

A Mustard Seed of Hope:

Culturally grounded approaches within wraparound care for pregnant and parenting women dealing with substance use and trauma



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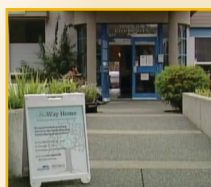
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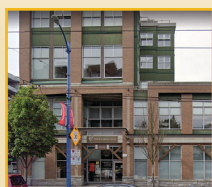
Introduction

Since the 1990s, a number of community-based, wraparound programs for pregnant or parenting women who have substance use and other concerns have emerged in Canada.

These 'one-stop', multi-service programs are a model of hope for health, wellness, and mother-child connection.



HerWay Home



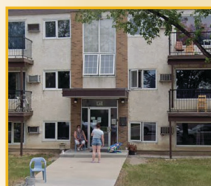
Sheway



Maxxine Wright



H.E.R.



Raising Hope



Mothering Project



Breaking the Cycle



Kids First

The booklet was produced through the **Co-Creating Evidence project¹ (CCE)** and is a **Thank You** to all the women who access these programs and the staff who care for them, supporting their healing journey. It describes the Indigenous cultural services provided by these programs, to honour this work and to inspire others who provide community-based programming in their work.

¹ To learn more about the Co-Creating Evidence project, visit: www.fasd-evaluation.ca

Background

Pregnancy is known to be a transformative time when a woman might contemplate change. Within many Indigenous cultures, the birth of a child is viewed as a gift of the creator, and pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing are sacred components of the life cycle.

Women's substance use is often linked to experiences of trauma and violence. Women's recovery is often linked to the kind of supports and services they receive and the strength and resilience of women wishing to make a change.

What is often overlooked when describing women seeking health and social care are their stories of resilience and survival. Each woman carries her own story, and sometimes it takes only a "mustard seed" of hope to begin a journey of healing.

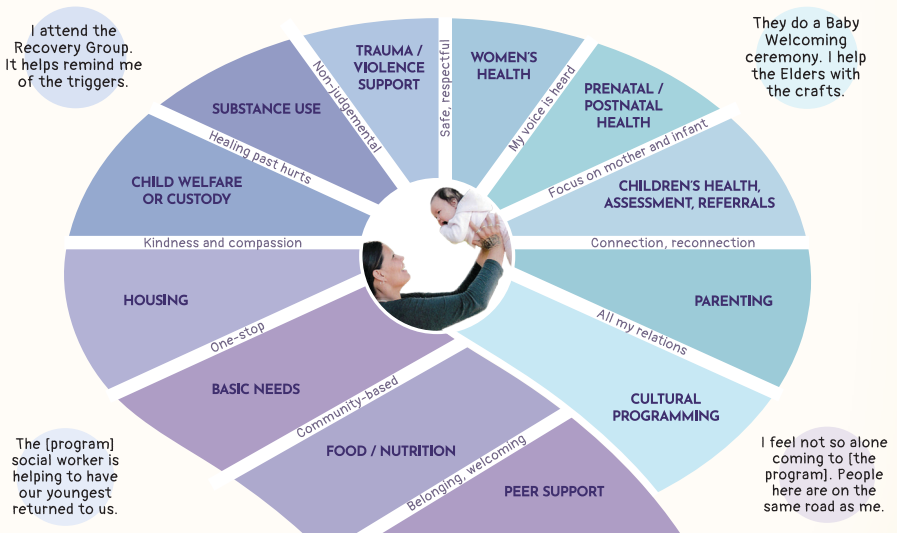


What is a wraparound program?

Wraparound programs bring multiple services together at one location or tailor services to holistically address co-occurring challenges.

The aim is to reduce barriers so that program participants do not have to make separate trips to different services for various needs. It's as if the services are “wrapped around” clients in ways that support them in many aspects of life.

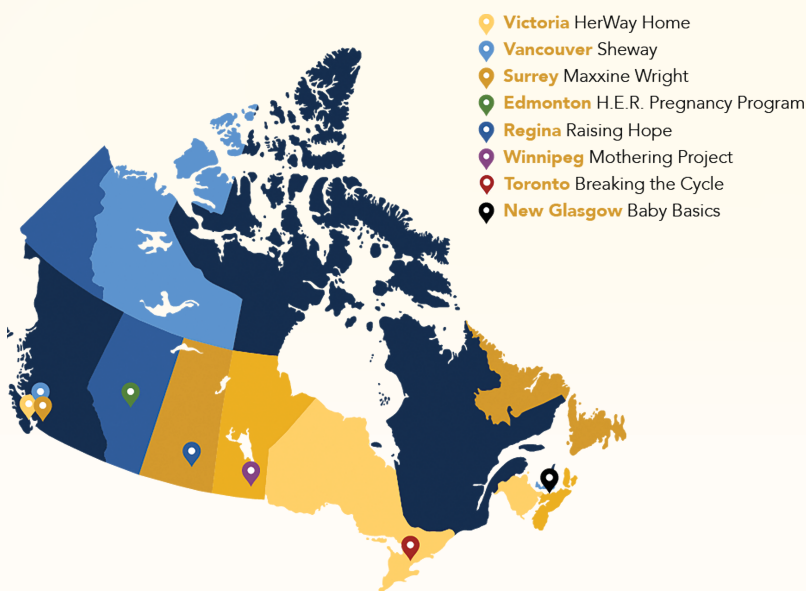
WRAPAROUND SERVICES FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING WOMEN WHO HAVE SUBSTANCE USE CONCERNS A MODEL OF HOPE FOR HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND MOTHER CHILD CONNECTION.



Learn more about the Co-Creating Evidence study here: www.fasd-evaluation.ca or contact notabenegroup@shaw.ca

Wraparound care in cities across Canada

In a Canadian study called **Co-Creating Evidence** (see fasd-evaluation.ca), pregnant and parenting women with substance use concerns from eight different programs spoke about the benefits of one-stop, wraparound services.



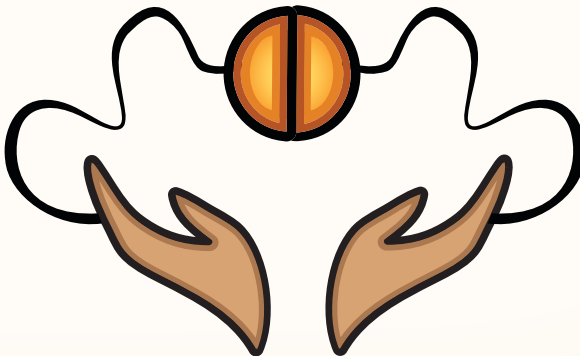
These mainly urban programs offer pregnant and parenting women and their families a variety of health and social services, including food and basic needs supports, health services, counselling, housing or referral to housing, referrals to other community services, support and advocacy related to child and family services, and cultural programming. Each of the programs involved in the study offer services that are uniquely its own.

For the programs involved in the study, it is both the multiple services and the way in which services and supports are provided that make a difference.

The programs' approaches include:

- ♥ being respectful and offering non-judgemental care
- ♥ following the lead of participants rather than deciding what is best for them
- ♥ employing harm reduction strategies
- ♥ building relationships to meet women where they are at in their journey, and
- ♥ understanding that substance use is closely linked to trauma and violence in the woman's past and current life situation.

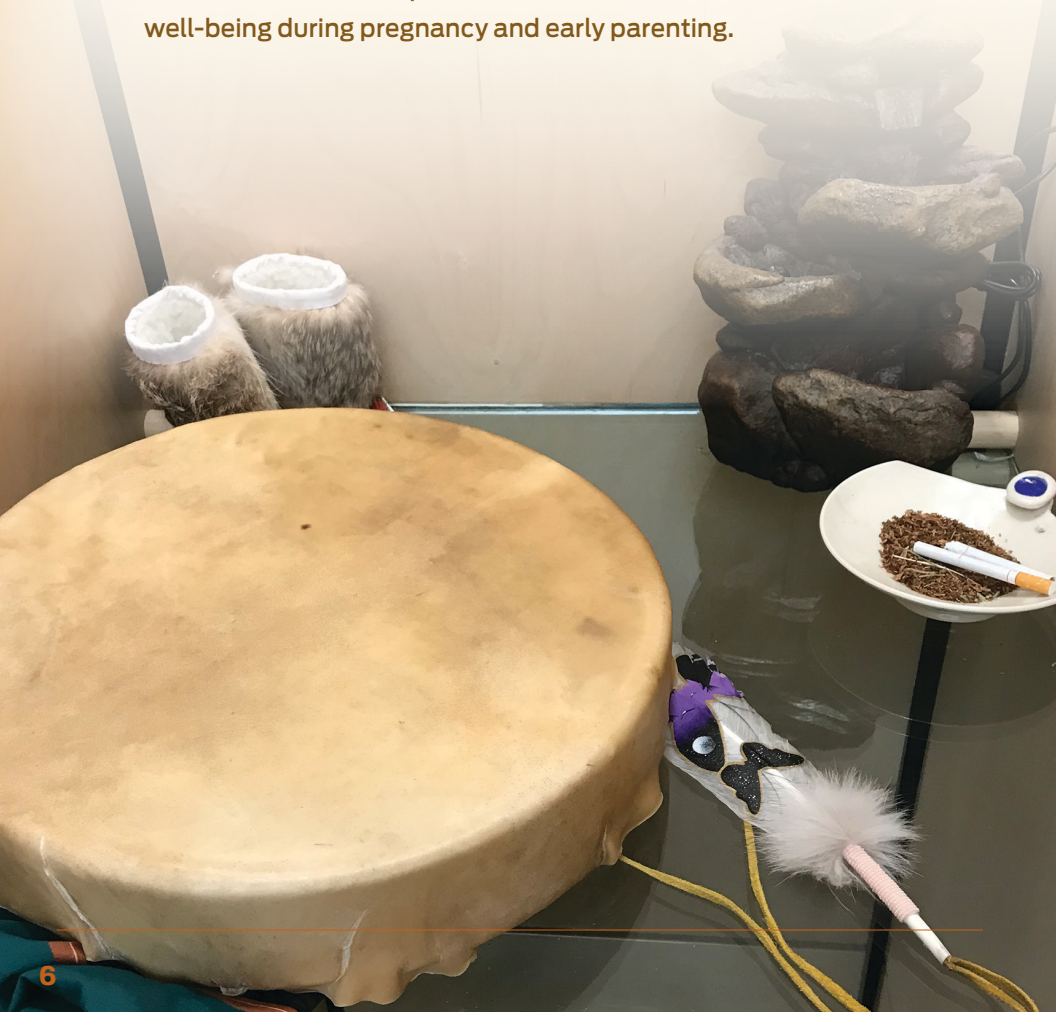
In developing culturally responsive programs for Indigenous women and their families, having knowledge about the community and connection to it along with a process that is Indigenous-led are important early steps.



Why focus on Indigenous cultural supports?

Indigenous people in Canada come from many cultures within the three main groups. First Nations, Métis and Inuit have local and regional differences in history, language, and culture. Indigenous people living in urban centres such as Vancouver, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, and Toronto come from all over Canada.

This booklet highlights three programs that demonstrated how culture could be an important feature in wholistic health and well-being during pregnancy and early parenting.



Indigenous approaches to well-being align with wraparound programming

The wholistic nature of wraparound services align with Indigenous approaches to wellness: all aspects of the person's life are considered rather than only one issue.



Anishinaabe nurse Rosella Kinoshameg

used the medicine wheel and the circle in teaching new mothers that everyone is born with sacred gifts. The circle symbolizes wholeness and interdependency. It is a resource that allows life to be viewed in a wholistic manner, and its teachings guide prospective mothers toward good health and harmony in life.



Métis physician Dr. Judith Bartlett

created a 16-point wellness framework that uses the circle to capture an Indigenous wholistic perspective of traditional wisdoms and interconnections². This framework is also presented in a Métis cultural framework using the Métis infinity symbol. Music, beadwork, and storytelling connect Métis wherever they are to Métis heritage, Métis Identity, and to each other.



The Inuit Mental Wellness Action Plan

takes a wholistic perspective including traditional knowledge and perspectives; Inuit identity is key³. Mental wellness is defined as “self-esteem and personal dignity flowing from the presence of harmonious physical, emotional, mental, spiritual wellness and cultural identity”.



In Canada, Indigenous societies have ancient teachings in considering the “whole” person in relation to each other, the land, air, water, the animals and plants, and the spirit world. All are one.

² Bartlett, J. (2005). Health and well-being for Métis women in Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96 (Supplement), S22-S27. doi: 10.1007/BF03405312

³ Alianait Inuit-specific Mental Wellness Task Group. (2009). *Alianait Inuit Mental Wellness Action Plan*. <https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Alianait-Inuit-Mental-Wellness-Action-Plan-2009.pdf>

Whether Inuit or Métis or First Nations, there exists a strong connection to the land that sustains wellness and Indigenous cultures.



The cultural programming found within wraparound programs often utilizes ceremony and activities that strengthen connection to land. Smudging, prayer, and on the land activities are examples.

The cultural programming reflects both the local Indigenous culture and the urban nature of the participants.

The role of culture in the well-being of Indigenous peoples has been widely documented in Canada and around the world. It is fundamental to Indigenous healing programs in Canada.

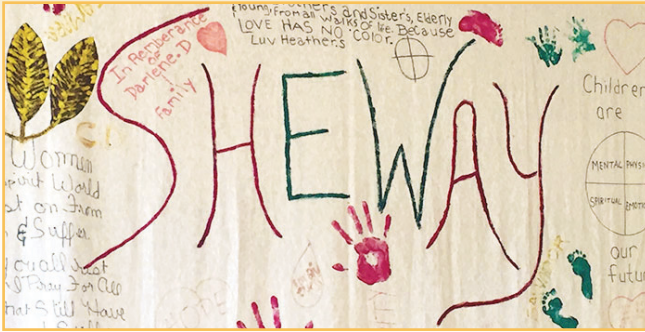
Similarly, cultural safety, as a guiding principle, stands alongside of and is woven into other core values common to these wraparound programs, including trauma-informed and harm reduction, and being client-centred. These guiding principles are braided together with non-judgemental service delivery by the program staff.

The concept of cultural safety and humility challenges health care providers to recognize that all are bearers of cultures and, importantly, that everyone needs to be aware of their own biases and assumptions. The key is to learn from the program participant, to talk with them, to build relationships, to build trust.



Highlights of Three Wraparound Programs

Sheway



Opening its doors in 1993, **Sheway** – located in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver – was the first ‘one-stop’ program of its kind in Canada. **Sheway’s** location led the program’s staff to deeply understand and respect Indigenous women.

On average, over two thirds of **Sheway’s** program participants are Indigenous.

An important feature of **Sheway** is supporting women’s self-determination; program participants choose the services they are interested in.

Cultural safety, trauma-informed practice, harm reduction, and being client-centred are deeply embedded into **Sheway’s** philosophy and approaches to working with program participants.

Indigenous cultural activities at **Sheway** include Baby Welcoming ceremonies, water and cedar ceremony, brushing, support and teachings, or sometimes just sitting with and supporting participants through grief and loss.





Sheway's Aboriginal Family Support Worker offers traditional Indigenous teachings and various cultural activities.

Food is shared through the daily lunch program, and extras are offered for breastfeeding mothers. Traditional foods such as salmon and bannock are served regularly with the lunch.



*Drumming
awakens the
spirit*

~ Sheway
Elder

Elders visit the program and provide spiritual support through ceremony and prayer, drumming and song. They are also a main support for the well-being of staff in difficult times.

During the timeframe of the Co-Creating Evidence project, the opioid and toxic drug epidemics intensified. To help staff and participants cope with their losses, Elders offered prayers and ceremonies along with sitting with staff or participants when needed.

Healthy Empowered Resilient (H.E.R.) Pregnancy Program



Culture is central to the **Healthy Empowered Resilient (H.E.R.) Pregnancy Program** in downtown Edmonton. During the timeframe of the study, about half of H.E.R. program participants, on average, identified as Indigenous. The program's core approaches include being trauma-informed and harm-reducing, and these are fully integrated with H.E.R.'s culturally grounded approach.

The majority of H.E.R.'s Outreach Workers are Indigenous women with lived experience, which gives hope to women that positive change is possible.



They let you know that you can do it, that you can be a good parent.

~ H.E.R. program participant

H.E.R.'s cultural programming is carried out largely through its partnership with Boyle Street Community Services, which employs Knowledge Keepers and offers the Indian Residential School Health Support program for residential school survivors and their families.



I don't refuse anyone. They're allowed to participate even if they're not substance-free.

~ Knowledge
Keeper
Boyle Street
Community
Services

The Knowledge Keepers invite women to do cultural practices such as smudging, picking medicines and crafts.

Knowledge Keepers do ceremonies and prayers and take women and children to sweats. All cultures are honoured, and no one is refused.

H.E.R. staff training includes cultural and traditional activities and ceremonies, such as sweats, medicine picking, and cultural events. Staff wellness includes being out on the land, allowing time for staff to re-centre and strengthen connections to one another.

Manito Ikwe Kagiikwe (Mothering Project)

The Manito Ikwe Kagiikwe (Mothering Project), attached to the Mount Carmel Community Health Centre in Winnipeg, weaves Indigenous knowledge alongside trauma-informed, harm reduction and women-centred approaches to maternal health care. The vast majority of program participants are Indigenous. At the same time, many women come to the program without strong connections to their culture.

A lot of Manito Ikwe Kagiikwe's programming focuses on or includes an Indigenous cultural component. The program has a kitchen, drop-in space, and a healing room where women can go for ceremony, circles, and smudging.

Drop-in groups provide opportunities for participants to develop a sense of community, talk informally and do crafts such as making drums, ribbon skirts, and dream catchers.



It is culturally-based recovery.

~ Manito
Ikwe Kagiikwe
Program
Participant



Ceremony includes smudging, drumming, songs, medicine picking, sweats, and the seven sacred teachings. For some program participants, the healing room was particularly valued.

Traditional teachings are shared during activities. Program participants enjoy doing cultural activities together with their child within a safe, welcoming environment.



I like the crafts and the smudge room. On especially hard days I can go there and have a smudge and it makes everything okay.

*~ Manito
Ikwe Kagiikwe
program
participant*



Wraparound programs engage in partnerships to strengthen cultural programming

For all eight programs involved in the **Co-Creating Evidence** study, partnerships have been key to the ability to deliver holistic, wraparound services.

Most commonly the programs have developed working relationships or partnerships with child welfare/child protection services, prenatal/postnatal health care services, specialized health services and addictions and mental health services.

These partnerships have enabled the programs to deliver an array of programs under one roof or to facilitate a smoother referral process between services.

Programs that didn't have culture as central to their model have developed relations with Indigenous organizations and service providers. This helps program participants to make cultural healing connections and program staff to learn more about cultural humility and safety.



How culturally safe approaches and Indigenous cultural programming make a difference

Cultural programming helped Indigenous women connect to the services, resulting in good outcomes, including women being able to parent their children and the women's children learning about and connecting with culture.

Program staff and partners benefited as well, receiving teachings and experiencing calming support, as well as training and opportunities to further their learning through participation in cultural ceremonies.



Connection/reconnection with culture as a part of the healing process

Women spoke of the ways in which taking part in cultural programming made a difference for them in their healing journey, including reawakening their knowledge of culture and traditional practices.



*I'll do drumming.
I talk with the Elder
and do smudging.
It is significant.
It enabled me to
talk about the
root causes of
my addictions.
It helped me to
reconnect with
culture and
spirituality.*

~ Program
Participant

*I go to cultural
events like sweats.
I went during my
pregnancy and now
I take my baby.
Cultural practice is
most important.*

~ Program
Participant

Improved access to non-stigmatizing health care

Pregnant women accessed prenatal care and connected with other services that they may have avoided because of stigmatizing treatment by care providers. Program staff and Elders offered guidance and encouragement, helping to reduce women's concerns. In the words of one Elder:



I help women to overcome anxiety about the health care system. I can bridge the notion of getting clinical help and break down their fear and the stigma of non-Native environments and the health care system.

~ Program Elder



Increased knowledge about cultural traditions and practices

The programs' use of traditional practices and having Indigenous staff helped everyone – non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike, staff and community partners – to grow and learn more about the traditions that were practiced by different cultural groups, and how certain roles were to be respected.

As well, in some instances, staff's engagement with community organizations led those partners to request more information about Indigenous culture and healing practices. This in turn helped make those spaces more accessible to program participants.



In my work outside of [the program], I'm being asked to do workshops on healing and the need to address trauma. Agencies are doing smudging. And other agencies are opening their doors to us and our clients.

~ Program Staff



Conclusion

Cultural programming helps build pride, self-esteem, and stronger Indigenous identity, which can help Indigenous women to connect with valuable services. This can lead to positive outcomes, including women being able to parent their children and women and their children learning about and connecting with culture. This booklet has described many ways that wraparound programs can and are offering cultural activities to achieve these outcomes.

In the longer term though, deeply rooted cultural programming within Indigenous-led programs is needed to nurture the health and well-being of mothers and babies.



*I believe that
the path to
reconciliation
and self-
determination is
healthy babies
and families.*

~ Marilyn
Van Bibber,
Northern
Tutchone



Acknowledgements



First and foremost, we hold our hands up in respect and gratitude to all the women who shared their stories with us as participants of the eight programs that took part in the study.

Your willingness to share your experiences and insights reflects your strength, courage and compassion. We have learned a lot from your wisdom.

We also would like to give huge thanks to the program managers and staff of the eight programs who volunteered to join us on this multi-site evaluation journey.

Your steadfast support of the program participants and children whom you serve, your unwavering belief in them, and your commitment to working collaboratively with your partners continually inspire us.



Download this booklet from: www.fasd-evaluation.ca