

# Supporting First Nations Rights to Mental Wellness – What is the Critical Path?

**Carol Hopkins, O.C., MSW, RSW, LL.D. (hons)**  
**CEO, Thunderbird Partnership Foundation**



**THUNDERBIRD**  
PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

# Learning objectives for the presentation:

- 1) Respecting the rights of Indigenous children requires a paradigm shift.
- 2) Reflecting on the paradigm shift will determine what is the critical path.



**THUNDERBIRD**  
PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

# What Space Have You Facilitated for Decolonization?

College members **do not discriminate** against anyone based on race, ethnicity, language, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, economic status, political affiliation or national origin.<sup>3</sup>



**THUNDERBIRD**  
PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

# Grounding the discussion in wellness

1. Place your feet firmly on the ground.
2. State: Today I am going to deepen my understanding
3. Take slow, deep breaths.
4. Find something in the space around you that can be used to help ground you
5. Remind yourselves that we are in a safe place: I can ask questions when I need to, I can take a break when needed, I can turn off my camera and go make some tea and come back.



<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/storyboot-workshop-teaches-moccasin-making-reconciliation-1.5621057>



**“The eye sees only  
what the mind  
is prepared  
to comprehend.”  
- Henri Bergson**

# Oshkawbaywis

Helper – to spirit, understanding all of life have spirit, with identity,  
belonging, meaning and purpose

Spirit centered helping



**THUNDERBIRD**  
PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

# Guidance on the Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, Metis Children, Youth and Families, Jan 2020

- The act sets out **National Standards**

**Defines "Best of the Indigenous Child".... differentiates from all children by emphasizing:**

- cultural continuity – essential for the wellbeing of the child
- Childs care **cannot contribute to assimilation or cultural destruction.**
- Substantive equality: **Must be able to access their rights.**
- Jurisdictional disputes **must not result in a gap in services** (Jordan's Principle in law)



# Abinoojii Inakonigewin – often interpreted as “Child Care Law”

**Touches the earth for  
the first time**





# Best Interest of Indigenous Child

- **Requires a new analysis of the super weighted factors:**
  - This means taking care of spiritual, physical, psychological, and social wellbeing (cultural continuity).
  - Emphasizing **must have ongoing relationship** with family, community, and culture & religious beliefs and land/territory (including extended family and culturally defined family) and language.



# Dressing Up Identity



# Language is the Foundation to Health Promotion

Manido Meness is an Ojibway term used for “beads” but its origin comes from the understanding that our physical and spiritual life is “strung” together by the Creator with “spirit seeds”

The spirit seeds that are strung together, physically and spiritually make up our unique identity, which is: our nation, spirit name, language, and from these comes our personality, characteristics, strengths, gifts and potential...



Indigenous culture is  
What has sustained us

Denied



Approved

# Priority in the Best Interest of the Indigenous Child - Prevention

- Includes pre-natal and pregnancy care – specialized care for example food, addiction treatment, medical, and planning for after birth such as placement planning
- Social economic conditions cannot be cause for apprehension: such as housing, poverty, clean water, food
- Social economic needs must be provided for to demonstrate all reasonable efforts before apprehension
- Definition of the family is broad
- "may" is a possibility and "must" means it is definitive

# Paradigm Shift

From	To
An examination of deficits	The discovery of strengths
Use of evidence absent of Indigenous world view, values and culture	Indigenous Knowledge sets foundation for evidence
A focus on inputs for individuals	A focus on outcomes for families and communities
Uncoordinated and fragmented services	Integrated models for funding and delivery of services

**What is it that you carry within?**

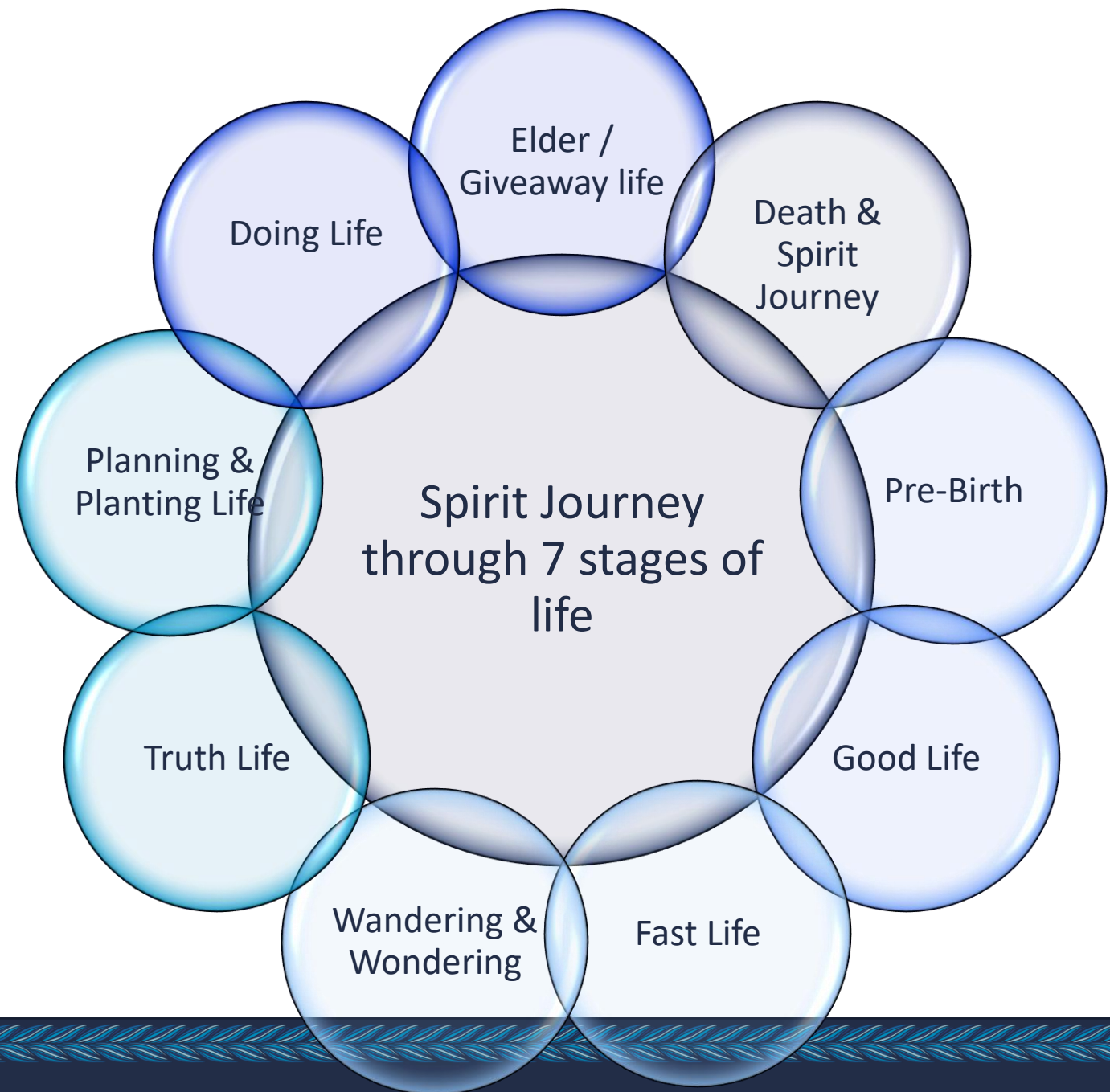
***I shut my  
eyes in  
order to  
see.***

*Paul Gauguin*



# Hope, Belonging, Meaning, & Purpose Across Stages of Life

(Peter Ochiese, Aki winini)





# Cultural Understanding of Development Needs



# Fasting ...igniting the spirit seeds

Some things fasting teaches....

- How to manage fear of the unknown
- How to manage emotions
- Delayed gratification
- Connect with spirit family
- Vision for life: meaning & purpose
- Social responsibility- interconnectedness



# Example: From Benzo's to Berries

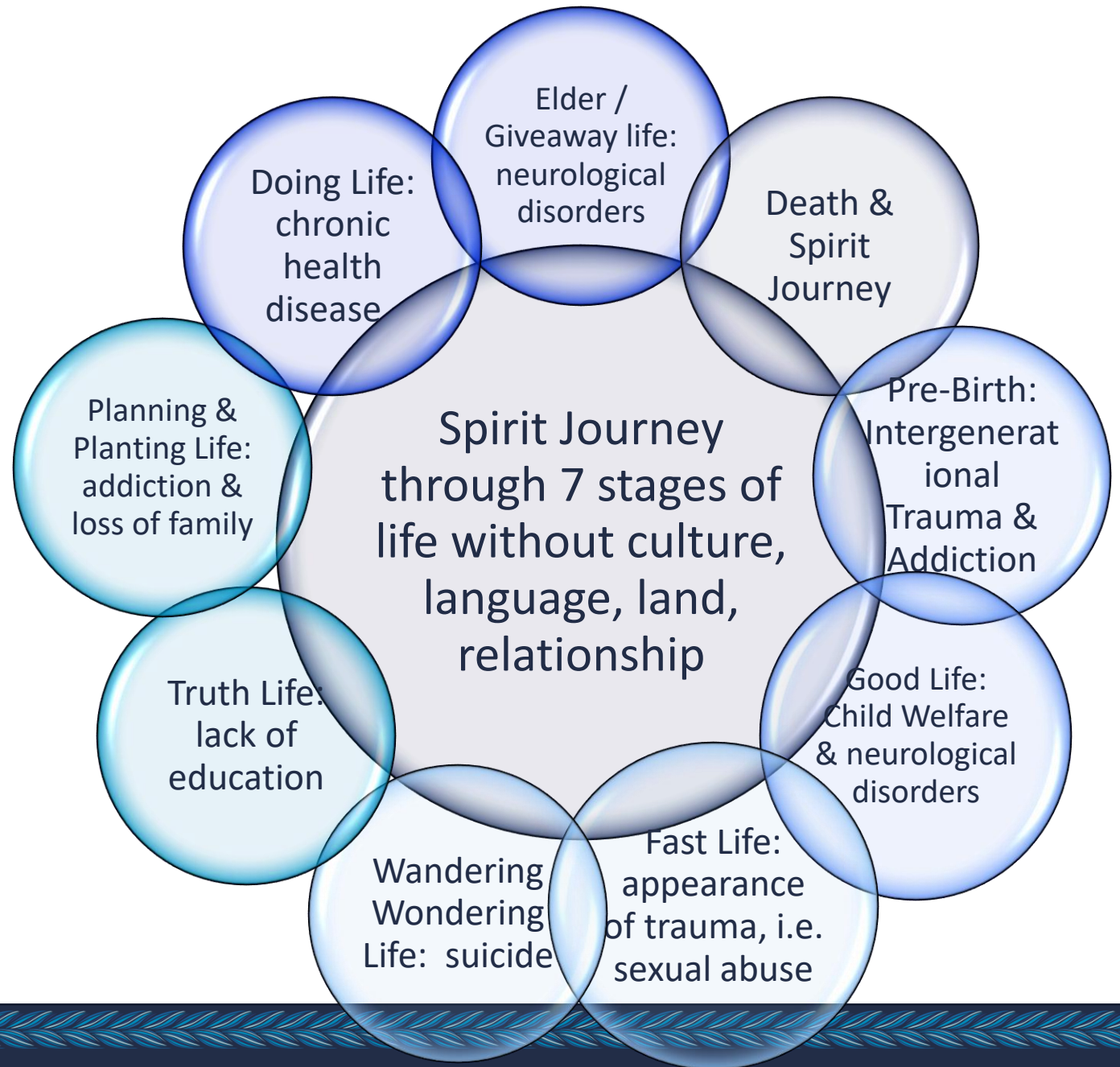


- In the attempt to apply a more inclusive understanding within psychiatry, conventional models of service and health promotion must be fundamentally rethought so that they are consistent with Indigenous realities, values, and aspirations.
- A fundamental 'shift in thinking' will require both the discipline of Western psychiatry and those who work within it to question their own sense and placement of self, community and political context.

*Canadian Journal of Psychiatry.* 2011;56(2):75–83.

# Hope, Belonging, Meaning, & Purpose Across the 7 Stages of Life

(Peter Ochiese, Aki winini)



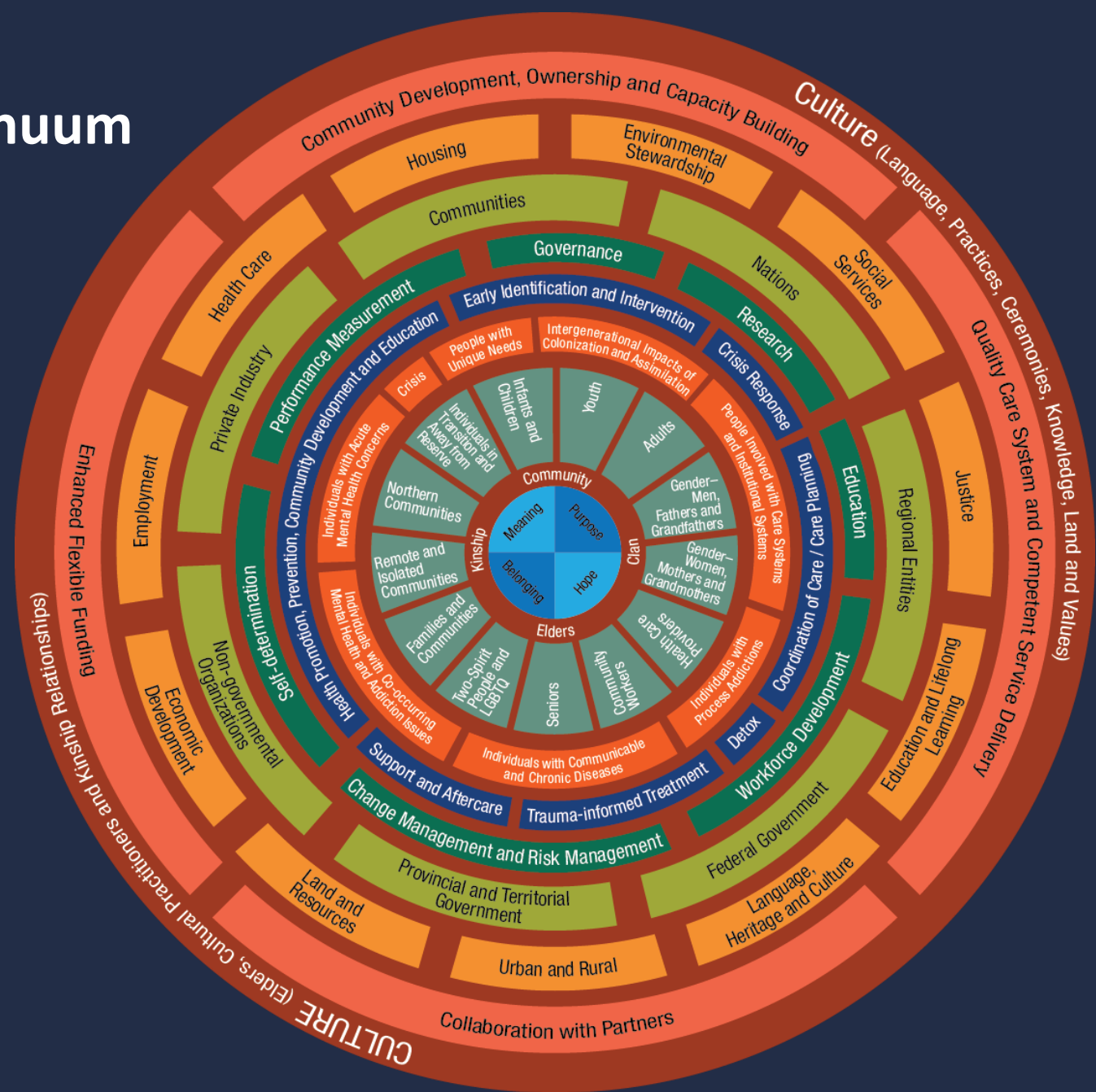
# First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework

## Key Themes:

- Culture as foundation
- Community Development and Ownership
- Quality Health System and Competent Service Delivery
- Collaboration with Partners
- Enhanced flexible funding investments

## Supporting Elements:

- Performance Measurement
- Research
- Workforce Development
- Change Management
- Governance
- Self-Determination



**THUNDERBIRD**  
PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION

# Research Questions:



What is a whole and healthy person



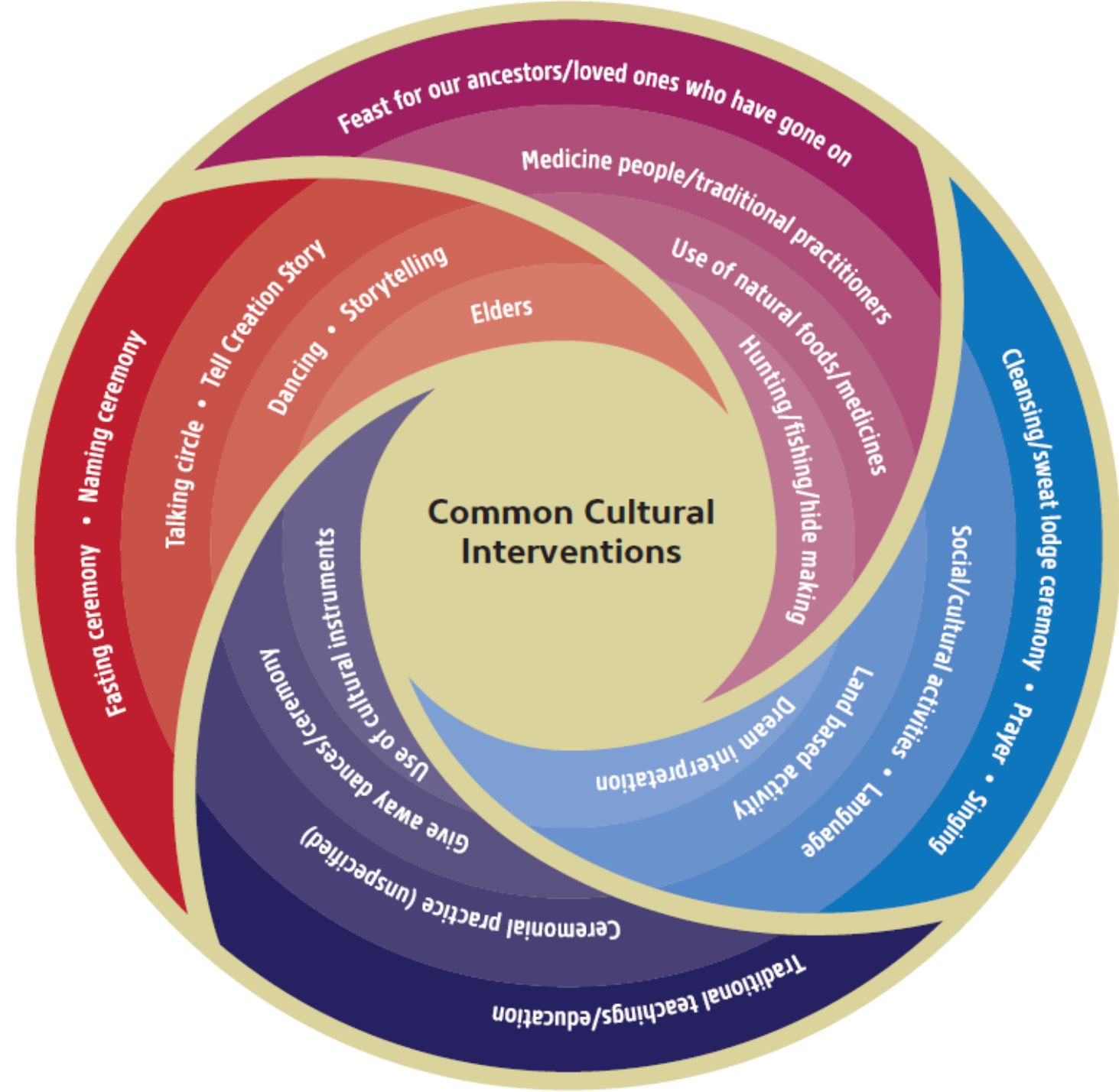
How do culture-based practices facilitate wellness for First Nations who use drugs and alcohol (What are the cultural Interventions utilized)



What outcomes can we expect from the use of culture to facilitate wellness; (What are the indicators)

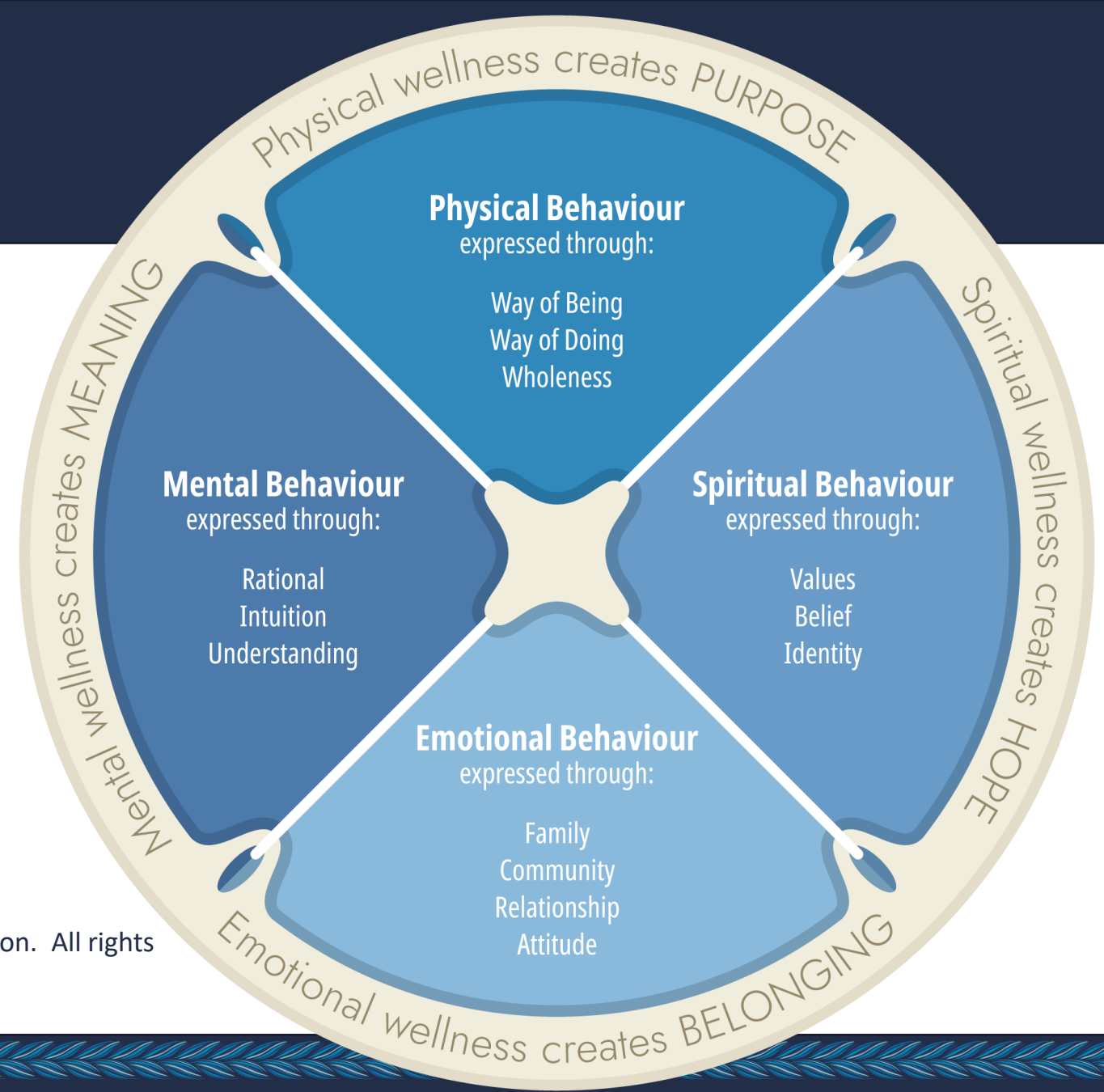
# Common Culture Interventions

- Respects diversity of cultures
- Based on common cultural practices
- Identifies indigenous language as central to knowledge, sanctioning, practice
- Whether cultural intervention are practice within a residential treatment center or in a community-based service – community is involved



# Indigenous Wellness Framework

15-19% increase in Belonging and Purpose through Culture and Land Based services, (Thunderbird, 2021)





# Native Wellness Assessment

- Sample of the questions
- Based on indigenous knowledge
- Strengths based
- Measures Hope, Belonging, Meaning and Purpose

		DK Don't Know	0 Do Not Agree	1 Agree a Little	2 Kind of Agree	3 Mostly Agree	4 Strongly Agree
1	I can see my loved ones who have gone on, or ancestors, in dreams or ceremony.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
2	My Native culture fuels my desire to live a good life.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
3	I believe that the Creator is the source of all life.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
4	My relationship to the land I come from is important.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
5	I feel comforted when I participate in cultural activities and ceremonies.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
6	I feel a need to connect with my Spirit.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
7	My Native language is a sacred language.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
8	Knowing the names in the generations of my family is important for my identity.	DK	0	1	2	3	4
9	All living things have a spirit.	DK	0	1	2	3	4



# Native Wellness Assessment



## Native Wellness Assessment (NWA-O) (Observer Rating Form)

Please complete this survey designed to background section used for research, cultural interventions/activities. You may

### Your Background:

Your responses in this section will be grouped with that of others to make sure the survey is statistically valid. The information you provide here will not be used to identify you specifically under any circumstances.

Your gender:  Female  Male

Your age: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Your ethnicity:  First Nation  
If Yes, which Nation \_\_\_\_\_

Métis  
If Yes, which First Nation connection \_\_\_\_\_

Inuit

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Work Experience: How long have you had interventions/activities?

Cultural Experience: What experience do you have with your Treatment?

No experience

Training and

I am very far from this Treatment

I live and practice

Other \_\_\_\_\_

What other assessments do you use? Please list: \_\_\_\_\_



## Native Wellness Assessment (NWA-S) (Self-Report Form)

Please complete this survey designed to assess your Native wellness. Once you have filled out the background section used for research, please complete the three sections concerning a rating of statements and cultural interventions/activities. You may provide any additional comments at the end of the survey if you like.

To be completed by Treatment Centre Staff prior to the client completing the survey:

Client ID: \_\_\_\_\_ (number as used in Treatment Centre)

Date of Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_ (dd/mm/yyyy)

Completion:  1st time completed  2nd time completed  3rd time completed by client

Point in time:  Entry to Treatment (administered within 7 days of intake)  
 In-Progress (administered halfway through treatment)  
 Exit from Treatment (administered within the last 7 days of the program)

Treatment Centre: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Program: \_\_\_\_\_ weeks

### Background:

Your responses in this section will be grouped with that of others to make sure the survey is statistically valid. The information you provide here will not be used to identify you specifically under any circumstances.

Gender:  Female  Male  Other (i.e. Two-Spirited/LGBTQ/Gender fluid) \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Ethnicity:  First Nations  
If Yes, which Nation \_\_\_\_\_ OR  Don't Know

Métis  
If Yes, which First Nation connection \_\_\_\_\_ OR  Don't Know

Inuit

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Is made up of 2 assessment forms:

(1) Self-Report Form  
(completed by client)

(2) Observer-Report Form  
(completed by service provider)

The assessment is administered twice during the treatment cycle for each client.

[www.thunderbirdpf.com](http://www.thunderbirdpf.com)

“We are not in the business of talking people out of painful realities. But there is reframing to be done...To help develop an attitude, a vocabulary, a story about prospects and expectation, and a picture of a genuine individual lurking beneath the diagnostic label.”

—Dennis Saleeby, D.S.W., *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice, 1997*



# Mental Wellness



# What are your critical steps to a paradigm shift



Emotions Drive People





PHONE  
(519) 692-9922

TOLL-FREE  
1-866-763-4714



FAX  
(519) 692-9977



E-MAIL  
[info@thunderbirdpf.org](mailto:info@thunderbirdpf.org)

[thunderbirdpf.org](http://thunderbirdpf.org)



VISIT OUR LIFE PROMOTION WEBSITES

[cultureforlife.ca](http://cultureforlife.ca) for Youth

[wisepractices.ca](http://wisepractices.ca) for Communities