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NATIVE CHILD
AND FAMILY SERVICES
OF TORONTO

Seeking Expansion of Land Based Programming

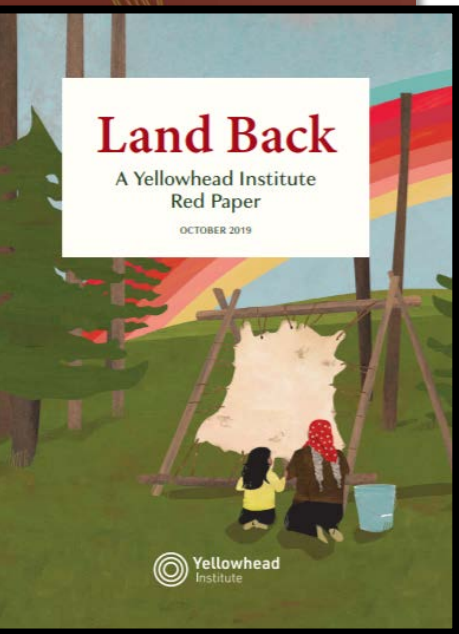
Learnings from NCFST Trauma-Informed land-based response to COVID-19

July 7, 2020

Agenda

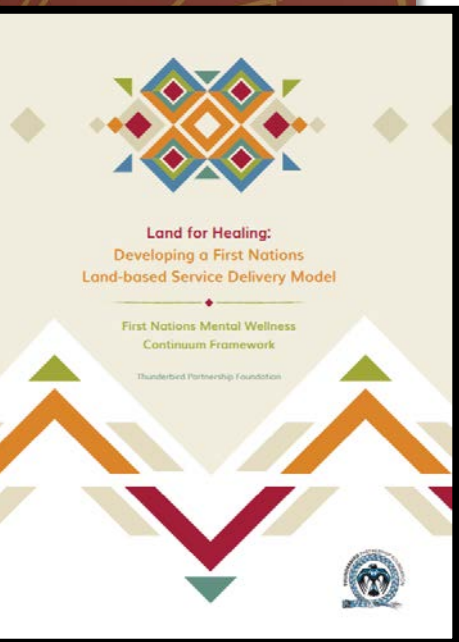
- Land Based Practices
- Pilot
- Outcomes
- Implications
- Request for Support & Expansion





Land Based Practices

- The land has always been fundamental for **health** and **cultural identity** for Indigenous peoples.
- As beings of the earth and from the earth, we have developed specific concepts, practices and standards of care that are derived from and deployed on the land, which aim to maintain **spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wellness**. Land is viewed as a living, breathing, conscious being that **heals and teaches**, and is therefore the source of a positive cultural identity and balanced wellbeing. The expression "**All my relations**" underlines the **connection to earth** and **centrality of Spirit**.
- **Poor mental health outcomes** across Indigenous communities in Canada is a direct result of **harmful colonial practices**,



Pilot

A trauma-informed land-based response to COVID-19

What we found:

- Numerous families who have found themselves unable to access services also lack access to green space.

What we did:

- Worked with the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario to bring on the land opportunities to children and families.

How it works:

- Indigenous families of up to four members who have been self-isolating meet with a member of the Native Child and they participate in a range of culturally specific activities, including Indigenous storytelling, singing Indigenous songs, children such as strawberry hunts at three Toronto parks.

Goals:

- Initiative will help to address many of the issues children and families are struggling with during the pandemic, including

Partners:

- In partnership with the University of Toronto and The Hospital for Sick Children we've developed a rapid evaluation tool. based data in Ontario of the impact of a trauma-informed land-based response to COVID-19 for vulnerable Indigenous hotspots.





"Part of our culture is we take our shoes off, we walk in the grass, we connect with Mother Earth. It helps us to recharge our mind, body and spirit"

Video
youtu.be/6slrcHOQNf4



Preliminary findings: What parents are saying

Improved mental health

- “Being here helps her mellow out, when she comes home she’s fine and not upset”
- “(my daughter) needs it, she craves it, she counts down the days to coming”
- “being an only child without her friends she is having a really hard time with it (being alone)”

Decreased Parent stress

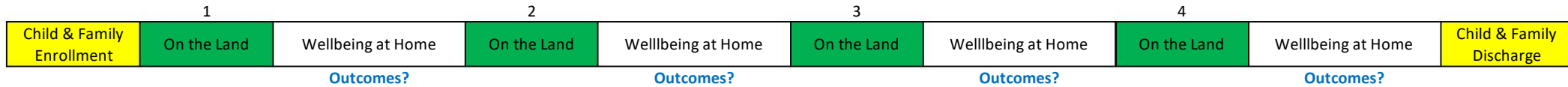
- “I was able to talk, feel better... when I got here I was jumbled and stressed”
- “When we are here I don’t have to *watch her* watch her, I trust you guys”

Increased Physical exercise

- How much physical exercise did she get today? “lots! Look at her! Over an hour from start to finish”
- “We got a full 90 minutes today”



Outcomes



Measuring the anticipated outcomes for families able to reconnect with the environment and lands:

1. Shifts in the **anxiety** levels of participants
2. Increase in the quality of family **relationships**
3. Improvements in caregiver **well-being**
4. Measuring the time spent in **physical activity**

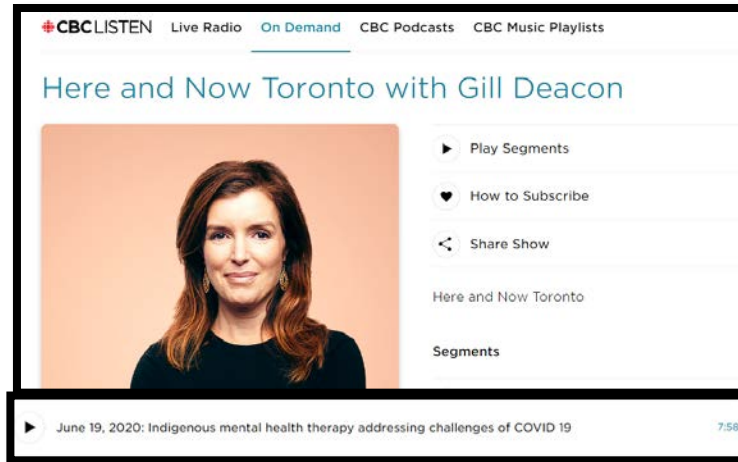
The objective of the data collection is to provide concrete evidence to assist in advocating on behalf of Indigenous families for safe access to land and land based programming.



Globe & Mail



CBC



Toronto Star



On the Land Awareness Outcomes

Implications

1. Reduction of governmental red tape & oversight
 - Self-determination in Action
2. Space for ceremony, traditional gardens, medicines and activities
 - Land Reclamation
3. Permanent structures in parks
 - Supporting a sense of place & identity with lodges, memorials and plaques offering teachings, stories and history.....



Request for Support & Expansion

- Statement of support for NCFST's continued operations in the parks including the provision of Day Camps beginning July 13
 - Face-to-face day camps will run on Mondays (for 6-9 year old's), Wednesdays (for 10-12 year old's) and Fridays (for 13-16 year old's). Activities to include Elder opening, smudging ceremony, teaching circle and a range of culturally specific activities and physical activity for children and youth.
- Action item to collectively continue the conversation supporting access to municipal lands
 - Committee to recommend that City Council make a motion to direct staff to engage with NCFST to explore how services like these could be incorporated into the City's Indigenous Placemaking Strategy



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