



**FINDING OUR POWER TOGETHER**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

---

**2020**



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## FROM THE DIRECTOR



## Nicole Ineese-Nash

Boozhoo. Songe Wabigwanikwe niindizhinikaaz, Mamawmattawa nindonjiba, mukwa nindodem. Welcome everyone to our first annual report! My name is Nicole Ineese-Nash (Wildflower Woman) and I am the co-founder and director of Finding Our Power Together (FOPT).

Thank you to everyone who has been part of the FOPT family in some capacity over the past year. I am humbled and honoured to be reflecting on a year of significant growth, hardship, and surprise. I welcome the opportunity to share a big miigwetch with all of our staff, students, volunteers, partners, and donors who have made our work possible.

Finding Our Power Together emerged from a desire to connect as Indigenous young people in order to spread a message of hope and love. I could have never imagined that several years later we would have grown to be a national non-profit organization operating in these unprecedented times! What started as an idea quickly became a movement; one in which Indigenous young people are driving and partnering to develop programs that are meaningful to them.

COVID-19 changed all of our lives significantly, and impacted some communities in devastating ways. I am amazed by the resilience of our communities across Turtle Island to maintain the health and wellbeing of our community members in such challenging circumstances. This has been a true testament to the inherent ability of our people to determine our own resurgent futures. We know Indigenous youth continue to face challenges in accessing and maintaining support systems for their mental health and spiritual development, which is why I am so honoured to be working towards growing our capacity in offering our spiritual and mental health programs.

As an Indigenous young person, I often struggled to find places in which I was able to connect with others who shared my experiences, worldviews, and cultures. In particular, I felt as though I was unable to learn cultural practices that I knew I needed for my own healing. I have always wanted to be part of an environment in which Indigenous youth felt safe, understood, and supported to achieve their fullest potential.

Because of my experiences as an Indigenous young person, as well as my academic and professional expertise in education and social services, I am compelled to continue developing collaborative spaces where Indigenous young people can share, learn, and find meaning in their lives.

Both the Building Our Bundle program and Young Leaders Circle seek to support young people to develop skills and relationships through cultural teachings and perspectives. Now more than ever, I think it is imperative that we support Indigenous youth to learn to pick up their bundles again in order to support intergenerational healing and prosperity. Our youth are hungry for the cultural knowledge that has been hidden from them and I hope that in some small way, our programs bring some of our cultural practices and stories back into the light. I am constantly amazed by the tenacity of our young people to learn and grow and to develop creative solutions in their communities and am thrilled that we get to be part of that in some way.

I know that Creator has a plan for all of us and I am honoured to be called to do this work, walking along in this journey with our Indigenous young people.

I can't wait to see what the future holds and hope you continue to be part of it.

*Nicole Ineese-Nash*

# ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATION

## Finding Our Power Together

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Finding Our Power Together is an Indigenous-led non-profit organization supporting Indigenous youth to access support and relationships that enable them to thrive. FOPT offers a variety of therapeutic and educational programs designed to develop community, increase capacity, and promote wholistic wellbeing. We started as a way to grow connections between Indigenous communities across Turtle Island in order to share a message of hope and solidarity, particularly to save our young people from preventable death. We collectively understand the value in bringing together young people and community members from various communities to share resources and maintain connection; We know we can find our power together.

[WWW.FINDINGOURPOWERTOGETHER.COM](http://WWW.FINDINGOURPOWERTOGETHER.COM)

# HISTORY

FOPT began as a community-based initiative in Nibinamik First Nation in 2016, founded by Indigenous youth from Nibinamik and other communities in Treaty 9 territory. At this time, many young people had attempted or completed suicide in Nibinamik and surrounding communities. Youth in Nibinamik sought to support their own people and worked with members of Ryerson University to film a documentary video, sharing their experiences of systemic discrimination and colonialism. More than that though, they shared their messages of hope and support for the young people in their community and across Turtle Island.

This film premiered at a fundraising event in 2017 at Ryerson University in Toronto which brought together nearly 400 Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to share in collective solidarity. We have since grown to support communities and youth across Canada in learning and developing skills and practices to promote life and wellbeing. We registered as a formal nonprofit in May 2020 and have shifted to online support as a result of COVID-19.



# OUR VISION

We envision a world where Indigenous young people are rooted in who they are with access to cultural knowledge, language, and ceremony; where Indigenous youth have a strong commitment to life through their interconnections to others, to land, and to spirit; where Indigenous youth have support from their families, communities, and societies to develop the skills and gifts they would like to; where Indigenous youth understand that they are valued, important, and belong; where they know their power and use it to help others.

Our ultimate goal is to end preventable death by suicide in Indigenous communities and support our young people to thrive.

# OUR MISSION

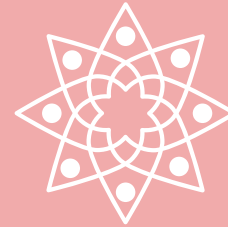
Our mission is to support Indigenous young people to realize their own priorities and goals and gain access to various supports they may benefit from. We work towards this goal through developing and facilitating programs and services that: connect Indigenous youth with one another and Indigenous mentors/professionals; utilize traditional Indigenous practices and cultures; increase social connectedness and resilience through group and individual counseling; provide training, skills development opportunities, and activities for practical learning and growth; and promote pride in Indigenous identity and various Indigenous lifeways through sharing and relationship building.



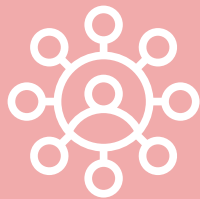
# OUR PRINCIPLES



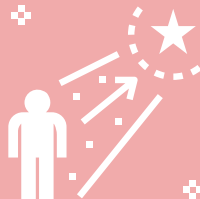
We promote culture by incorporating Indigenous teachings, values and language into our mental health practice, where appropriate.



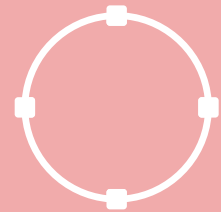
We encourage interconnection by welcoming relationships with the land, ancestors and spirit in our mental health practice.



Relationality is fostering caring, reciprocal and respectful relationships with the self, individual and communities in order to nurture the connection we have with all things in creation.



Self Discovery and Determination is supporting the youth to better understand themselves and their emotions and their reactions in order to provide appropriate options for their health



We support wholism though honoring individuals in all facets of the self and promoting self-acceptance.



We encourage the exploration of balanced living through reflection and practice of care within all aspects of the self to achieve balance restoration.



Context Specificity; we actively acknowledge environmental and historical factors that have and continue to impact each individual and their lived-reality and adapt to suit the specific needs of the individuals and communities.

# OUR TEAM



Our team is an interdisciplinary group of staff, students, and volunteers who work holistically to support community needs. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members support one another and the community to reach their self-determined goals through the sharing of their various backgrounds in Indigenous worldviews, Child and Youth care, early childhood education and development, psychology, social work, and arts-based methods.

## CURRENT STAFF

NICOLE INEESH-NASH

### **NICOLE INEESH-NASH** Director

Nicole Ineesh-Nash is an Anishnaabe (Ojib-Cree) scholar and a member of Constance Lake First Nation. Nicole is currently completing a PhD in Social Justice Education and Indigenous Health at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where she is researching land-based education as a mechanism for youth leadership and spiritual healing. Nicole completed both her BA and masters degrees in Early Childhood Studies and Psychology at Ryerson University. She is the director and co-founder of Finding Our Power Together: A non-profit organization providing mental health services, cultural programming, and educational support to Indigenous youth.



NYLE JOHNSTON

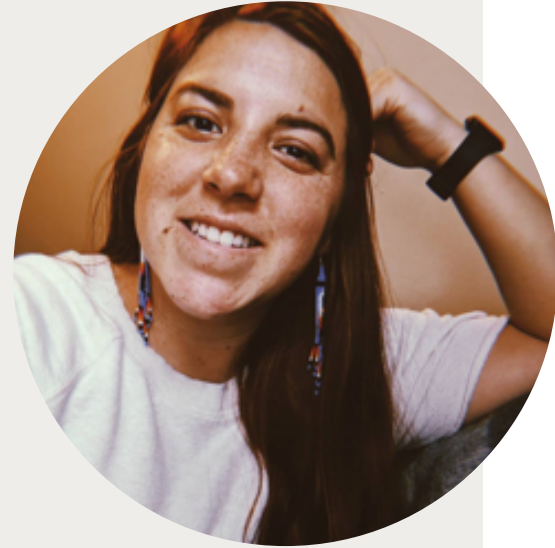
### **NYLE JOHNSTON** Cultural Director

Nyle is an Anishnaabe artist, storyteller and Oshkaabewis (Traditional Helper) from Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation. His art depicts the interconnectedness of all living things and incorporates teachings based on traditional knowledge. Nyle has worked on numerous projects supporting community organizations such as Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 7th Generation Image Makers, Chippewas of Nawash Health Centre, TakingITGlobal, Canadian Roots Exchange, Lower Simcoe Underpass Mural Project, Bold Realities Project, Sketch Toronto and Ink Indigenous Tattoo Studio and Gallery. His work draws inspiration from woodland painters, Storytellers and the traditions of his Anishnaabe culture.



**VANESSA NICHOLSON**  
**Building Our Bundle Program Coordinator**

Vanessa is an Anishinaabe Child and Youth Counsellor and member of Sagamok Anishnawbek. She has an undergraduate degree in Forensic Psychology and a Master's in Child and Youth Care (CYC). She is currently a CYC Counsellor with the Toronto District School Board. She has years of experience working with youth of all backgrounds in a variety of capacities, but most specifically in First Nation Communities within Northern Ontario. Vanessa has a background in child and youth care, trauma-informed and community-based youth practices. Vanessa began her work with FOPT as a CYC placement student in Nibinamik First Nation in the 2018-2019 academic year as a requirement for completion of her graduate studies.

**MAGGIE STEIN**  
**Master's of Social Work Student**

Maggie Stein is a Master of Social Work Candidate at the University of Toronto. She earned an honours BA.Sc in Psychology at the University of Guelph and a diploma of General Arts and Sciences from Humber College. Maggie has 5-years of experience working directly in clinical practice and indirectly through academic research with Adolescents and Young Adults facing a variety of mental health concerns. She works from a trauma-informed and strengths-based perspective, taking a collaborative and client-centered approach when delivering evidence-based interventions for those with whom she works with, and for. Maggie has a background in cultural safety practices, attachment theory, emotion regulation, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), mental health policy and advocacy.



JESSICA SHERK

**JESSICA SHERK**  
**Young Leaders Circle Program Coordinator**

Jessica is a mixed Anishinaabe-settler Master of Social Work student who is currently finishing up her MSW. Jessica has had previous experience working in interdisciplinary teams supporting Indigenous communities in various capacities. She has 10+ years experience working with children and youth in several different organizations and initiatives. Jessica has also provided in-class, individualized support to children who have exceptional needs. She is competent in developing and implementing activities and workshops that are culturally specific and age-appropriate. Jessica recently assumed the role of the Youth Leaders Circle Coordinator. She facilitated FOPT's first ever Young Leaders Virtual Roundtable in November 2020.



JESSICA BITTON

**JESSICA BITTON**  
**Fundraising Coordinator**

Jessica is a recent graduate of the Social Work program (BSW) at Ryerson University. Her passion for social work has led her to find creative and innovative ways to combat mental health challenges within First Nation communities. She has previous experience working with youth and newcomers who struggle with mental health resources. Jessica was on the board of the Youth Sexual Health Committee raising awareness surrounding sexual health. She has worked in multiple disciplinary sectors using harm-reduction and anti oppressive models. Jessica assisted with the development of the Building Our Bundle program and has extensive research skills in Indigenous youth mental health. Jessica's interest in community building and development has led her to create meaningful relations as an ally in Indigenous communities that helps to better support their way of life.



**KRUTI PATEL**  
**Administrative Coordinator**

Kruti is the administrative coordinator for Finding Our Power Together. She is currently in her final semester of the undergraduate Child and Youth Care program at Ryerson University. Kruti is a South Asian female whose family originates from India. She has provided individualized, in-class support to students with behavioural disorders, and intellectual and physical disabilities, using youth-centered, anti-oppressive, and strengths-based approaches. She has also developed and facilitated peer-support groups, stress relief activities, and expressive arts activities for children and youth between the ages of 6 and 22. Kruti currently provides academic and social support to marginalized students, ages 13 to 18, living in low-income communities. She is also pursuing a double minor in French and Psychology.

**CURRENT STUDENTS****MEGAN HOLMAN**  
**Placement Student (Fall 2020)**

Megan is a Métis placement student completing her Child and Youth Care degree at Ryerson University. She takes pride in her Indigenous roots as well as her Scottish, Irish, and French ancestry. Megan has a passion for working with young people, especially teenagers. She has 5+ years of experience working with vulnerable youth in both camp and community settings. Through working with Finding Our Power Together Megan aims to learn more about advocacy and how to better support Indigenous youth across Turtle Island. After she finishes her degree, Megan hopes to pursue a Master of Social Work to further explore her passion for serving others. She hopes to one day open her own equine therapy business where she can support and aid children and youth in their healing from trauma.



## FORMER STAFF

LAUREN AKBAR

### **LAUREN AKBAR**

**Building Our Bundle Program Coordinator (January - December 2020)**

Lauren has spent the last ten years partnering with Indigenous communities in Canada; her role ranged from direct youth work, training and coaching Indigenous youth workers in local communities, and providing capacity building and leadership training for communities. Lauren has experience providing support for vulnerable populations of young people facing a range of mental health concerns and works to create safer and braver spaces for youth to work on their personal development goals. Recently Lauren has begun facilitating freelance counselling utilizing the method of therapeutic coaching for young people between the ages of 15-25. Lauren also offers consulting services to non-profit and for profit organizations, including, but not limited to resource development, training and facilitation in leadership development, youth engagement, trauma-informed practice, etc. Lauren has both her Bachelors and Masters of Child and Youth Care.



## FORMER STUDENTS

### **ROSARIO DIZON, RECE**

BA ECS Candidate, Ryerson University

### **MARK SANTOS**

BA ECS Candidate, Ryerson University

### **NATASHA LANZOROTTA**

BA ECS Candidate, Ryerson University

# PROGRAMS

FOPT is excited to be in the process of developing programs that meet the needs of Indigenous youth in the current reality. Our team has been committed to increasing access for Indigenous young people to have mental and spiritual health support during this unprecedented time. Take a look at the programs that we developed throughout the year.



**BUILDING OUR  
BUNDLE**



**ONE-ON-ONE  
MENTORSHIP**



**OSKAATIS  
NIGAANIIWEMOWIN**



# FINDING OUR POWER TOGETHER BUILDING OUR BUNDLE

The Building Our Bundle Program is an online mental and spiritual health program designed to support Indigenous youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program offers 6 online weekly sessions to connect Indigenous youth with one another and the broader world to explore various mental health skills and cultural teachings.

Participants may choose to participate in synchronous online sessions in a group setting or engage with activities individually on their own time. All participants are also able to receive one-on-one mentoring support from the FOPT team who will work independently with young people on their self-determined goals.

## **Session Overview**

Finding Our Power Together launched its first season of Building Our Bundle during the summer of 2020. As COVID-19 continued to isolate us from one another, FOPT team came together with Nibinamik First Nation and other Indigenous young people across Canada to unite. Season one of BOB was conducted both in Nibinamik First Nation coordinated by Oskatis Nigaaniwe (Youth Leader) as well as asynchronously over our social media accounts.

This 6-week program engaged youth participants (ages 14-29) through the use of tablets, cellphones, or other electronic devices. Each week, participants engaged in the program by following online prompts, engaging in self-reflection activities and photo challenges facilitated by the Oskatis Nigaaniwe in community, and by submitting challenge photos to our team over social media. Weekly topics are oriented around developing self-help skills in facing mental health challenges, developing leadership capacities, and engaging in peer-to-peer communication through a cultural relational approach.



During our first session of BOB, we had 42 participants register for the 6-week program (optional 7th week), and many of these participants accessed one-on-one mentorship. Each week we had an average of 9 participants completing the weekly photo challenge, and an average of 10 mentorship sessions happening between the BOB Coordinator, Oskatis Nigaaniwe (youth leader) and or participants.

We feel the Building Our Bundle program was very successful in raising awareness of mental health challenges that have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic and providing tangible interventions to be used to help combat these challenges. In particular, our online videos were widely circulated, averaging around 3000 views a week across our major social media platforms (i.e Instagram, Youtube, Facebook). This meant that even if young people were not registered in the program, they might have been able to still access the content and potentially learn strategies to support their wellbeing.

<b>Building Our Bundle Session 1 Data</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b># of One-on-One Mentorship Session with Youth Leaders and Participants</b>	<b>Total # of Viewers Reached</b>	<b>Total # of Submitted Weekly Photo Challenges</b>
July 20 - 27, 2020	15	3164	13
July 28 - August 2, 2020	10	357	7
August 3 - 9, 2020	8	3963	8
August 10 - 16, 2020	7	3228	7
August 17 - 23, 2020	7	2479	7
August 24 - 30, 2020	13	5337	13
August 31 - Sept 7, 2020	10	4897	N/A

## Oskatis Nigaaniwe - Young Leaders: Community-Based Facilitation

During the planning stages of Building Our Bundle, it was clear to the FOPT team that youth mentorship was an important aspect to the program and would support the success of the project overall. We therefore sought out youth leaders (or Oskatis Nigaaniwe) based in Nibinamik First Nation, Sagamok First Nation, Brunswick House First Nation and Neyaashiinigmiing First Nation. Through the CREation funding opportunity FOPT received, we were able to hire and mentor three Oskatis Nigaaniwe to support the recruitment of young people and weekly facilitation of the program. In communities where there were no Oskatis Nigaaniwe, the FOPT provided online coaching and mentorship to participants to support them through the program. Through the 6-week BOB program, the FOPT provided a total of 21 mentorship sessions with the community Oskatis Nigaaniwe (youth leader) across all three communities.

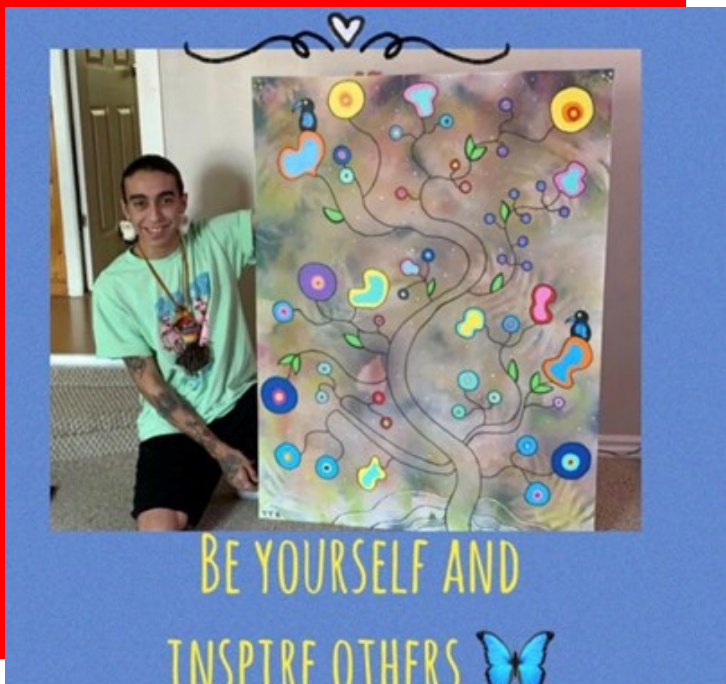
As the Building Our Bundle program continues to expand, so will the development of young leaders across first nation communities. Coming 2021, we will be hosting a synchronous BOB season in Six Nation, that will be co-developed and facilitated by a young community leader in partnership with Finding Our Power Together.

*"I feel my true self when I'm at my ancestral home where my people's pride is continuously flourishing in a non-westernalized world." -Kyrstin*

## Testimonials

### Tyler Rushnell

Tyler is 21 years old from Wasauksing First Nation and is an incredibly talented artist and he began connecting with FOPT through Instagram. Tyler joined the Building Our Bundle program in week two and jumped in full force. He caught up on week one's activities and became a weekly participant. Tyler utilized his skills as an artist to connect with the content with the program and created beautiful images to express his personal learnings from each week. Tyler was the final prize winner of the program and he shared a beautiful picture and quote:



“My experience participating in the Finding Our Power Together six-week challenges was being able to find confidence more in myself and the things I do whether that be in public or when I’m by myself, I’ve found that taking part in this community has benefited me well and I’ve met so many beautiful people and seen so many people share their beautiful photos from

being apart of the community. Chi Miigwetch”. Tyler expressed that he made the photo below when thinking about his learnings from the program.

*“Building Our Bundle has brought nothing but family and friends my way. I’m so grateful for the love everyone shows to each other and the teachings available through this program because I can bring some of those teachings into my life and my family’s life.” - Tyler Rushnell*

## Bee

Bee is a 26-year-old Indigenous participant from Hamilton, Ontario. Bee participated in all 6 weeks of the Building Our Bundle Program and actively reached out and engaged with the FOPT team. As a participant, Bee was very excited about the program and eager to begin learning and sharing in order to better herself. As a participant Bee utilized the one-on-one support and communication offered by the FOPT team. She often completed the weekly activities and photo challenges without many prompts from us, however, she did engage weekly through our social media platforms to connect and share with us.

Bee often reached out to express her gratitude for the lessons provided each week, and share with us the importance it held to her. She would speak to the teachings or the personal struggles she has overcome related to the topics of that week. Bee excelled at sharing her feelings and engaging with the material both on our social media as well as her own. She did not appear to struggle with the use of technology or the format of the program.

Living in an urban environment, Bee expressed she does her best to surround herself with nature. With the use of this program, she was able to explore and find gratitude in the land around her. Throughout the 6-week program, Bee expressed how the program allowed herself time to reflect; on herself and her gifts. She did well to express areas she was thriving in but also utilized the week's lessons to reflect on areas she struggles with and is working to overcome.

*"Be kind to yourself and others." -Tyler Rushnell*

The Finding Our Power Together team appreciated that Bee participated weekly, and did very well at using this time and these teachings to reflect and reconnect with herself. Bee showed such strength and willingness to heal, and such a love for herself, her family, and her culture.



On the left is Bee's week 1 photo challenge. It is a photo of items that she has collected over time to add to her personal bundle. She describes the white and green flower as being near and dear to her as it is a gift given to her by her son. The sage is from her garden, she was offered this plant to grow from an elder for sharing and showing strength. Lastly, cedar represents the gratitude she feels.

*Bee expressed how the program allowed herself time to reflect; about herself and her gifts. She showed such strength and willingness to heal, and such a love for herself, her family and her culture.*

## Angel

Angel is 29 years old and is from Nibinamik First Nation, a remote fly-in community in northern Ontario. In Nibinamik, the Finding Our Power Together team hired an Oskatis Nigaaniwe (Youth Leader) to facilitate the program and support youth throughout the six weeks. Angel immediately jumped on board, she expressed her interest in learning more about the activities throughout the Building Our Bundle program and she enjoyed taking pictures each week to articulate her learnings. Each week she connected with the Finding Our Power Together team to learn more about the activities, share what she was working on, and convey challenges she was facing. Angel was eager and keen to learn throughout this program and any program that involves technology is bound to have challenges with technology.

When utilizing new applications (apps) on her tablet, Angel found herself reaching out for support in how to use those apps and create her image. Although she found ease in delving deeper into the self-reflection activities and utilizing her tablet to take images, using the new apps were, at times, a challenge. The FOPT team helped support her through these challenges by sharing ideas and videos on how to use those apps, and also by supporting her to create her image.

*"Life is a dance, you learn as you go."*



The FOPT team appreciated Angel's dedication to the process. She not only was going through each week's activities in the participant guides meticulously, but she was also teaching herself new skills through technology and reaching out regularly to check in. Angel's kindness and expression of self were humbling and taught our team the importance of creating spaces online to learn a multitude of new skills.



On the left is Angel's week 5 photo challenge, expressing her personal mantra being "Life is a dance, you learn as you go". She discussed that this mantra is something that she tells herself or looks at the quote itself from time to time and that it helps to provide ease and comfort.

*"Grow through what you go through."*

## Photo Challenge Examples



*“My experience participating in the Finding Our Power Together six-week challenges was being able to find confidence more in myself and the things I do whether that be in public or when I’m by myself. Chi Miigwetch” - Tyler Rushnell*

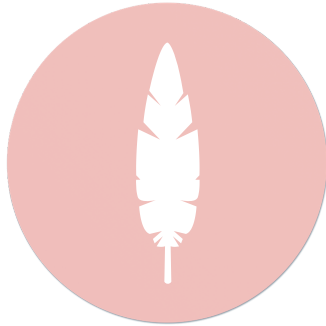


## Moving Forward

As we move forward, the FOPT team continues to strive to improve, revamp, and explore new approaches to delivering an online mental health program to support the well-being of young Indigenous people. As we head into 2021, FOPT will be hosting Building Our Bundle Season 2, which will be a 6-week, synchronous program, in which we will be exploring new teachings, skills and sharing of experiences. FOPT is developing future BOB seasons that have been informed not only by participants' feedback, but by research. The Building Our Bundle program has been informed by research conducted by Nicole Ineese-Nash and Maggie Stein called The Braided Approach. This approach has a focus on Indigenous ways of knowing, Child and Youth Care practices and Dialectical Behavioural Therapy.

A braided approach to mental health support is an integrative model that recognizes the individual strengths and limitations to any one approach alone. A braid is woven with intention, in order to acknowledge and honour identity, culture, and spirituality. The braided approach is formed by the principles described below. While each strand of the approach is important on its own, it is through the interrelationship they hold with one another that a strong braid is built. It is integral to consider each part as related to the whole.

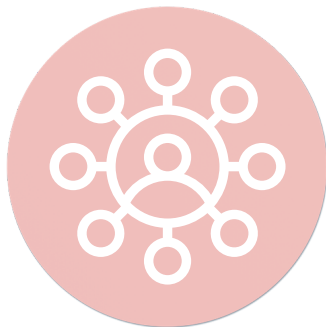
## Principles of a Braided Approach



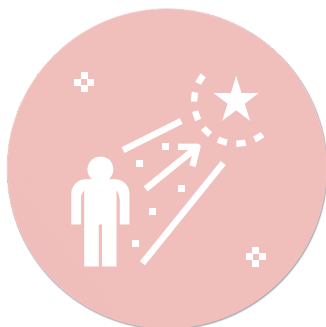
We promote **culture** by incorporating Indigenous teachings, values and language into our mental health practice, where appropriate.



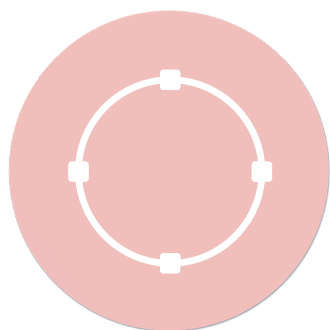
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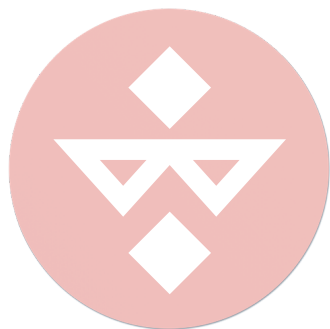
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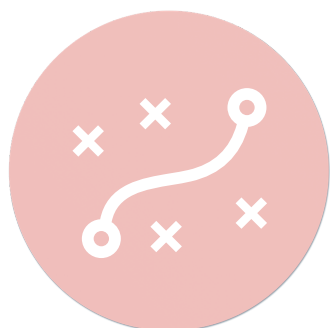
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We encourage the exploration of balanced living through reflection and practice of care within all aspects of the self to achieve balance restoration.



**Context Specificity**; we actively acknowledge environmental and historical factors that have and continue to impact each individual and their lived-reality and adapt to suit the specific needs of the individuals and communities.

Our Braided Approach encompasses and requires a flexible relational approach that is trauma-informed and culturally safe. When approaching mental health service provision with Indigenous youth, here are some additional things our team values: accessibility, respecting and following community lead, involvement of family (chosen or biological), teaching and development of skills and tools, and understanding and empathy to build meaningful relationships.

# FINDING OUR POWER TOGETHER

# **BUILDING**

# **OUR BUNDLE**

## Upcoming BOB Sessions

In 2021, the Building Our Bundle program has big expansion plans; the program has four more seasons planned for the new year. This new year will bring programs that are delivered both synchronously and asynchronously online to support the diverse needs of our population. The upcoming seasons will be hosted both in communities and opened nationwide to any young Indigenous people looking to learn, grow and connect with others.

Session	Date	Method	Location
BOB Season 2	Feb - March 2021	Synchronous	Online, nationwide
BOB Season 3	April - May 2021	Synchronous	Online, nationwide
BOB Season 4	May - June 2021	Synchronous	Online, Six Nations FN
BOB Season 5	July - August 2021	Asynchronous	Social media

# MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

As Finding Our Power Together created and launched Building Our Bundle this year, our team realized the need for one-to-one support for the young people participating in BOB as well as those that were following along on their own. This mentorship program was inspired by the mentoring that was taking place between our BOB program coordinator and our Oskatis Nigaaniwe (youth leader) in Nibinamik First Nation. During the first season of BOB, we had 21 mentorship sessions between the community leader and the BOB Coordinator. As young people continued to reach out and bring to light more need for individualized support, mentorship was created.

Mentorship was designed to support Indigenous youth who were looking for more individualized support with one of our mental health mentors. It was an opportunity for young people to connect with a mentor to learn and build new skills, work on goals or tasks, and have someone that they could regularly connect with. Our mentors come from a variety of backgrounds; child and youth care, social work, early childhood studies, traditional knowledge holders and more which created a diverse team to support diverse needs.

After the end of the first Building Our Bundle Season, the Finding Our Power Together team supported 3 Indigenous young people on a regular basis, this included one weekly session for approximately 12-weeks. Finding Our Power Together created a mental health team that would meet weekly to discuss mentorship, access supervision from Dr. Judy Finlay, debrief and plan for best practices. Our mental health team met approximately 12 times after the end of our first BOB season to continue to develop our mentorship program.



As FOPT continues to grow and more young people seek one-to-one support the more mentorship grows and develops. FOPT strives to support as many young people as possible, and to increase the number of young people accessing mentorship. Our plan is when young people register for Building Our Bundle sessions, they will automatically be paired with a mentor. This allows for us to streamline the process and to normalize individualized support. Young people will be paired with a mentor based on their interests, goals and type of support needed. For example a young person that is graduating high school, and looking for support around applying to post-secondary may be paired with a mentor that specialized in academic support.



# OSKAATIS NIGAANIWEMOWIN

Oskatis Nigaaniwemowin, which translates to the "The Way of the Young Leader" is the Anishnaabewmowin name for FOPT's Young Leaders Circle. The Young Leaders Circle is a group of Indigenous young people between the ages of 14-29 from across Turtle Island who share a common interest in supporting youth in their communities. Through reciprocal sharing and teaching, the Circle supports one another to develop skills, explore challenges, and celebrate successes in youth life promotion work, as well as advising on FOPT's organizational decisions and program design. The Young Leaders Circle meets seasonally engaging in networking, training and cultural teachings.

The Young Leaders Circle (YLC) is a program that aligns with the history, mandate, and goals of Finding Our Power Together. Our organization began as a way to support Indigenous young people who were mobilizing to support one another amidst suicide outbreaks in northern remote First Nations in Ontario; through consultations with this group (The Nibinamik First Nation Youth Council) and other youth across Canada, we have heard a need for support Networks for Indigenous youth where they are able to have emotional, spiritual, material, and educational support in order to continue the work they seek to do within their

communities. The YLC provides tangible and relational resources to Indigenous young people so that they may be able to access professional and personal development opportunities; develop skills in program design, facilitation, and mental health approaches; increase cultural connectedness and competencies through cultural experiences and teachings; enhance social networks with other Indigenous young people and professionals, and obtain peer mentorship and services to support their own healing and vicarious trauma. We do this through seasonal gatherings in which participants are able to: connect with each other and Indigenous mentors from the FOPT team; learn cultural teachings and engage in cultural experiences such as sharing circles and ceremonies; participate in professional development activities and trainings (provided by FOPT and other mental health organizations); work on personal goals and challenges through individual counseling and mentorship (throughout the year), and develop local solutions and programs to meet the needs of their communities (with the support of trained youth workers and social workers).

The YLC is needed, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to identify and address the needs of Indigenous young people at the local, regional, and national levels. In the context of COVID-19, many Indigenous youth are facing significant barriers in maintaining optimal health and wellbeing as a result of social distancing, a lack of resources and infrastructure within their communities, and an increase in depression and anxiety as a result of significant changes in normative living. These issues compound longstanding social conditions such as inadequate access to mental health services, intergenerational trauma, and lack of cultural support systems, which ultimately contribute to poor mental health and premature death by suicide. There is therefore a need to support local initiatives that increase capacities for Indigenous young people within their local contexts while having a network of supports to increase youth capacity, as well as improved social and cultural connectedness. We know without local programs and support in Indigenous communities, some young people will choose to end their

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lives altogether. Research shows that Indigenous youth between the ages of 10 and 29 who are living on reserve are 5 to 7 times more likely to die by suicide compared to non-Indigenous youth and we do not wish to lose any more of our young people.

## First Young Leaders Gathering: Fall 2020

Finding Our Power Together hosted its first gathering of the Oskatis Nigaaniwemowin - Young Leaders Circle in November 2020. This was an opportunity for many young Indigenous leaders to come together and reflect on what being a leader means, what barriers are preventing more youth from taking leadership roles, and how FOPT can better support Indigenous youth across Turtle Island. Eight young leaders participated in the virtual session from across Canada, each sharing their experiences with leadership and their hopes for the future. The Young Leaders Circle started off with a teaching by Nyle Johnston about what it means to be a leader and how we can work together to make good choices for our communities. The Indigenous youth were asked to share what being a leader meant to them. A word map was generated to illustrate the responses from the youth.

### What is a leader?

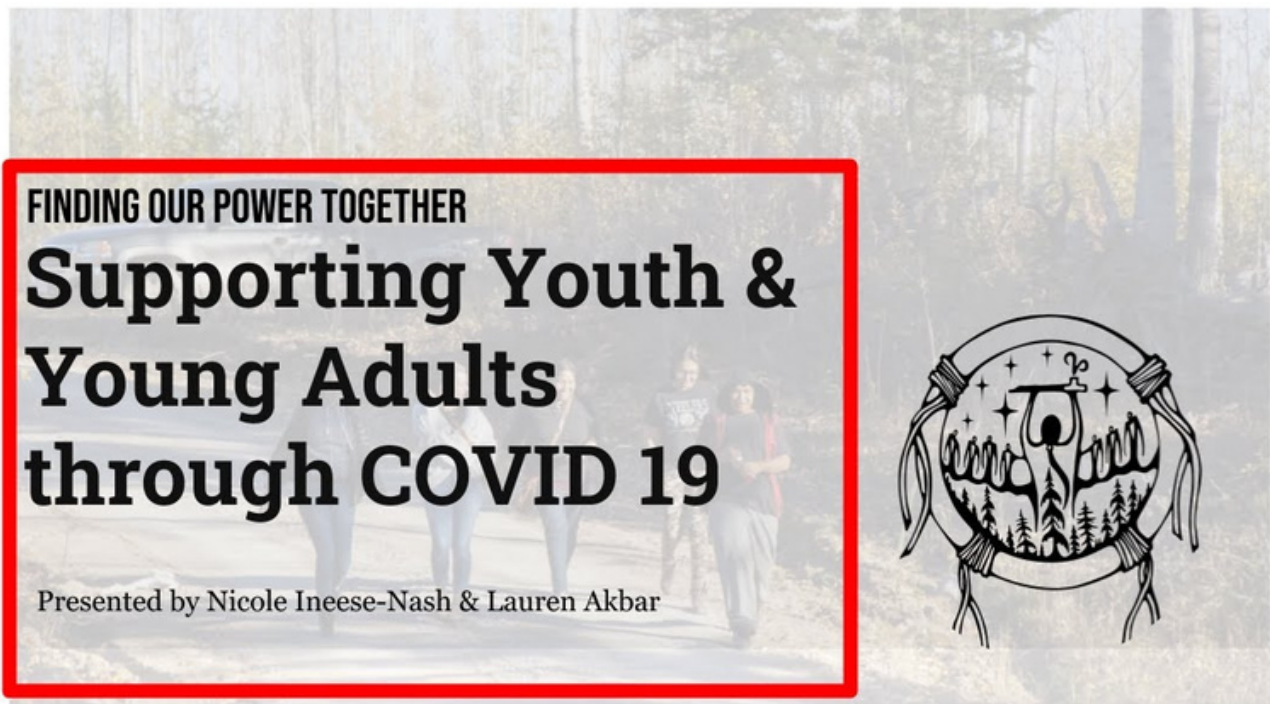


# WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS

## SUPPORTING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS DURING COVID-19

Nicole Ineese-Nash and Lauren Akbar hosted an online webinar where they discussed theoretical and practical ways parents and adults working with youth may support young people during the challenging time of social distancing. They further discussed ecological system changes impacting young people, principles of youth support, and offer reflective activities to engage in with the young people in their lives.

The 30-minute video webinar was presented in early 2020 and is currently posted on our website.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

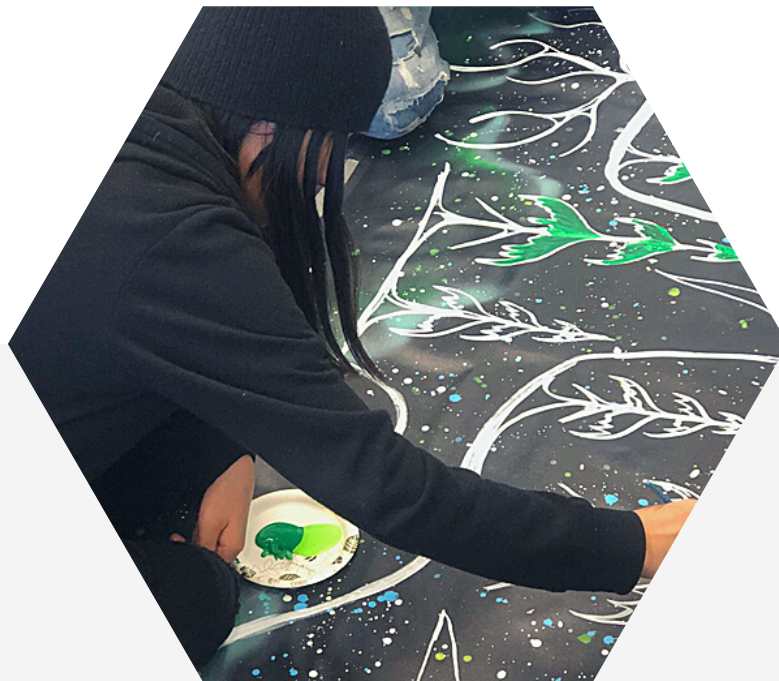
## NIBINAMIK TRIPS

A group of 5 Ryerson team members visited Nibinamik First Nation in February 2020. The goal of this visit was to engage in community consultation and dialogue regarding strategies for supporting the young people of the community, as well as engaging with youth directly. During this visit, the team was able to assist with community events, such as the Family Day dance and school movie screening, as well as facilitate a variety of youth activities. In particular, the Ryerson team worked with the school staff and students to create a community mural depicting the Finding Our Power Together (more on this in the following sections) logo designed by a youth in Nibinamik in 2017 which was then revealed to the community with a community feast. The team consulted with many community stakeholders including Chief and Band Council, the health director, youth workers, teachers, youth, and elders regarding strategies to support young people long term.



These consultations lead to the following ideas for engaging youth:

- Youth-Elder night focused on language and culture
- Leadership training for youth and youth workers
- Frontline staff appreciation event incorporating self-care
- Recreational programming for youth
- Art-based programming for children and youth
- Frontline staff training and support around reporting
- Talking circles with staff and youth
- Music lessons/workshops
- Naloxone training/drug awareness
- Support youth in creating short documentary video on the need for a youth centre
- Bullying/cyber-bullying workshop for youth
- Consent workshop for youth



## NEYAASHIINIGMIING

Our team visited Nayashiinigmiing in the summer of 2020 for community consultation and visioning session. During our time there, 8 members of our team were able to take part in cultural activities and ceremonies and connect for a path forward. This time was an important opportunity for debriefing, connection, and healing from the many months of COVID-19 restrictions. We were also able to connect with several Indigenous youth community members who were then hired as Young Leaders for our Building Our Bundle programs.



# CAMPAIGNS

## WORDS OF SUPPORT



At the start of 2020, we collectively experienced the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has particular impacts on Indigenous communities who have disproportionately high rates of ill-health, social isolation, and suicide. Many youth will not survive this crisis. However, we can immediately put supports in place to ensure that no community member is without appropriate support in this time of global crisis. Finding Our Power Together wanted to put support into action at the start of the 2020 pandemic, and we began our outreach with a Words of Support Campaign. This campaign was designed to allow Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together and show our support for Indigenous communities during this time. It was an opportunity to let everyone know they were not alone. To share inspiring messages, words of hope, solidarity, and encouragement.



## COVID-19 EMERGENCY DONATION DRIVE

As a result of COVID-19, our usual in-community programming was shifted in order to support local community responses to the global health pandemic. Finding Our Power Together held a COVID-19 emergency donation drive in February and May 2020 to support Indigenous youth and their families in remote First Nations communities experiencing compounded impacts of the pandemic amidst other social crises. Thanks to the generous support from our donors, we were able to send two shipments of donations to Nibinamik, Eabametoong, and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nations. The shipments included over one thousand pounds containing:



- 11 500 medical-grade face masks
- 2360 handmade fabric masks
- 140 hygiene kits
- Over 45 boxes of educational materials
- Miscellaneous cleaning supplies
- Non-perishable food items

# HOW DO YOU THRIVE?

## THRIVING THURSDAYS

Thriving Thursdays is a social media campaign that Finding Our Power Together started as a way to spotlight Indigenous youth (14-29) and youth-serving individuals/organizations (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who are supporting their communities. To date, we have featured over 20 individuals and/or organizations on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter platforms.

## Thriving Thursday Examples

### Edie & Jacquelyn Assinewe

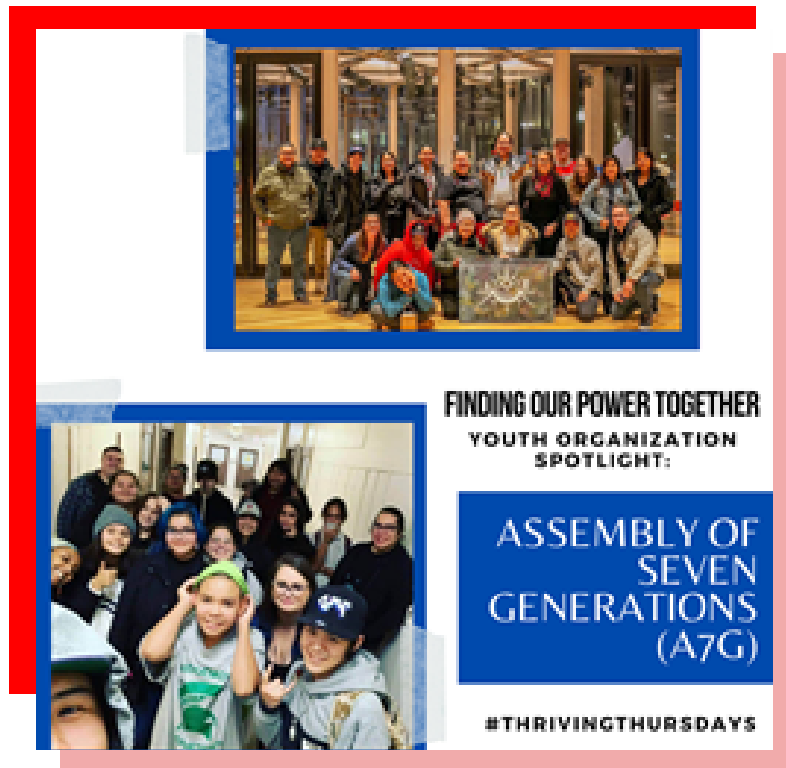


Edie and Jacquelyn Assinewe are 22-year-old twin sisters who were born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. They are members of Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation (located north from Sudbury, Ontario). Both are full-time students studying business and fashion at Ryerson University and Humber College. They both worked on Ryerson University's first ever virtual Pow Wow over

the summer as Social Media Lead and Event Logistics and E-Commerce Lead. They are currently bringing their passion to life with the creation of Assinewe Jewelry (@assinewejewelry)! As Co-Founders of the company, their passion is to reconnect with their culture and create jewelry for all to wear!

*Edie & Jacquelyn define thriving as: "knowing your worth and being confident. Making connections and growing within your community"*

## Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G)



Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) is an Indigenous-owned and youth-led, non-profit organization focused on cultural support and empowerment programs/policies for Indigenous youth while being led by traditional knowledge and Elder guidance.” A7G has created an innovative and inspiring space for youth online in response to the challenges of COVID-19, check out their website for more information: <https://www.a7g.ca>

## Tyler Tabobondung Rushnell



Tyler (21yrs) is a member of the Beaver Clan from Wasauksing First Nation, currently living in Parry Sound, Ontario. "Being raised off reserve and not really being close to my community and not knowing my traditions and ceremonies was hard for me."

Tyler shared that he was often looking for something

to grasp onto to learn from and felt a connection to Native Studies, "I felt it in my spirit to learn, it was definitely a calling for me; especially my mother not knowing about her culture, I was able to shed light and share our traditions with her. Growing up, trying to find myself and my purpose was challenging to say the least."

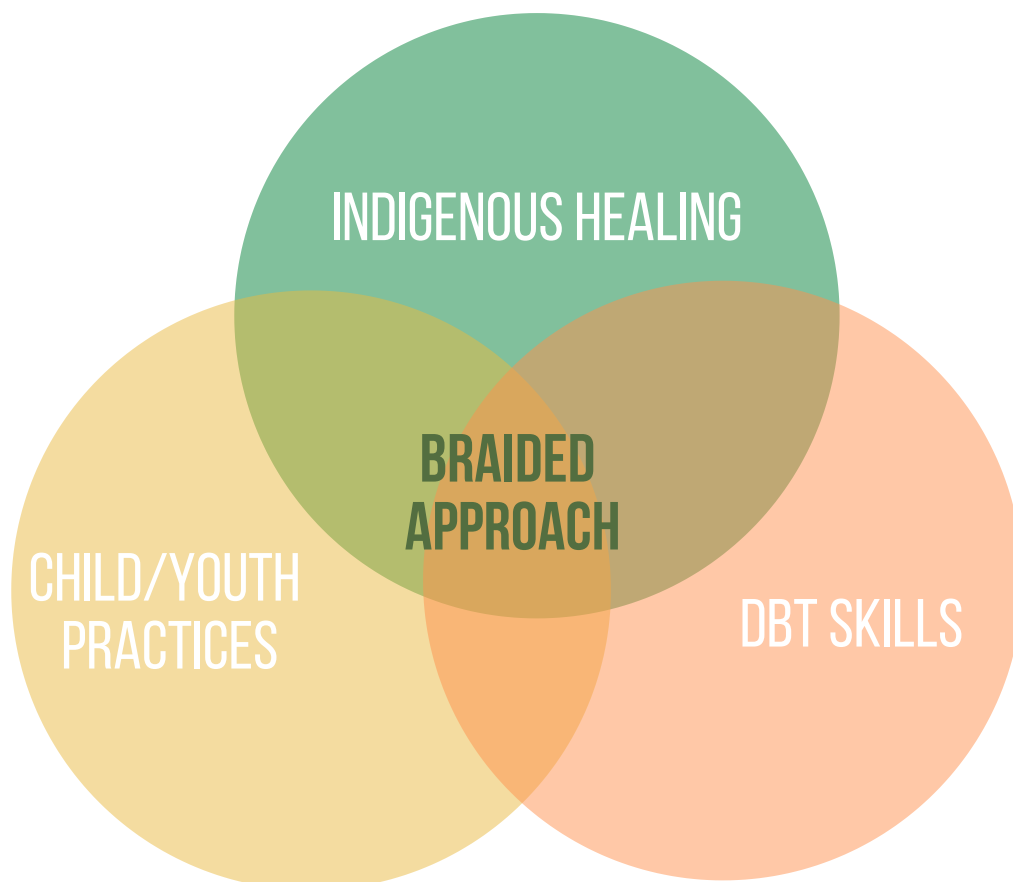
Tyler's journey with art started in late 2018, it began with doing an Anishnaabe style of artwork, where he received much inspiration from Norval Morrisseau. Tyler donated a painting of his called "Nature's Beauty" to a children's foundation, in doing this, he hoped it may spark children's creative instincts and inspire them to participate in the arts. Tyler is motivated by inspiring those around him and connecting to the world around him.

*Tyler's message is to be kind and inspire others, no matter what you are doing.*

# RESEARCH

## A BRAIDED MENTAL HEALTH APPROACH FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH

In the summer of 2020, team members Maggie Stein and Nicole Ineese-Nash were awarded a student award from OISE to complete research related to COVID-19. The research project resulted in a report called “A Braided Approach to Indigenous Youth Mental Health,” a synthesis of knowledge from three systematic literature reviews and four informant consultations with mental health providers in various disciplines. The braided approach includes core principles of Indigenous Healing models (IH), Child and Youth Care (CYC) approaches, and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) practices. The purpose of this approach is to best serve the mental and spiritual health needs of Indigenous youth across Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research project resulted in the design and implementation of our online mental health programs.



## SERVICE PATHWAY MAPPING PROJECT

Over the course of 2020, our team has been researching and documenting social services as they relate to youth and child mental health and wellbeing. Through an approach called Institutional Ethnography (IE), two research projects were conducted in order to better understand the current context of services available to children in youth in Northwestern Ontario. IE is a method that enables researchers to identify systemic issues, barriers, and ideologies that impact interactions at both the macro and micro levels. These projects yielded important data that enabled our team to better support Indigenous youth and children in these regions, develop inter-organizational processes and partnerships, and support the development of programs and services intended to bridge gaps in service provision. Systems maps were used to illustrate the complexities of predominant youth mental health and early childhood disability service systems available to Indigenous youth and children.

### I. Youth Mental Health Services Map

The Youth Mental Health Services Map is part of an ongoing research project informed by self-determined priorities articulated in the Nibinamik Community Wellness Index, a collaborative report between members of an interdisciplinary research team from Ryerson University and Nibinamik First Nation community members. Suicide prevention was identified as one of the most significant priorities by Indigenous youth and community members in Nibinamik. This priority prompted a closer look into the current system of formal and informal mental health services available to Indigenous youth in remote communities in northwestern Ontario.

*The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world.*  
- Shawn Wilson

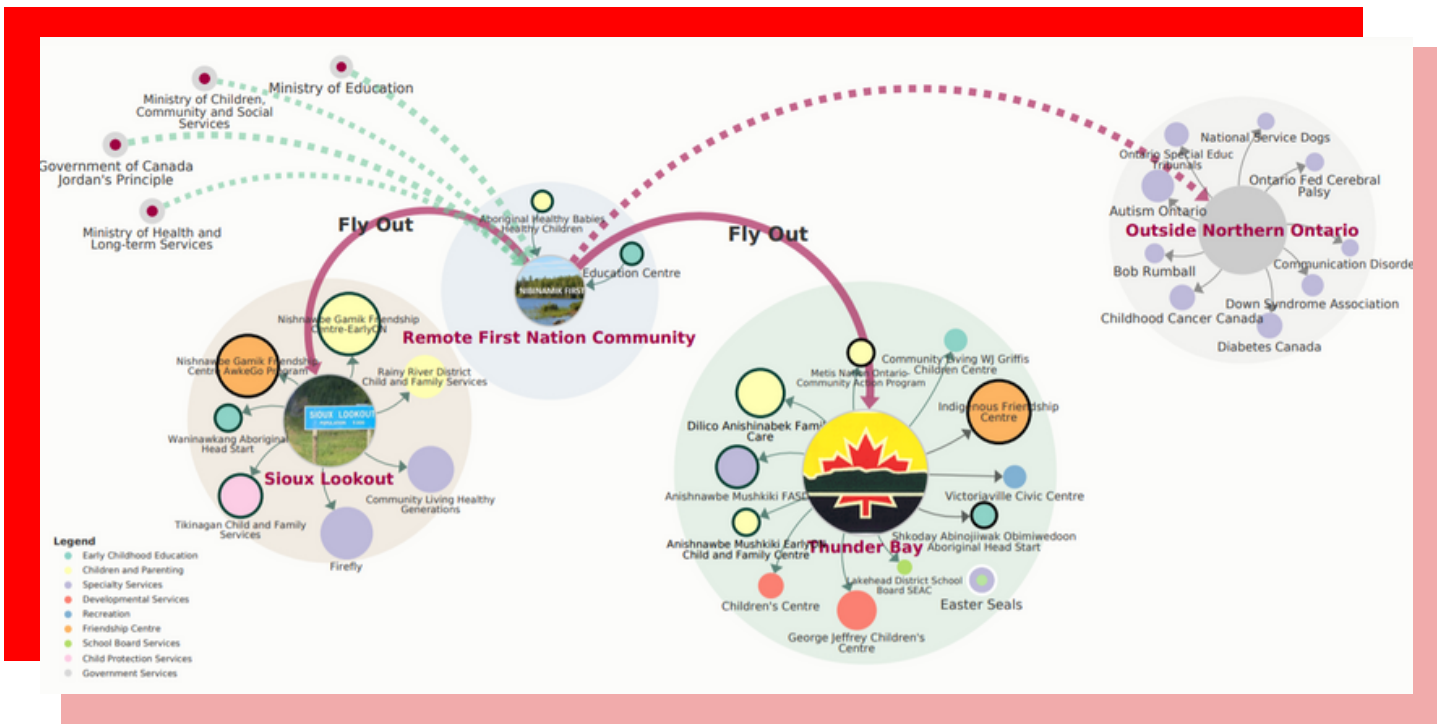
Members of the FOPT team developed a master list of mental health services, which were grouped into the following categories: Mental health, COVID-19, crisis, funding, training, addiction, housing, education, culture, intervention, and medical. A systems map was generated using the data from the list of mental health services to illustrate the key organizations involved and how they are connected via service pathways.

Based on preliminary findings from the data, it is evident that the current system of mental health services available to Indigenous youth in northwestern Ontario is insufficient based on issues of accessibility-related to geographical, cultural, and policy barriers. The findings of this project will enable our team to better support Indigenous youth in these regions, develop inter-organizational processes and partnerships, and support the development of programs and services intended to bridge gaps in service provision.

## **I. Early Childhood Disability Services Map**

The Early Childhood Disability Services Map was developed by self-determined priorities Based on the information provided from The Mamow Ki-ken-da-ma-win: Searching Together Project in Nibinamik First Nation Executive Summary (2014), and Nibinamik Community Wellness Index: Final Report, A database of existing early childhood services and supports that are available was completed in collaboration with team leaders and members of Finding our Power Together (FOPT). Information from this database was translated to a community map which provided a visual overview of the early childhood disability system of supports and services.





For this project, the service agencies and support programs that were identified were grouped into nine categories: early childhood education; child and parenting; specialty services; recreation; child protection; friendship centres; school services; government services; and developmental services. Findings from the community systems map indicate that there are limited services available and accessible to Indigenous families living in remote Northern communities. To avail of this range of services and supports, families and children need to fly out, distancing them from their community and the support of their community members. This does not align with their cultural values of connectedness and interdependence with their community, which are strong determinants of their health and well-being. Based on the inaccessibility of these early childhood services and supports, this system does not satisfactorily meet the rights of the Indigenous child. To fulfill the rights of the Indigenous child, a system of support and culturally appropriate services need to be placed in an accessible and coordinated manner.

# MIIGWETCH

## FOPT ACKNOWLEDGES

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CRE Canadian Roots  
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Snowchange

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Bernick  
Candace Buck  
Carolyn Dunham- Wilkie  
Catherine Raine  
Celeste Lessard-Kragen  
Chantelle Walker

Florence Letarte  
Fredric Martin  
Gideon Forman  
Gwen Beal  
Heather Griffin  
Herta Neufeld  
Hilary Nickel  
Hillory Tenute

### DONORS & PARTNERS

Alicia A Akbar  
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Alison Smith  
Allison Neshinapaise  
Allison Reynaud  
Allison Smith  
Amanda Lowe Music & Art  
Amanda Stolk  
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Claran Geaney  
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Daniel Halpert  
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Elsha Daya  
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Esencia Solar Wellness  
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Jessica Griffiths  
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Samantha Zerafa  
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Sibat Anam  
Sophia Bell  
Strini Reddy  
Tara Rose Farrell  
Thipika Bala  
Vanessa Nicholson  
Vigan Nazarian  
Yanique Brandford  
Yellowhead Institute  
Yu-Ching Tsai

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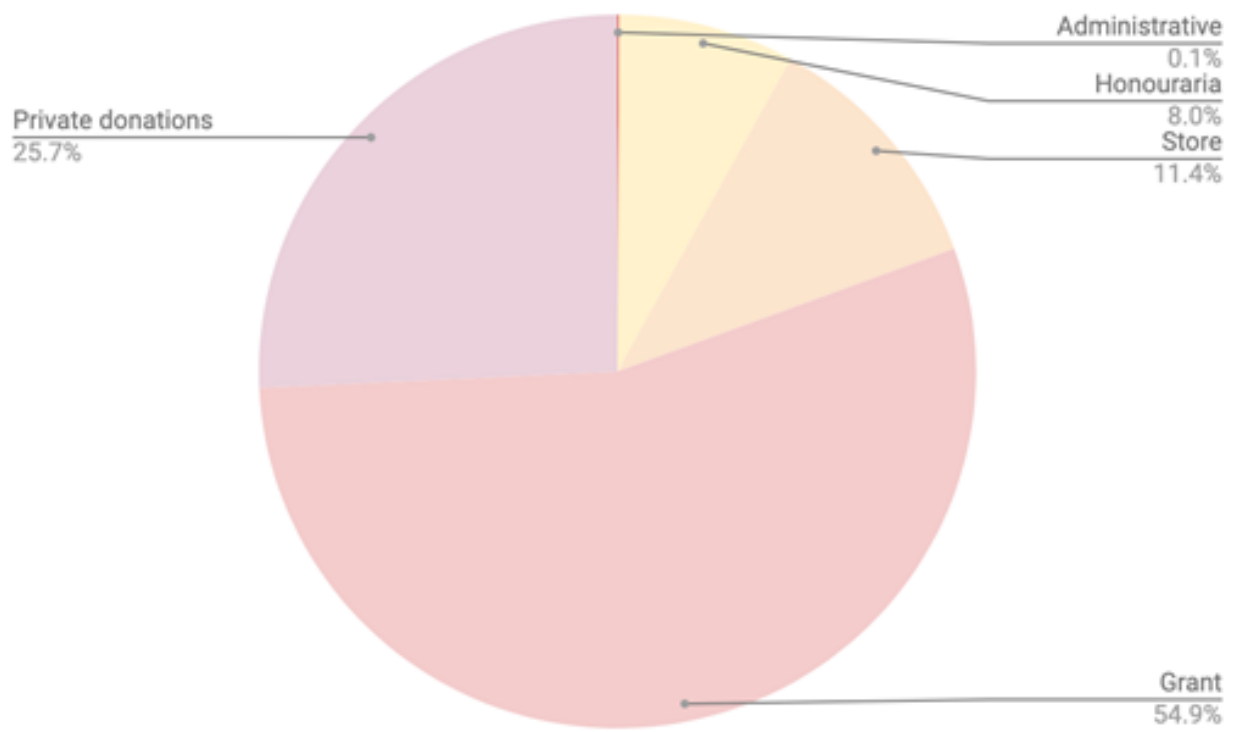
Jessica Bitton  
Jessica Sherk  
Kruti Patel  
Megan Holman  
Mark Santos  
Natasha Lanzarotta  
Rosario Dizon

# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

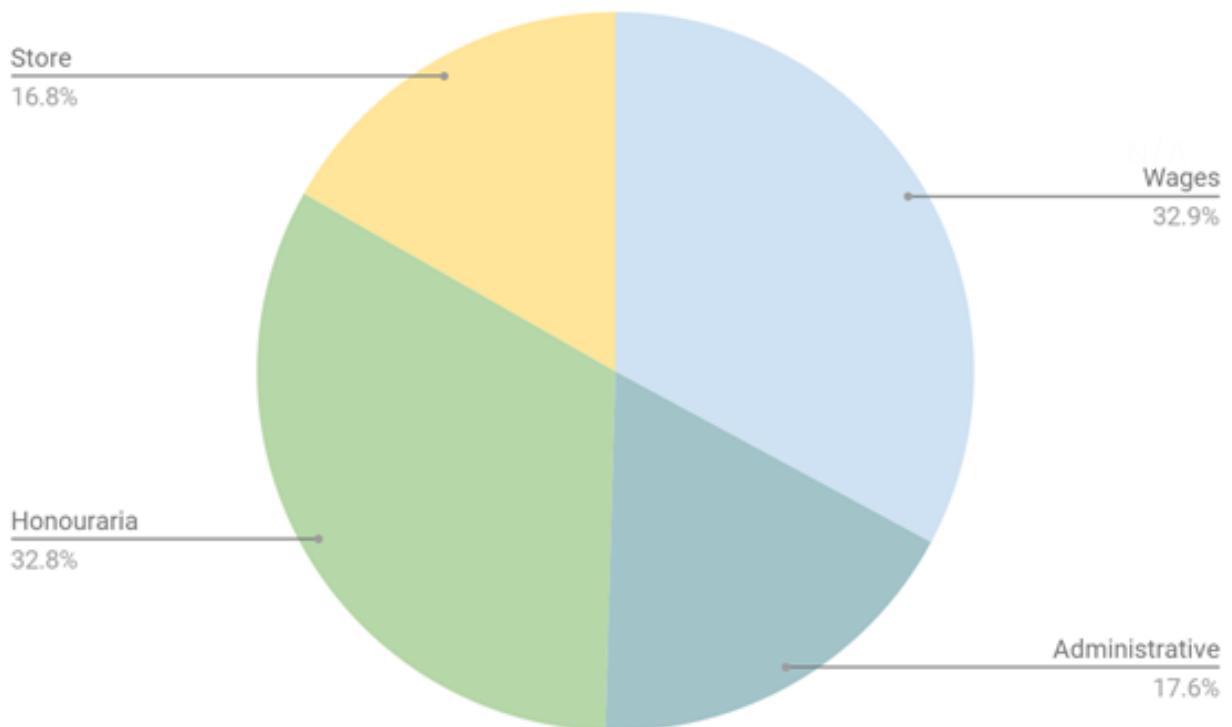
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION			
TYPE	INCOME	EXPENSE	BALANCE
Wages	0	-9144.79	-9144.79
Administrative	20.47	-4889.52	-4869.05
Honouraria	2500	-9120	-6620
Store	3573.57	-4663.28	-8236.85
Grant	17222.35	0	17222.35
Private donations	8081.29	0	8081.29
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>31397.68</b>	<b>-27817.59</b>	<b>3580.09</b>

TOTALS	EXPENSE
Wages	9144.79
Administrative	4889.52
Honouraria	9120
Store	4663.28
Grant	0
Private donations	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27817.59</b>

## FOPT REVENUE



## FOPT EXPENSES



# CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

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As a growing team that is adapting to the many changes that COVID-19 has posed, we are thinking critically about how to best support Nibinamik and other Indigenous communities across the country.

Here is what we hope to accomplish in 2021:

- Formalized mental health services for Indigenous youth provided by trained youth mental health workers and Indigenous traditional practitioners
- Solicitation of donations for partner communities
- Training for youth on various topics, including Mental Health First Aid
- Development of additional mental health and land-based programming for youth
- Facilitation of additional synchronous virtual sessions of Building Our Bundle with a focus on the body and developing Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) skills
- Increased network building between organizations and communities
- Formalization of organizational governance structure
- Maintain sustainable funding sources

**OUR ROLE AS HELPERS TO INDIGENOUS YOUTH IS TO GUIDE THEM ALONG THEIR OWN PATH, SO THEY CAN HOLD HOPE AND DESIRE FOR THE FUTURE.**



**FINDING OUR POWER TOGETHER**

**MIIGWETCH**

# FINDING OUR POWER TOGETHER

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS YOUTH TO THRIVE



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