have better understanding of the southern ways.*
- ✦ *I was open, with an open mind and open heart, even. Without that, I don't know how you would experience the training. When I finally understood that I could be an ally, that had a huge domino effect. During Liza's session it finally clicked for me. Not that the idea of an ally was brand new, but it was how it was delivered, over four days, being immersed in it. For whatever reason, that is when it really clicked and helped me in accepting what my role was. When I was questioning my role, I'm white, I didn't have a lot of knowledge, I did some information gathering but it is so different when it comes from an elder...I feel like I know a lot and then there's a tipping point when you realize that*

you know very little. This training made it okay to not know everything. It's the intention behind it. If my intention is from a genuine place so I can connect and bring leadership and guidance, if my intention remains positive, it doesn't matter how much I know. My intention is to have an impact on how I support people...some people intend to recite facts...When you learn these things, how can you not act on it? As a Canadian. As a human being. It is an obligation now. I know these things. I felt these things. I experienced these things. I can't ignore it. I'm not the same person I was before I took the training...I experienced reassurance. I read it. I heard it. Now Reg is telling a story about it. Reg sharing his personal experiences was so impactful. It was uncomfortable. He was laughing too. It hurt also, that he actually experienced it and is able to laugh at it or he has to laugh. So it was painful and surreal. But so important, that personal aspect. I respect him so much. I definitely wasn't prepared for that.

- + Personally, it was very affirming, very empowering on my personal journey. The idea of listening to the land. It was very welcoming. I didn't feel like an outsider. I felt like we were connecting...Emotionally, it felt like a retreat, there was a calmness, an awareness of energy, an openness to experience that. It really got me in that way. It is a testament to how safe we all felt.*
- + Yes, you read and understand how First Nations people were treated and the government laws. Now I emotionally feel more responsible and more interested in following what's going on in the government. The social justice piece is really good. I'm just more alert and more aware...At first I was nervous because I felt I didn't know enough, but I felt very comfortable. I'm interested in keeping sharing. I think it's important to keep it going so that families feel like they can do their thing and people aren't being prejudiced against them.*
- + Hearing the stories made it so powerful. The sharing circle was really powerful. Really understanding Canadian history, the multi-generational trauma. It had a strong emotional impact on me.*
- + It made me sad. Sadness permeated later. Our knowledge is so fragmented. There was a break in Reg's teachings due to residential school. One of my teachers travelled west and stopped in the different communities. Every year this elder would do ceremonies in each community. He had never been to residential school. He didn't speak English so it was hard to follow his knowledge; that knowledge that he shared was very old, it was like looking through a pin hole. I thought about that a lot after this training.*
- + What I've been experiencing especially as I get older, is that we're living at a time of reconciliation but I have a deep sense of mourning and loss at the deterioration of knowledge. When I see something that's actually a very positive and a good thing it flips very easily too because there's also awareness of what's been lost and how my people could have benefited from this knowledge.*

5.3 Spiritual Impact



Figure 5. Spiritual impact of the experience

The experience had a spiritual impact for many participants. For example, it **provided ideas** for how to incorporate spirituality and ceremonies into programming for Indigenous youth and families, and strengthened the belief that providing these opportunities is important. One participant, for example, described how such opportunities might not be provided because of logistical and practical challenges. He learned the importance of providing these opportunities for youth and gained insights about how to overcome the challenges. Some participants said that the experience deepened their **connection with nature** or had contributed to **introspection/connection with self** (Who am I? Where do I come from?). A few participants said that although they did not consider themselves spiritual, the experience was respectful, not imposing of any beliefs, and that it was an honour to be “witness to a lived spirituality”. Some participants said that the whole training was a powerful, **personal spiritual experience**. Illustrative participant quotations for each of these categories are presented next.

Provided ideas for how to incorporate spirituality and ceremonies into programming for Indigenous youth and families

- ✦ *Being in a program that values ceremony, the training made me aware of how much better our ceremonies could be. We need to change the layout of our teepee to be more authentic. I had a conversation with a kid about how the teepee was set up wrong.*
- ✦ *I saw the importance of the spiritual and the importance of making sure it is something that we bring to the program. I've taken a few more trainings and I participate more fully now because I really connected to the ceremonial aspect.*

Deepened connection with nature

- ✦ *The training strengthened my connection to nature. The biggest thing for me was the song. Just the sound resonated through my entire being. To learn of the significance of the song was amazing. I do believe in a higher power. Hearing the word Creator felt very comfortable and relatable.*
- ✦ *The training helped me better connect with nature and be more mindful in daily life. I appreciate nature, birds, sunshine...the sense that they are all sending messages. I find I get lost in daily routines and the training helped me reconnect with the spiritual self I used to be.*

Introspection: connection to self

- ✦ *This training helped me honour who I am and to really encourage who I am. It makes me feel like there's hope to wholeheartedly honour who I am.*
- ✦ *This training was very grounding. That is very good when we are in a crisis environment so much. This training brought me back to why I got into social work, what I set out to do, and to think about what my goals are as a social worker.*
- ✦ *The training was very affirming, very empowering on my personal journey. The idea of listening to the land for me hit home. It was very welcoming. I didn't feel like an outsider, I felt like we were connecting. A large part for me was the concept of 'your song'. A beautiful thing to understand.*
- ✦ *Not as much impact on the spiritual level. I already have a deep journey and an eclectic spirituality. My spiritual understanding has been more intellectual. We don't have the cultural support for spirituality. Being a witness to a lived spirituality, through Reg and Adrian, and being allowed to experience and be a part of ceremony was really humbling and an honour. It aroused curiosity about how my own practice might be able to be shaped by what I experienced. Sometimes western culture has a tendency to consume anything it comes into contact with, so I don't want to do that.*

Personal spiritual experience/connection

- ✦ *It was a very integrated experience; it enriched me spiritually. The teaching of walking and standing in our spirit was powerful. I have talked with the Creator and I've been in tune with the elements and the seasons. That mindset has been a lot stronger in me.*

- ✦ *The whole experience was spiritual for me. It feels right to me; it feels like coming home. Turning to the Creator and to nature has helped me.*

- ✦ *It was a reminder of my own personal connection to the Creator and to nature. It increased my understanding how the physical, mental and spiritual all connect. It helped me in moving through all the crud, the collective and the personal...It was a very good four days. I have participated in and know the ceremonial path. It was with a ceremony that we experience a reprieve. I've been to other trainings that don't include ceremony. Service providers are so lucky to have this experience.*

- ✦ *Our group was given a name and given a song. How could that not change you? It felt like being in a bubble in a good way. I knew almost immediately it was something I'll never forget. I'm really thankful for the experience.*

- ✦ *The learning on the spiritual level was huge, feeling the energy in the room. I have a Christian background so I saw there really are similarities between the beliefs in a higher power, the cultural similarity there.*

- ✦ *The songs really stood out, and the prayers. I'm not super spiritual but I felt like the drumming was more than just a drum...you could feel your heart beat and the people around you.*

Participants reported a range of practice and behaviour changes as a result of the four-day learning opportunity. It is clear that the experience made a difference, and that participants were beginning to apply what they learned in practice. Examples of changes included **facilitating access to cultural programming; advocating for change and being an ally; increased connections; changes to care plans; increased patience as a result of understanding intergenerational trauma; and personal changes.** Additional descriptions and illustrative participant comments are provided next.

Facilitating access to and continually improving cultural programming: Participants reported being more likely to help youth access cultural practices and to make that a priority. There was increased openness to ask about spirituality and to refer for cultural support. There was better understanding of Blackfoot practices (e.g., more intentional about the Blackfoot way of smudging). In many cases, the experience helped to improve the quality of programming and practices within agencies (e.g., by providing more opportunities, using more sensitive language, being aware of context, having more confidence, emphasizing the importance of connection to culture, referring people for cultural support, rekindling agency connection with elders, providing cultural supplies and workshops, being more proactive, actively participating on committees and being committed to continually improve cultural programming).

- ✚ We have performance indicators that say we should have cultural programming, but it was lacking. This training has helped push me forward, to see what we need to do to support the youth in our programs.*
- ✚ We now hand out smudge kits to Aboriginal youth in our homes so that they have the tools to participate in their culture. Otherwise they can't afford to buy sage or sweet grass. We do workshops now, a dreamcatcher workshop, a moccasin making workshop. We have food celebrations... We said we were doing cultural practices but we weren't. Now we are. We have one cultural recreation group every three months. We have a newsletter. We take kids to sun dances.*
- ✚ We are connecting youth to Aboriginal resources more. We went to the Elbow River Lodge. We're better at referring kids to elders if they need that. We've added cultural consideration questions to our intake forms, for all cultures.*
- ✚ One thing I'm doing differently is removing barriers for youth to access their cultural practices. Before I was making excuses to not do things, but since then I'm finding a way to do it. I'm taking kids to sweats, or if it's a youth who wants to go to church, I'm more likely to make it happen now...For example, a kid voiced his need to connect with his Siksika culture and we were going to have to split the team up, which normally we try not to do. But we made it happen and split the team to take him to a sweat. I'm just supporting those moves now...I've adopted a Blackfoot way of smudging, now more intentional with how I set up that up. I'm aware that some kids have*

Christian background so not forcing anything, respecting other cultures. I'm more intentional in how I set that up. Reg modeled that very well.

- ✚ It was reassuring to know some of the things we do are helpful for all children. At the training they did some things that we do here in condensed form. We do an eight-hour cultural sensitivity training. Imagine how hard it is to study Indigenous world view in eight hours! But nice to know. We do everything in the context of relationship. We have always tried to make sure kids keep their relationship to their culture. That is part of how Reg talked about learning. We missed the first day of invitation into relationship. We work in circle, use the talking stick. The written part, care plans, the way we talk to our staff, all of it has to do with relationship. The focus on culture and history. It was confirming and encouraging to know that things we are already doing are on the right track. Reg encouraged us that way, to make sure kids keep up their relationship to their own culture. I feel more determined to keep emphasizing this. It's not just a 'pillar' that the government writes about. It's real life that we do.*
- ✚ I refer people for cultural support more. I'm more patient and listen better. Now I let them take over and give them more time to figure things out. Just more understanding of why they don't trust your ideas. Building trust now is what I understand needs to be done. Now that I have knowledge I think I understand more.*

Advocating for change/being an ally: Participants described “not opting out” and the concept of being an ally. Many said that they were better able to advocate for change because of their understanding of the parallel teachings. Examples of advocacy included: advocating for access to relevant cultural programming, advocating for the Cultural Solutions training to be provided to more staff, and advocacy for an Indigenous approach to program evaluation.

- ✚ The biggest thing I came away with is to know how to be an ally. I hang that ally poster very proudly.*
- ✚ Advocating for change in a huge organization like (my agency), constantly pushing against that system is discouraging. For me, participating brought me hope. Seeing other people working towards social change and realizing there's allies in that. It helped me not to feel so discouraged and ignited my passion to keep advocating for change.*
- ✚ I reported back that we need this training here in my agency, so that we could have a conversation about it. We think we know but we don't really know. We're not very inclusive of Aboriginal people in our agency. People are afraid to be accountable. There is so much responsibility.*

- ✚ *Related back to my work, I am understanding people for who they are, valuing people for who they are, and who I am. I'm committed to not abdicating responsibility. I'm not opting out of the conversation anymore. We all have Indigenous roots, when we practiced oral traditions. It's just way further back.*
- ✚ *The difference is how I show up now, with these Aboriginal teams and in general. I'm a better advocate because I understand the importance of making parallels...I find myself able to help others in a non-judgmental way.*
- ✚ *I now advocate more strongly for a more Indigenous approach to evaluation of our programs. Right now it's very western, surveys mostly. How do you quantify an elder teaching? I believe we can evaluate but just need to get away from doing a survey. Not a scale from 1-10, but talking, asking questions on the impact it had on who you are. Funders want percentages. I advocate to funders on methods, and also want to figure out how to find the data and quantify it.*
- ✚ *I feel more a part of the conversation with other agencies. I can contribute and we can work toward change. I don't think I will stop advocating. It is now a part of what I bring to the table. I may not feel personally connected to the cultural practices but I understand their importance and I advocate for them and make sure they happen for our staff.*
- ✚ *(Re: advocating for more people to take this training) One other person has taken the training so we have a good conversation. I think the fear for people is that this training will be the same Aboriginal awareness training they've taken in the past, because the description just doesn't capture how life changing it was.*
- ✚ *There is (an agency) Aboriginal Committee which we as RNs now sit on, to see how we can incorporate cultural care and practices. I was the only nurse out of three to go, so I shared what I learned with the team and we've made it one of our agency goals to serve Aboriginal youth better. We presented it to our managers and we keep reiterating that we could do more. We made a PowerPoint presentation and presented it to management, so we're advocating for more cultural sensitivity, on top of our roles as nurses. Especially with getting consent for meds. We approach it differently, particularly with kids from the NWT or Nunavut who are already going through culture shock. We frame it differently. We talk about healing rather than about fixing behaviours. We ask: do you have an elder or other practices that you'd like instead?*
- ✚ *Being passionate about the issues and concerns. Being excited and fighting for things. The training with staff teams I couldn't have done (without this and previous training). To talk about language, colonization, being an ally. I have partnered with a woman here who is Blackfoot...In Calgary, because of the Blackfoot focus, before this training, have found it difficult to have the same coming together. Dr. Crowshoe has an amazing reputation. The agency was very supportive of me attending again. I have a director who shares my passions.*

Increased connections/inclusivity/listening: Participants described changes in the type and nature of their connections with other people, increased understanding and appreciation of diversity, and increased inclusivity and active listening. Examples included better connections with Indigenous families and coworkers; more partnering with other agencies; recognition that Indigenous staff need to be involved in decisions more; more attention to trying to hear people's stories ("who are you and where do you come from?"); recognition of the need to be more inclusive; looking through a different lens; increased awareness and respect for different cultures; and better understanding of diversity (there is no single Indigenous culture).

- ✚ *Professionally, I try to look through a different lens in one-on-ones with clients. I try to hear their story and ask who they are and where they come from. It's easier to connect with them and it breaks down walls between us.*
- ✚ *With three kids (at the agency), my perception is that me taking interest in who they are, not their past, not what they've done, has made it so that when things get difficult they gravitate towards you because they feel like you're seeing them.*
- ✚ *In my professional life, I'm more proactive in helping improve the quality of Aboriginal programming. I attend meetings and I'm more involved. I am more eager to be involved.*
- ✚ *Professionally, my work on the (reserve) has improved. I've made more connections with people and I'm doing more family support. I've been asked to partner with joint therapy sessions, opportunities that hadn't opened up before...My bond with my Aboriginal counterpart has increased. I've taken action on issues that are unfair, up the levels, for kids that are being mistreated by the system. I'm doing other work on coalitions.*
- ✚ *Professionally it helped me work with Aboriginal kids and families and understanding the difference between the Blackfoot Nations. I ask questions in a different way now. A lot of times meds are being pushed on people. I understand now that for them it's really more about healing the whole person. We can work together with the family to get to the real issue and not just always push meds.*

Changes to care plans/forms (or the recognition that many forms comes from a western world view and the implications of this reality): Some participants described changes to forms or care plans at their agencies. For example, adding "meeting with elder" as part of the care plan, specifying where a youth comes from (recognizing that there is not just one Indigenous culture), adding cultural considerations to intake forms and care plans.

- ✚ *It added on. I've spent quite a bit of time with a Blackfoot elder, so I already had an understanding of their ways and set-up of communities. I am able to work with them in a more respectful way of how they want their children to be served. I'm able to ask (the elder) better*

questions. It eliminates my own assumptions about First Nations culture, how diversified it is. We now distinguish which First Nation a youth belongs to in our Care Plan. (My colleague) has actually developed an Aboriginal awareness training. We had already been looking at our care plans. Now we know the elder and when he meets with the kids, we incorporate that into the care plan. When kids come into care our goal is to get them back into their own community.

✚ *What struck me was that Reg referred to white people as coming from different tribes. He made brilliant parallels. It made me realize that our forms and our processes need to allow for personal songs, if we're trying to break down barriers. Our forms right now are very European. Just your name. Not who you are. We need to allow for people to communicate how they are comfortable. Small steps, bringing it to conversation in a board room, causing a pause for people to realize maybe we're caught in our own lens. But influence at that level takes a lot of time.*

Increased patience/empathy/understanding of intergenerational trauma: Some participants described increased patience and empathy when working with Indigenous families as a result of learning about intergenerational trauma (e.g., less blame for sometimes bad decisions, more understanding).

✚ *This training brought a layer of understanding especially around Intergenerational trauma. I want to understand how our staff are being cared for. We need to ensure that they are well so they can provide support for children and families. I recognize they need to be included more. So I've been looking at where can I say 'I'm not going to make a decision, I'm going to involve Aboriginal staff.' That can be hard especially in management. For example, consulting on where teepees will go.*

✚ *I do a lot more listening, trying to understand who they are, where they come from. I am way more understanding. I'm being more vulnerable with them, more open to really listen to what they're saying and what they're not saying. Now I know about the intergenerational trauma. I'm not just blaming them for their sometimes bad decisions. My understanding is more rooted in history. It really changed things for me. I'm more empathetic.*

Catalyst for more learning/desire to create change/pursuing next steps/personal changes: Some participants had not yet made direct changes in their professional practice, but were making changes in their personal lives and continued to search for more information. There were common themes of self-discovery and pursuit of knowledge, being more present in the moment, sharing information with family and friends, personal growth and healing, talking more about one's own culture, and an ongoing journey of self-exploration regarding "who am I and where do I come from?".

✚ *Personally, the training was right before the election and it made me think about what I value in the leaders of my country...and it influenced how I voted.*

- ✦ *I'm talking about my own culture, my practice, my ceremonies more with everybody now. I'm not keeping my Indigenous ceremony side specific to my Indigenous community and my white side to my white community.*
- ✦ *It was a catalyst to pursue more learning and experience and work towards change. I started to think, what can I do in my world to create some change? I find myself now pursuing knowledge.*
- ✦ *In my personal life I find myself taking that line from The Making of Treaty 7 very seriously: 'We are all treaty people'.*
- ✦ *My ability to understand people has changed, and I realize it's only the tip of the iceberg. It opened an appetite to learn more. I wish I'd had this training 20 years ago.*
- ✦ *I share a lot of what I've learned. I have three kids. I talk about it and how it has impacted me. I recommend the training to anyone I work with.*
- ✦ *Pursuing is a good word...I feel I need to go back to school, because I'm going to become an expert on reconciliation. I feel that I've lived my life up until this point looking at how that is...When I find myself in places like this as the only Indigenous person speaking from an Indigenous perspective and sharing the knowledge, I see it really is about sharing. Because we're all here and more people are coming from other places that are suffering in their own ways but they should have to learn about this land as well. And so that reconciliation part of it really is the key. There have been times in my life that I have been really angry and racist as well because I feel like so much has been ripped out and kept away from me. I've learned in my life that anger is a stepping stone to another place. And now we find ourselves in this reconciliation era... There were over 500 elders that I interviewed about their trauma. I carry a lot of those stories and atrocities...When we talk about things being historical, they are not historical. They are still occurring and happening but so many people don't know about them. I think what I felt so conflicted about after our training was because how do I get into this again? What do I do? I felt angst. It is about getting recognition in order to do the work that I want to do. I want to be a colonial theorist, an expert in reconciliation. I have the knowledge and experience.*

Following are examples of participant comments regarding the potential of the learning opportunity to impact practice in Calgary and Southern Alberta:

- ✚ **Huge potential.** *Having ceremony and elders and allies in the room holds us accountable. You can't get rid of the ally in the room. The training gets rid of the perception of a single story, a stereotype of what First Nations people are that leads to people avoiding the culture. An important piece of this training was talking about spirituality. We are not going to get anywhere if we don't start working together. So ceremony, smudging, circle, face painting, the more the better. I go to any Aboriginal training I can because it's important to understand all different First Nations. Hopefully this training expands to be bigger. So far they've involved Cree and Blackfoot teachings, which is good. One type of teaching is not enough.*
- ✚ **Great potential** *to make change by eliminating fear related to racist thoughts. If people have less fear and opportunities to be a part of the community, that would make huge change. This training bridges gaps, and helps you see these things are not archaic. I loved how we talked about prayers, paralleling another way of praying.*
- ✚ *Many Aboriginal people have worked with agencies for a few decades now, trying to communicate the importance of understanding cultural philosophy and practice. **It is so powerful for our coworkers to come in and experience it with us.** It gives more value to what we've said about cultural knowledge. It allows you to come closer to someone else's cultural perspective. You can't go back once you've experienced it. You're different. It will free people up to say more. Hopefully it means we don't have to keep selling the idea. It will help people understand and come to love these things themselves and embrace their own cultures and talk to their kids about it. It will help people not just be behavioural scientists, but to bring their spiritual selves and whole self to interactions. It will give people more joy in their work because if they don't experience culture and have to write it into their care plan, it's a burden to them, just platitudes and sentences. Training opens it up for people doing the work, so the care plan is more caring...It makes my job easier as the Aboriginal Resource person, now that non-Indigenous people have open hearts and minds. It's a post-TRC world, people have been asked by survivors to do things to honour...If they don't do this training they won't know where to start. We need ways for Native and non-Native people to carry on together. Training gives people a personal vision of how to relate to the TRC.*
- ✚ *Workshops like this add another voice to things I've heard before. It is important. It wasn't all new information but it was critical to hear it again from somebody else. The strength of (colleague's) program is experiential participation in ceremony on the land. The changes are huge. **There is no limit to the impact courses like this could have.** The only limit is how deeply participants integrate the experience into their lives. I would hope entire agencies could participate. It was a little expensive to send all of our staff to, and it would be extraordinarily valuable to send all of our staff. It would be awesome to find a way to make this affordable as a*

full agency experience. The reach would be much stronger. A huge addition to impact on the province.

- ✚ **There's a lot of potential to do that.** *The only hesitation is who is going to the training and are they open to what they are going into? They may be a very influential person, but if they're not open it won't change them. Ultimately that's the hope, but people have to have the potential as well. I left feeling that all of our VPs need to go to this, but that would just never happen because it's four days. And to have the impact it has it needs to be four days. I realized right away that it would not have had the impact it did if it was every Friday for four weeks.*
- ✚ **The potential to change is huge.** *I wish I had had that training when I was a case worker. It changes how you communicate. It would have been profound to be able to talk differently to the people I was working with. Equally so, our work (in government) would be in changing the forms to support that practice.*
- ✚ **I think everyone should have to take this.** *And I think we need to make sure elders are teaching those trainings. They can't be one hour, it needs to be a week long. Because if you're doing something for a day you just walk away without being changed. They presented things we could actually do in our jobs. Anyone working with Aboriginal people needs to have this level of training. There has to be more training like this...I still feel like I only hit the tip of the iceberg, and I'm looking to understand more. Sometimes people just sweep it under the rug and don't talk about what happened in our country. In this field, you need something more in-depth like this.*
- ✚ **I think it has tremendous ability to change practice.** *But not if the impact has to be run through the sieve of quantifiable western based impact. The way it impacts people doesn't lend itself to that very well.*
- ✚ **Absolutely.** *I don't think anyone could take this training and have it not change things they do professionally and personally.*
- ✚ **If it keeps happening it would.** *It would pick up speed and it'll be talked about. People would be advocates for this training in their own agencies. Especially with it being one of the pillars that Children and Family Services has identified, it's a good time right now.*
- ✚ **I think it has a lot of potential.** *I hope that more people have a chance to take the training. I would like to see more people involved with legislation and policy taking the training. Hopefully there can be more funding and the opportunity for them to do so.*

seasons, etc.). For example: *“I’d recommend to have more elders in the room. More people who live it. I would love to hear a younger person’s perspective who is really stepping into their culture. Elders-in-training. Rose’s grandkids were there. It would have been good to hear their perspectives, to have them share their life. I’d love to spend more time with the elders and learn more, like learn to hunt ethically.”*

- ✚ **Provide more opportunity to discuss next steps and follow-up** (strategies for how to apply the learning in practice). For example: *“We did have an afternoon on strategies, but I would’ve liked to spend more time on that. I’d like to see them bring in people who have used our agencies and asked what their experience is like. I wonder what the people we are serving think.”*
- ✚ **Expand to include other nations** (e.g., Stony, Cree, Sarsi);
- ✚ **Provide recommended materials to review in advance** (e.g., reading material, videos) and time to reflect on material (e.g., homework);
- ✚ **Make it more accessible and broadly available** (e.g., make it available to more staff, encourage VPs and senior leadership to attend; *“it would be great to see this training move into the educational system, at all levels”*). Another participant emphasized that the training should be ongoing and broadly available: *“Thinking about cultural solutions, most training has no real empathetic connection to what’s going on, no pay-off in understanding what history is about, no personalization of who this happened to. People have never heard an elder talk about residential school, and the stories were re-traumatizing for the people telling them. This training was different. To hear this information, this was essential. This training should be ongoing for all of you who work with Aboriginal people. It shouldn’t be a one-off four-day thing.”*
- ✚ **Change the advertising/promotional information used to describe the learning opportunity.** For example: *“I’d recommend changing the material advertising this course because nothing in the write-up comes close to what the actual experience is. It is a completely different way of looking at life. The description did not capture it.”*

perspective with Liza. Having the ceremony and elders and allies in the room holds us all accountable. You can't get rid of the ally in the room."

- ✚ **Learning in the context of relationship:** face-to-face; providing an opportunity to get to know other participants; personal sharing and vulnerability of other participants (unique, doesn't usually happen during training); voluntary participation (not forced to be there); interactivity/connection; group size (too large a group might hinder the creation of the relational, safe space). For example: *"Cultural learning is not cost effective. Any serious learning is in the context of relationship. It is essential to be person-to-person. All First Nation languages were oral. They are not meant to be written. Staying in the territory geographically is important, talking about why that's important."*
- ✚ **Learning about trauma and brain science;**
- ✚ **Experiential learning, teaching style (circle process, inclusivity, non-hierarchical);**
- ✚ **Oral culture/story-telling;**
- ✚ **Parallel teachings and inclusivity;**
- ✚ **Sharing food;**
- ✚ **Incorporating song;**
- ✚ **Held on Blackfoot land and including culturally specific information** (e.g., understanding the Blackfoot practice to change location of sweat lodge);
- ✚ **Drumming circle;**
- ✚ **Duration;** and
- ✚ **Link with current Canadian political context.**

- ✚ **Advocating for colleagues and more people to have the same learning opportunity** (emphasizing the need for more funding and support to take the training). For example: *“I wonder if there’s a way to get elders to pass on the knowledge. For agencies, the reality of economics of taking the staff off the floor for the money we get for training, it’s impossible. We need more money for training. People need to have the experience for themselves.”*

One participant, an Indigenous woman, stated strongly that there is an **urgency for action**.

*I have a sense of urgency. Reg and other elders are aging out. Canadians working with Aboriginal people will pay for it if we don’t do this learning now...Again, I feel **an urgency for this to be done now** because we have the elders who can do it and because the Canadian public is ready to listen because of the TRC. In Treaty 6 there was a line that asked when catastrophe struck, will you help us? And then the buffalo died. And the government brought in supplies but they built stockades around it and wouldn’t let the people access it. **Don’t build stockades around this knowledge.***

8.0 Summary and Implications

The following table includes a summary of findings by evaluation question, and where relevant, implications within each category.

Table 2. Summary and Implications of Evaluation Findings

Evaluation Question	Summary and Implications
<p>1. What, if any, difference did the experience make for participants?</p>	<p>The learning opportunity made a difference for participants in multiple ways: personally, professionally, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically (see Question 2 for more detailed examples of types of changes reported). This finding has implications for considering ongoing training and learning needs. Recent recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate emphasize the need for this type of training.</p>
<p>2. To what extent did the experience impact participants mentally, emotionally, spiritually and/or physically?</p> <p>a. Mental: What did participants learn?</p> <p>b. Emotional: What was the emotional impact of the experience?</p> <p>c. Spiritual: What difference did it make on a spiritual level?</p> <p>d. Physical (Practice/Behaviour Change): What difference did it make on a physical/behavioural level? For example, are participants doing anything differently in their work with children and families?</p>	<p>What did participants learn?</p> <p>Numerous changes in knowledge, attitudes and awareness were reported by participants. Participants learned about history, trauma, and diversity within Indigenous culture. For those who already knew the history, hearing it again and from the personal perspective of an elder was very meaningful and brought a new level of understanding.</p> <p>The experience contributed to increased cultural understanding on many levels. For example, participants said they learned about the importance of the oral tradition (as a result of experiencing it – learning by doing); the role and importance of ceremony (learning the protocols and meaning of ceremonies, song, drumming, how to participate in smudging); understanding of intergenerational trauma; the importance of connection to geographic location and the land; a new lens to look through (Indigenous worldview) and the ability to identify when looking through your own lens and beliefs and not impose them on others. Participants also learned about parallel teachings and said that this helped to make a difference in how they approach their work. Finally, the experiential nature of the training helped to integrate participants’ previous knowledge.</p> <p>What was the emotional impact of the experience?</p> <p>Participants experienced a wide range of emotions during and after the four-day learning opportunity. For example, some participants reported going through</p>

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	<p>sadness, shame, anger, frustration, and then hopefulness. It was emphasized that the teaching style did not use shame or blame, and that this helped participants to feel welcome, safe and vulnerable. Some participants reported feeling isolated going back to work with people who had not done the training. There was a feeling of motivation to act on what they had learned and participants said they were more inclined to not “opt-out”. There was increased commitment to being an ally and an advocate, and increased confidence in that role.</p> <p>What difference did it make on a spiritual level? The experience had a spiritual impact for many participants. For example, it provided ideas for how to incorporate spirituality and ceremonies into programming for Indigenous youth and families, and strengthened the belief that providing these opportunities is important. One participant, for example, described how such opportunities might not be provided because of logistical and practical challenges. He learned the importance of providing these opportunities for youth and gained insights about how to overcome the challenges. Some participants said that the experience deepened their connection with nature or had contributed to introspection/connection with self (Who am I? Where do I come from?). A few participants said that although they did not consider themselves spiritual, the experience was respectful, not imposing of any beliefs, and that it was an honour to be “witness to a lived spirituality”. Some participants said that the whole training was a powerful, personal spiritual experience.</p> <p>What difference did it make on a physical/behavioural level? For example, are participants doing anything differently in their work with children and families? Participants reported a range of practice and behaviour changes as a result of the four-day learning opportunity. It is clear that the experience made a difference, and that participants were beginning to apply what they learned in practice. Examples of changes included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ facilitating access to cultural programming; ✚ advocating for change and being an ally; ✚ increased connections; ✚ changes to care plans;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ increased patience as a result of understanding intergenerational trauma; and ✚ personal changes.
<p>3. How did participants characterize the differences and similarities between “Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions Training” and other types of learning opportunities?</p>	<p>Overall, participants described more differences than similarities when asked to characterize the similarities and differences between the four-day learning opportunity and other types of training.</p> <p>Some of the similarities included use of PowerPoint (although only used sparingly), some of the structure, and some of the content (e.g., information about residential schools).</p> <p>The most common response was that “everything was different” when comparing the learning opportunity with other types of training. Differences included both the process (how the training was delivered – experiential, using circle process, integrating ceremony, story-telling, oral tradition, non-hierarchical, inclusive, longer duration) and the content (what was taught – including parallel teachings, how to be an ally, and sharing of personal stories). Both the process and content helped to strengthen participants’ understanding of history and current context.</p> <p>The implications of these findings are that the learning opportunity offers something valuable and uniquely different from the status quo.</p>
<p>4. From the perspective of participants, what key elements of the experience should stay the same? What could be improved?</p>	<p>Key elements that should stay the same:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Inclusion and integration of ceremonies; ✚ Inclusion of elders and all the speakers; ✚ Including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (showing what it means to be an ally); ✚ Learning in the context of relationship; ✚ Learning about trauma and brain science; ✚ Experiential learning, teaching style (circle process, inclusivity, non-hierarchical); ✚ Oral culture/story-telling; ✚ Parallel teachings and inclusivity; ✚ Sharing food; ✚ Incorporating song; ✚ Held on Blackfoot land and including culturally specific information; ✚ Drumming circle; ✚ Duration; ✚ Link with current Canadian political context.

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	<p>Recommendations for improvement/considerations for future programming:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ More natural setting (recommended by participants in the first location); ✚ Include even more stories and teaching from different perspectives; ✚ Provide more opportunity to discuss next steps and follow-up; ✚ Expand to include other nations; ✚ Provide materials to review in advance; ✚ Make it more accessible and broadly available (<i>“this training should be ongoing”</i>); ✚ Change the advertising/promotional information used to describe the learning opportunity (<i>“nothing in the write-up comes close to what the actual experience is. It is a completely different way of looking at life.”</i>) <p>This feedback may provide useful considerations for future learning opportunities (location, funding, inclusion of colleagues, etc.).</p>
<p>5. To what extent does the learning opportunity have the potential to impact change in practice in Calgary and Southern Alberta?</p>	<p>Participants stated that the learning opportunity had tremendous potential to impact practice in Calgary and Southern Alberta. Some participants suggested that the impact would be greater if more people (e.g., entire agencies) could participate in the training; however, the expense and duration were considered challenges to more widespread uptake (cost of training and challenges for staff to spend so much time away from the office). Although it presented a challenge to participation, the duration was also considered a key element of success (could not do this in just one day). Participants expressed appreciation for the subsidy provided through Align (helped to ease the financial burden, although more funding was still required). The length and style of training (four days, immersive, experiential, involvement of elders) were considered key to its potential to impact practice. Participants emphasized that more funding is needed to allow more people to access the learning opportunity.</p> <p>The implications of these findings overall suggest that the learning opportunity resonated strongly with participants and there is interest in making it more widely available.</p>

Concluding Comments

It has been an honour and a privilege to listen to the stories shared by participants in the experiential learning opportunity, *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions*. Their openness and vulnerability and willingness to share the impact of the experience was greatly appreciated.

One message stands out and seems to convey the spirit of what many participants shared: **“Don’t build stockades around this knowledge.”** *Allying with Indigenous Peoples: Cultural Solutions* has offered a unique, experiential learning opportunity that has resulted in profound personal and professional changes. This opportunity should continue to be made available, building on the feedback and ideas shared throughout the process and the evaluation.