

Pathway to Partnership

An Informational Policy Brief on Building
Indigenous Partnerships through the
Nurturing the Seed Program

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Issue and Purpose

There is a critical need for the Government of Canada, and other organizations within various sectors across Canada, to prioritize reconciliation with Indigenous communities through authentic relationship-building and collaboration. To this end, the purpose of this brief is to provide information on a service model called Nurturing the Seed (NTS) as an example of a promising practice in relationship-building between Indigenous communities, program developers, researchers, and government, and in furthering reconciliation with Indigenous communities as settlers.

Context: Understanding the Issue

The Government of Canada has committed to “achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change.”¹ This is exemplified by the Government of Canada’s commitment to the following initiatives:

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Calls to Action.** 94 Calls to Action to further reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples were made in the 2015 report. These were developed from collection of official records and hearing from over 6,500 witnesses across the country between 2007 and 2015, creating a historical record of the residential school system in Canada.² Areas of focus of the Calls to Action include child welfare, education, health, justice, and reconciliation, among others.
- **2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.** The purpose of this action plan is to drive transformative change to end systemic racism and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.³ This action plan was co-developed by a core working group in collaboration with the National Family and Survivors Circle and contributing partners. The National Action Plan was a response to the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the Métis Perspectives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+People*.

¹ <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/principles.pdf>

² <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

³ <https://mmiwg2splus-nationalactionplan.ca/eng/1670511213459/1670511226843>

- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.** This Act provides a roadmap for the Government of Canada and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to work together to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples based on lasting reconciliation, healing, and cooperative relations.⁴ On June 21, 2021, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* received Royal Assent and came into force.
- **Jordan's Principle.** A child-first principle to ensure First Nations children get the services they need when they need them. Jordan's Principle was established through a motion in the House of Commons in 2007 in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a young boy from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba.⁵

Current Status: Where do we Currently Stand on the Issue?

There is an urgent need for implementation of recommendations and calls to action. While Canada has taken positive steps on its path towards reconciliation, many have noted that progress has been slow, that much needed actions have not been taken, and that, overall, reconciliation does not seem to be an urgent priority.⁶ This is evidenced by the fact that, since the release of the Calls to Action in 2015, only 13 of the 94 Calls have been completed.⁷ Of note, 32 of the Calls are in progress with projects underway, and 31 are in progress with projects in the proposal stage. Many advocates have also noted decreased funding towards Indigenous priorities in Budget 2023 relative to previous years, signaling a decrease in momentum towards reconciliation efforts.^{8,9,10} **There is a clear need to move innovative, evidence-based interventions into practice to further reconciliation in Canada.**

Key Considerations for Moving Forward on the Issue

Partnership as a key to implementation. There is a need for all levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) and other organizations to own their responsibility to engage with Indigenous partners and implement evidence into practice to further the Calls to Action and reconciliation. This involves a commitment to building **relationships based on trust** and **using the shared leadership built through these relationships** to collectively examine where and how the Calls can be actioned.

⁴ <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824>

⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/reconciliation-national-day-progress-calls-to-action-1.6601179>

⁷ <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/beyond-94?cta=1>

⁸ <https://afn.ca/all-news/bulletins/assembly-of-first-nations-bulletin-march-31-2023-federal-budget-2023/>

⁹ <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2023/03/31/news/drop-bucket-indigenous-advocates-weigh-budget-2023>

¹⁰ <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2023/04/06/budget-2023/>

Indigenous knowledge and values should be at the forefront of partnership. As settlers, it is our responsibility to learn from and embrace the values, knowledge and experiences of Indigenous peoples as we enter into partnership with Indigenous communities.

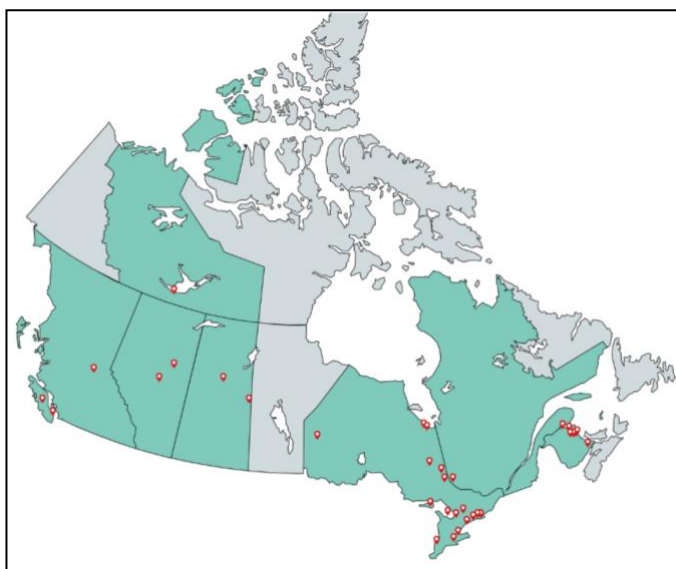
To this end, we discuss some learnings from an example of a successful collaboration with Indigenous communities, service providers, program developers, and researchers that aligns with the Government of Canada's goal of furthering reconciliation while moving evidence into practice.

Promising Practice: Nurturing the Seed (NTS), a successful partnership between communities, service providers, researchers, and government.

NTS Overview and Objectives

Partnership between Indigenous communities, service providers, researchers, and government.

NTS is a service model developed and implemented by Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion (IEMHP) at the Hospital for Sick Children and Indigenous community leaders and service providers (partners outlined in detail in Appendix A). The NTS model guides frontline staff working with Indigenous families to monitor and support the mental health and development of children 0-6 years of age, while strengthening the caregiver-child relationship in culturally meaningful ways. The map below provides a visual overview of current NTS sites.



A focus on training specifically designed by Indigenous advisors and experts to reflect Indigenous values and child-rearing practices. NTS works to reinforce the strengths of each community by supporting the implementation of tailored, meaningful and effective infant and early mental health training and support. Providing frontline workers with knowledge, strategies, resources, and tools to recognize, assess and address developmental concerns in children less

than 6 years old, NTS is used by practitioners who work alongside Indigenous communities to implement best practices across sectors.

Early identification of children with developmental support needs. This work aims to increase the likelihood that children at risk of less-than-optimal developmental outcomes will be identified early and supported immediately within the community, while placed on waiting lists for more specific services. For some children, NTS can even eliminate the need for additional, more intensive services.

“The Nurturing the Seed program fits hand in hand with my role as a KidsFirst North Home Visitor in Creighton, SK. We already do ASQ’s with families and the NTS study allows added support in the areas of development that children need, based on these ASQ scores. In our small community, there are no resources to refer families to unless they travel a far distance (which, for most of these families, isn’t an option), so having the Nurturing the Seed DSP’s gives me the tools to fill those gaps and provide supports to families in the areas required. Following up with families, continuing ASQ’s and checking in regularly – I can see the benefit of the NTS study not only on the child’s development but also the parent/child relationship.”

-Home Visitor, KidsFirst North, Creighton, SK

Opportunities for Indigenous communities to support the development and well-being of Indigenous children with a culturally sensitive approach. This includes a focus on strengthening the crucial relationship between the young child and their caregiver. This was key to the development of NTS, given that Indigenous people draw strength from their teachings and traditions, in which spirituality, respect, honour, and cultural pride support healing and positive mental health.

Relationship-building is critical to the success of the NTS program and, at a higher level, meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous communities. NTS provides a safe space for Indigenous partners, program developers, researchers and others to learn, partner, and work together on a shared desire to address and support outcomes for infants and young children. Key to maintaining these relationships is ensuring that the NTS methodology is continually adapted and modified based on learnings from communities.

“Nurturing the Seed is one of the programs that we partner on and it has made a difference to our community by equipping many of our local Service Providers to confidently and compassionately support families as soon as their babies are born, and all throughout the early years. This is especially crucial in our remote Indigenous community as we often lack having access to specialized services, and therefore having local community members knowledgeable about early mental health and overall development allows for support as soon as a concern is raised by a parent/caregiver. It has also allowed for our community to have an 'upstream' preventative approach of promoting mental health and wellbeing in infants and children as early as possible rather than only focusing on responding to mental health crises in the later years. We know for certain that Nurturing the Seed will positively impact generations through it's supportive guidance to parents and the powerful impact it has on the little ones apart of the program and because of this we are committed to increasing access to this program for other First Nations communities.”

-Prevention Supervisor, Child and Youth Milopemahtesewin Services, Moose Factory, ON

How NTS Responds to and Addresses Government of Canada Initiatives

- **The TRC and Calls to Action:** NTS has embraced key Principles of Practice as a commitment to the Calls to Action and in an effort to advance the process of Canadian reconciliation. These Principles were developed in partnership with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders to help guide IEMHP in their work with Indigenous Peoples. The Principles have directed IEMHP's efforts to repair relationships and establish trust with Indigenous communities, as well as support non-Indigenous partners to build connections with Indigenous organizations.
- **2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan:** The NTS program promotes the health and well-being of children and families. Agencies offering programs like NTS are taking steps to support healthy, strong, and resilient community members. NTS can help identify children and families in need of services while building connections within Indigenous partners.
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act:** NTS is reflected in the UN Declaration in that it is an example of how communities can work together in support of Indigenous people. These partnerships exemplify positive and cooperative relationships which, in and of themselves, support reconciliation and healing.
- **Jordan's Principle:** The NTS program assists service providers in better understanding the needs of young children, particularly those experiencing challenges. NTS service providers talk to caregivers about options related to Jordan's Principle and can also assist families in applying for Jordan's Principle funding.

Conclusion

NTS provides a promising example of how collaboration with Indigenous communities and relationships built on respect, trust and mutual understanding can advance Canada's efforts towards reconciliation. NTS has developed a proof of concept through its expansion across Canada. As such, we recommend the following for the Government of Canada:

- **Support the scale and spread of the NTS program through the provision of funding to ensure that all interested communities are able to access NTS.** IEMHP has the capacity to expand the NTS program into new communities but requires additional resources to scale the program across Canada. IEMHP's vision is for all communities to be able to access the NTS program and associated tools if they are interested in doing so.
- **Support IEMHP to disseminate key learnings from their work with Indigenous communities.** IEMHP's goal is to continue working closely with Indigenous partners, supporting them in sharing their stories and highlighting the strengths inherent in their culture and communities.
- **Utilize the lessons learned from NTS to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples across Canada.** IEMHP is dedicated to its work with Indigenous communities and calls upon its partners across sectors to do the same. By making a commitment, identifying responsibilities, and taking tangible action, we all participate in a movement towards reconciliation.

Appendix A: NTS Partners

A team of many dedicated and talented people brought their ideas, skills and experience to developing, writing and designing NTS. We acknowledge the many Contributors, Advisors and Elders who took part.

Below is a list of the sites participating in the NTS evaluation project:

- Aamjiwnaang First Nation (Sarnia, ON)
- Amiskwaciy Cultural Society (Edmonton, AB)
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (Edmonton, AB)
- Child and Youth Milopemahtesewin Services (Moosonee, ON)
- Georgian Bay Native Women's Association (Midland, ON)
- Keepers of the Circle (Kirkland Lake & New Liskeard, ON)
- KidsFirst North (Creighton & La Ronge, SK)
- Mino M'shki-ki Indigenous Health Team (Kirkland Lake, ON)

Below is a list of sites with service providers trained to deliver NTS:

- Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AB)
- Kikino Aboriginal Head Start (AB)
- Kw'umut Lelum (BC)
- Nanaimo Child Development Centre (BC)
- Prince George Native Friendship Centre (BC)
- Esgenoopetitj (Burnt River) First Nation (NB)
- Fort Folly First Nation (NB)
- Metepenagiag (Red Bank) First Nation (NB)
- Mi'gmaq Child and Family Services of New Brunswick (NB)
- Mi'kmaq Family Support (NB)
- Natoaganeg (Eel Ground) First Nation (NB)
- North Shore Micmac District Council (NB)
- Ugpig'anjig (Eel River Bar) Health Centre (NB)
- Hay River Aboriginal Head Start (NT)
- Beausoleil Day Care Centre (ON)
- Durham District School Board (ON)
- Health Babies, Healthy Children & Health Growth and Development – City of Hamilton (ON)
- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (ON)
- Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte (ON)
- Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (ON)
- Pikangikum Health Authority (ON)
- Pidaban Child Care Centre – Timiskaming First Nation (QC)
- Timiskaming First Nation Health & Wellness Centre (QC)

Initial funding for NTS was led by Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN) who remain partners and provide strategic support for this and many IEMHP initiatives. As a seminal partner of IEMHP, KBHN has raised \$250,000 for this project to date. KBHN is continuing its fundraising efforts with the goal of raising \$1,000,000 total for this program.

Today, the implementation and evaluation of this model in Canadian communities is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada with in-kind support from Queen's University and the University of Calgary.