

Cedar Blankets: Building Wraparound Supports & Reducing Barriers for First Nation, Métis, Status/Non Status and Inuit Women and Children to Transition Houses and Safe Homes

Literature Review - Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The five-year Cedar Blankets: Building Wraparound Supports and Reducing Barriers for Indigenous Women and Children to Transition Houses and Safe Homes project, aims to reduce barriers for Indigenous women and their children to access Transition Houses and Safe Homes in BC. Using a women-centered wraparound service delivery, culturally safe programming will increase the rates of meaningful stays at transition houses and safe homes by Indigenous women and their children who have experienced violence.

Through Cedar Blankets, four Transition Houses and Safe Home pilot sites will work to develop and adopt culturally safe, Indigenous women and children-centred wraparound supports that foster longer stays while providing safety and healing for survivors of gender-based violence. Each pilot site will adapt and implement the Cedar Blankets service delivery model by taking into account specific agency needs and capacity, as well as First Nation, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous Peoples' local and regional issues. Staff will explore and learn about cultural humility, allyship, decolonization, community engagement, and practical skill building to support implementation of the wraparound service delivery model. This literature review intends to support an evidence-based foundation and framework for Cedar Blankets and its training to begin the implementation of decolonized and indigenized practices in Transition Houses and Safe Homes in the province.

Through this literature review, Cedar Blankets' partners and stakeholders will build their understanding of relevant current issues related to the following three themed sections:

1. **Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls** related to the *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, the Calls for Justice, and Access to Transition Houses and Safe Homes;
2. **Shifting Landscapes** as a result of policy and legislation changes such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, Environmental and Industry Developments and Effects, Climate Change, Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and Child Welfare Reform; and,

- 3. Promising Approaches for Supporting Indigenous Women and Girls Experiencing Violence** through Decolonizing Practices, Allyship and Community Engagement, Cultural Safety and Humility, and Governance and Policy.

Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls in BC

Indigenous women and girls face disproportionately higher rates of gender based violence compared to other Canadian women and girls (Statistics Canada, 2013). These disproportionately higher rates of gender-based violence have confirmed that Indigenous women and girls now make up almost 25% of female homicide victims (MMIWG Final Report, 2019). With the numbers of MMIWG estimated in the thousands the need for access to culturally safe and responsive Transition Houses and Safe Homes for Indigenous women and girls cannot be overstated.

Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

In 2016, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and its Commissioners were given the sacred responsibility to hear from Indigenous families and survivors of violence to make concrete and actionable recommendations for the safety of Indigenous individuals, families, and communities (MMIWG, Vol 1a, pg.1). The release of the [National Inquiry's Final Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA](#) (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and Asexual people) concluded that the systemic causes of all forms of violence amounts to a race-based genocide that has been, and continues to be empowered by colonial structures. These policies and institutions have shaped social and cultural norms and attitudes in complex and harmful ways that compromise the safety of Indigenous women and their families. They have resulted in the socio-economic marginalization of Indigenous people, particularly women and girls, which creates conditions that legitimize and facilitate violence and exacerbate trauma. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls advocates for a decolonizing approach that acknowledges the rightful power and place of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people.

Calls for Justice

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) presented 231 individual Calls for Justice for transformative legal and social change. Arising from domestic and international human and Indigenous rights law, these Calls for Justice are legal imperatives that represent essential ways to end the genocide of Indigenous women and girls and to transform the systemic and societal values that have worked to maintain this violence.

Overall the Calls relate to Human and Indigenous Rights and Governmental Obligations, Culture, Health and Wellness (Service Providers), Human Security and Justice. There are Calls for Justice for All Canadians, for Inuit, Metis-specific and 2SLGBTQQIS- specific recommendations that call on all federal, provincial and Indigenous governments and all Canadians to be part of the change.

BCSTH has identified more than 30 Calls for Justice that both directly and indirectly apply to Transition Houses, Safe Homes, and Second-stage Housing. If actualized; the MMIWG Calls for Justice recommendations can be the framework to create safe and secure places for First Nation, Metis and Inuit women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIS people. For example, it is important that front line organizations:

- Engage in decolonizing practices;
- Support the individuals they serve to reclaim their power by respecting cultural rights; and,
- Embrace and celebrate Indigenous women and girls (National Inquiry in MMIWG, 2019, col 1b., pg. 405)

In strengthening communities and allowing families and survivors to take the initiative in their healing process, these powerful actions are working towards reconciliation and resistance. Cultural rights for example could include the right to practice a woman's cultural traditions such as smudging inside the Transition House or Safe Home, providing traditional foods or respecting a woman's decision to remain in contact with her abuser.

Access to Transition Houses and Safe Homes

Indigenous women surveyed by BCSTH reported that their experiences of intergenerational, institutional, and individual expressions of racism continue to deter them from accessing Transition Houses and Safe Homes (BCSTH, 2016). A large number of Indigenous women reported that they believe that entering a Transition House or Safe Home will result in child protection involvement and apprehension and that their confidentiality and personal agency will not be respected (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2006; BCSTH, 2016). Despite being disproportionately victimized by violence, Indigenous women and their children are under-served by transition houses and safe homes. Data reported by transition houses indicates that Indigenous women access these services frequently and leave them earlier than non-Indigenous women.

Shifting Landscapes

Systemic, institutional, political, environmental and cultural landscapes are all part of the ever-shifting world that Indigenous women and their children face. Over the past decade, there has been a number of changes to legislation and policy in systems that directly affect Indigenous women and their children. Some of these legislative changes and shifting

landscapes include, but are not limited to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDRIP), the B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, Bill C-92 - An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families, the environmental and resource development industry, economic development, definition and assignation of cultural identity and membership, healthcare and child welfare.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and the Impacts on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Women

In November 2019, British Columbia passed legislation to align BC's laws with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act has as its purpose: "to affirm the application of the [UN] Declaration to the laws of British Columbia; to contribute to the implementation of the Declaration; and, to support the affirmation of, and develop relationships with, Indigenous governing bodies" (Declaration, 2019). The Declaration Act's intention is to not only include self-determination in the form of Nation-to-Nation relationships, but also acknowledge Indigenous Nations' right to self-determination in culture, languages, education, sacred lands, and rights to the lands, water, and resources (Sayers, 2019, p.2). Today's Indigenous-based grassroots movements embody this self-determination. Initiatives such as Walking with Our Sisters are led by Indigenous women and call for self-determination and critical assessment of social problems to prevent future violence against Indigenous women (Hansen and Dim, 2019). These movements centre community building and healing as part of self-determination.

Environmental and Industry Effects

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act recognizes the part colonial history played in the dispossession of Indigenous self-determination and identifies Indigenous Nations as stewards of their sacred lands. Global ecology research has determined that extraction projects continue to have negative social, physical, and emotional impacts on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities where they exist (Morales, 2019, p. 4). As a result, Indigenous leaders continue to be adamant that their right to self-determination be acknowledged, affirmed, and respected (Morales, 2019, p.5: United Nations, 2012). First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women should be included in this decision-making process as this population and their communities are significantly affected by the extractive industries and the resulting higher rates of violence, trafficking and illicit drug use. Morales (2019) suggests that along with the right to self-determination provided by the Declaration, Indigenous women's expertise and agency should be recognized and consulted in relation to extractive projects (p.6).

There is evidence of a correlation between industrial development and increased violence against Indigenous women and children (Dalseg, Kuokkanen, Mills, Simmons, 2018, pg. 18). The introduction of new, often transient workers into adjacent communities of the projects

has shown an increase in the incidents of sexual harassment and violence, and human trafficking of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit women in the community (Morales, 2019, pg. 9). Consequently, homeless women, women with addictions, or women experiencing poverty are at a higher risk of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Climate Change Impacts on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Women and Children

Indigenous worldviews often acknowledge that when one aspect of the whole is affected, then the entire balance of all life is impacted. Place and land hold significant influence on the holistic well-being in the domains of emotion, body, mind, and spirit of Indigenous Peoples (Fernandez et al., 2020, p. 1). Climate change continues to have detrimental effects of the physical health of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Peoples (Dudley, Hoberg, Jenkins, and Parkinson, 2015, pg.1). Armed conflict, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies like the coronavirus pandemic can significantly weaken a society's ability to protect women and girls from gender-based violence due to limitations in available resources such as policing, and access to transition and safe house services.

The destruction of the environments and the shifts in the climate have restricted healthy living areas for many First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples. Physical sickness directly influences the emotional and mental wellness of Indigenous Peoples, especially when land and traditional food and medicines are also diminishing. Indigenous women have had to adapt to these changes, as they are predominantly responsible for foods and customs (Pentlow, 2020, p. 1). Further, women articulate how important and seriously they take their roles in their communities (Whyte, 2014, p. 3). The work and traditional knowledge that Indigenous women have employed in efforts to reduce climate change in their communities become invisible within these political structures and ultimately devalued (Low, 2020, pg. 1).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: (TRC) Calls to Action

Since the release of the 2015 TRC's Final Report, progress to adopt the Calls to Action has been slow. In 2017, the Yellowhead Institute released their report Calls to Action Accountability: A Status Update on Reconciliation (Jewell & Mosby, 2019) and provided an update in December 2019. The analysis of Canada's progress towards completing the TRC's 94 Calls to Action suggests that—as was the case in past years—progress has been limited and the number of completed Calls to Action has moved from a total of 8 in 2018 to 9 in 2019. In addition, the promised National Action Plan has not yet been constructed. The only call to action implemented to date related to the rights of Indigenous Women was the creation of the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Women and Girls.

Child Welfare Reform

One of the biggest barriers to accessing Transition House and Safe Home services identified by Indigenous women was the fear of child welfare involvement and/or apprehension triggered by going into Transition Houses or Safe Homes. In Canada today there are more children living in government care than even during the times of Residential Schools with Indigenous children making up about 60% of the total number. This does not include children who have open child welfare files. In response to a national outcry from Indigenous people as to the state of the Child Welfare system and the TRC Calls to Action, the federal government implemented The [Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families](#) (formerly Bill C-92), which came into force on January 1st, 2020. Under the Act Indigenous communities and groups will develop policies and laws based on their particular histories, cultures, and circumstances and move at their own pace to implement and enforce these policies and laws. Principles such as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity, and substantive equality have been established to help guide the provision of Indigenous child and family services. The Act enables Indigenous groups and communities to transition toward exercising partial or full jurisdiction over child and family services at a pace that they choose. This Act will shift many aspects of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit child and family services including upholding standards of care for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children, which remains the paramount concern. Particularly during the transition phase, Indigenous women may need support, education and advocacy to ensure they receive the services and support throughout this Act's implementation process.

The political and social landscape in BC may change and shift continuously as governments respond to current events, but one thing remains constant – Indigenous women and their children are forced to adapt to these conditions with little input into decisions that have so much control over their lives.

Promising Approaches for Supporting Indigenous Women and Girls Experiencing Violence

Over the last decade, a number of different promising practices have emerged in terms of how Transition Houses and Safe Homes approach the delivery of their services, particularly in relation to Indigenous women and their children. These key approaches and practices support the safety and well-being of Indigenous women and their children by placing women at the center, recognizing that service delivery is relational and ensuring Indigenous women's rights to self-determination. With culturally humility, this recognition acknowledges that Indigenous ways of being reflect Indigenous values. Although they may be different, they are correct nonetheless.

Decolonizing Practices

Indigenous decolonizing approaches, the efforts to resist the forces of colonialism and decolonize are rooted in Indigenous values, philosophies, and knowledge systems that re-establish Indigenous self-determination and self-governance (MMIWG, p.170). Decolonizing approaches challenge the colonial influences by making space for Indigenous Peoples to govern themselves in relation to their communities' right to determine their own economic, social, and cultural development.

Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA people, Elders and children must be included in decolonization approaches that seek to implement self-determination and measures that uphold rights and create safety through cultural safety and trauma-informed approaches and services (MMWIG, p.170). For Transition Houses and Safe Homes, this work entails increasing the effectiveness of support services by using interdisciplinary, systemic approaches to coordinating services, understanding the importance of cultural safety and integrating Indigenous values and traditions, and building long-term relationships with Indigenous communities in culturally safe ways.

Allyship and Community Engagement

Genuine allyship means stepping into a self-reflexive place to understand the position of power and privilege that have been, and continue to be, gained through unjust colonial systems that marginalize the Indigenous women and children we seek to ally with. As responsible allies, Transition Houses and Safe Homes have an opportunity to use our position and privilege to support and amplify the voices of the Indigenous women and their families whose lives have been affected by violence, both individually and collectively. In doing so in the development and implementation of policies and practices we work to eliminate the structural roots of violence. There are also key responsibilities to uphold through self-reflection, listening, and learning in order to understand how presence can affect the people and communities, we support (Amnesty, 2018). A gendered lens and framework ensures that impacts on women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals must be taken into account, including the understanding that while the experiences of individuals within distinct communities may differ, they are nonetheless equal.

Cultural Safety and Humility

Responding to Indigenous women and girls experiences of violence requires a service approach that prioritizes cultural safety and humility. Cultural safety is an approach that considers social and historical contexts. Complemented by cultural humility, a humble acknowledgement as a learner in understanding another's experiences, both approaches are strongly linked to emotional and physical safety in Transition Houses and Safe Homes and foster inclusive, supportive and safe environments. A clear need for more dialogue and training on cultural safety, intergenerational trauma, and trauma and violence-informed practice emerged in BCSTH research with Transition House staff. Accessible training and

education for Indigenous women who have experienced violence, as well as the legal, social, and health service providers who assist them, is a necessary strategy to achieve safer communities for Indigenous women in BC.

Governance and Policy

Transition Houses and Safe Homes need to implement policy and practices that are distinctions based and empowering, individually and collectively, when aiming to increase safety for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women. Transition Houses require increased, or prioritized, long term funding for resources to assist First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women with lived experience, such as educational programs around healthy relationships, short- and long-term housing, counselling, provision of basic resources (e.g., food and clothing), interim financial assistance, and affordable transportation to services (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2008).

Recruiting and supporting the unique needs of Indigenous staff, including management, with proven leadership skills, is crucial to the success of any Transition House. Additionally policy changes aimed at decreasing violence against First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women and girls must focus on the effect of colonial policies (Health Reference Center Academic, 2013) and be developed in collaboration with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women (Belanger, Weasel Head, & Awosoga, 2012). These policy changes should be rooted in traditional values (Health Reference Center Academic). Education and accountability mechanisms should consider all parties involved in service delivery. Furthermore, Transition Houses should engage in research and meaningful data collection to create an ongoing process for identifying best practices in supporting Indigenous women and their families in their community (Belanger, Weasel Head, & Awosoga, 2012).

Conclusion

Moving forward, Cedar Blankets will develop an adaptable, inclusive, culturally safe wraparound service delivery model to fit the unique contexts and needs of Indigenous women with experiences of violence at each of the Transition Houses or Safe Homes pilot sites. Taking into consideration the current relevant social, political, cultural, and legal environments that impact an Indigenous woman's access to services and support including considerations such as agency needs and capacity, local Indigenous Peoples, and regional and local historical and current issues. Decolonization and allyship, institutional, political, geographical and cultural landscapes are all part of the ever-shifting world of Indigenous women and their children today. These aspects need to be considered in order to transform policy and practice and shift the anti violence sectors service paradigm from a framework that responds to service delivery gaps to one that recognizes and supports Indigenous woman's human rights to safety.

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