

# Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2021-2022

ANGELINA HEER, MASTER OF EDUCATION COUNSELLING

*Healing through a living Aboriginal research methodology****Description of Research***

Aboriginal peoples remain over-represented in the Canadian prison system<sup>i</sup>. The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of including Aboriginal communities in the planning and delivery of their own criminal justice services, and that successful reintegration for Aboriginal offenders is dependent on the strengths found in culture and community<sup>ii</sup>. However, despite efforts for greater community involvement in correctional programming, readmission of Aboriginal offenders into the federal prison system remains elevated<sup>iii</sup>. Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) mission statement indicates that CSC will contribute to public safety by encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens<sup>iv</sup>. However, a recent systematic review concludes that there is no high-quality evidence to show the impact on mental health and well-being from interventions specific to Indigenous prisoners that are currently being delivered under the dominant Western model of health and justice<sup>v</sup>. If rates at which Aboriginal offenders are returning to prison remains elevated, it is important we understand what Correctional Service Canada is failing to consider in the interventions provided. The objective of this research is to identify meaningful reintegration programs that can guide Indigenous offenders on their healing journey. The purpose of this research is to reduce prison recidivism rates. In collaboration with traditional Mi'kmaw Elder Noel Milliea, this research is guided by an Aboriginal wholistic theoretical orientation. This study aims to create a safe space for participants to share stories about their experiences with programming. Participants will include Aboriginal adults who have been released from a federal prison, and currently reside in Wabanaki territory. Participants will be recruited through non-random convenience sampling. The Medicine Wheel Framework is the Aboriginal methodology that will be used for this research<sup>vi</sup>.

***Research Outcomes***

I am currently in the process of writing my MEd research ethics proposal, with an anticipated completion date of February 2023. As a counsellor-in-training, group facilitator, and friend, I have developed relationships with Aboriginal brothers and sisters who have experienced incarceration. These relationships have led me to reflect on my own biases as it relates to crime and punishment in Canada. My traditional teacher shared with me that colonization brought with

it many losses for our people. As someone who struggled over the years to find meaning and purpose in my own life, studying mainstream counselling theories has left me feeling ill-equipped to have cultural conversations that facilitate healing from trauma due to colonialization. Counselling practitioners have an ethical and social responsibility to increase their competencies when working with Indigenous clients with diverse life experiences, including life after prison. This research has the potential to contribute to culturally sensitive counselling practices that will benefit health practitioners, families, communities, and individuals who are seeking meaning and purpose in their own life, and the acquisition of knowledge that may be used by communities to shape the development of future policy.

### ***Knowledge Sharing***

- Heer, A. (2022, June 14). *Exploring the physical realm of the medicine wheel and its relationship to the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian prisons*. [PowerPoint Presentation]. Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research National Coordinating Centre's National Gathering of Graduate Students (NGGS), Dakota Dunes Resort from June 14-16 [In-person].
- Heer, A. (2022, March 19). *Healing the Wounded Spirit: A journey into Canada's justice System*. [PowerPoint Presentation]. 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS), University of British Columbia [Virtual]
- Heer, A. (2022, March 02). *Healing the Wounded Spirit: A journey into Canada's Justice System*. [Discussion Presentation]. Works in Progress Session (WIPS), University of New Brunswick, Faculty of Education [Virtual].

### ***Completed Project Deliverables***

- This Indigenous research is guided by an Aboriginal wholistic theoretical orientation which requires me to approach this work with much care. Through this lens, I am an active participant in this research process which carries with it a responsibility to all my relations. The completed project deliverable to date has been me learning how to navigate my own healing journey while participating in a Eurocentric research process.

### ***Forthcoming Project Deliverables***

- Continue completed project deliverables.
- Complete my MEd Thesis research ethics proposal (February 2023)

### ***Activities Outside of Your Research***

- Group facilitator at Apatawsuwikuwam "Come Back to Life Lodge" (2020 to present).
- Individual counselling provider for Healing Spaces Program at Under One Sky Friendship Centre (2021 to present).
- Nutsihpiluwewicik Director of Programs, Faculty of Nursing, UNB (2020 to present).
- Instructor for N2134 Indigenous Perspectives on Health and Wellness, UNB (Fall 2021, Fall 2022).

- Nutsihpiluwewicik Admission Pathway Working Group, UNB (2022 to present).
- National Indigenous Advisory Group, Medical Admissions (2022 to present).
- Saint John Indigenous Health Circle, UNBSJ (2022 to present).
- Reconciliation Committee, Faculty of Nursing, UNB (2021 to present).
- Marketing Committee, Faculty of Nursing, UNB (2021 to present).
- BN Admissions Committee, Faculty of Nursing, UNB (2020 to present).
- BN Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Faculty of Nursing, UNB (2020 to present).
- Project Advisory Committee for the CASN and CINA Annual Indigenous Nursing Student and Faculty Survey (2021).
- Editor for 2021 Annual Education Graduate Student Conference Proceedings.
- Committee Member for Annual Education Graduate Student Conference (2019 to present).

### ***Future Research Plans***

I hope to share my MEd research findings with the people who are involved in the project, First Nation communities, and organizations that offer justice and correctional programming. In addition, I would like to present this work at health education conferences.

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> Zinger, I. (2018). *Office of the Correctional Investigator: Annual Report 2017-2018*. Office of the Correctional Investigator. Government of Canada.  
<https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20172018-eng.aspx>
- <sup>ii</sup> Solicitor General Canada. (1975). *Native Peoples and Justice: Reports on the National Conference and the Federal-Provincial Conference on Native Peoples and the Criminal Justice System, both in Edmonton, Feb.35, 1975*. Ottawa.
- <sup>iii</sup> Zinger, I. (2018). *Office of the Correctional Investigator: Annual Report 2017-2018*. Office of the Correctional Investigator. Government of Canada.  
<https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20172018-eng.aspx>
- <sup>iv</sup> Correctional Service Canada. (2008 April 05). Commissioner's Directive 001 Mission, Values and Ethics Framework of the Correctional Service Canada.  
<https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/acts-and-regulations/001-cd-en.shtml#1>
- <sup>v</sup> Perdacher, E., Kavanagh, D., & Sheffield, J. (2019). Well-being and mental health interventions for indigenous people in prison: systematic review. *Bjpsych Open*, 5(6).  
<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2019.80>
- Atlantic Council for International Cooperation. (n.d.). *Medicine Wheel Evaluation Framework*. Atlantic Council for International Cooperation. <https://www.acic-caci.org/publications>