

## Indigenous Community Mobilization for Violence Prevention

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Article abstract

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# Indigenous Community Mobilization for Violence Prevention

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# Indigenous Community Mobilization for Violence Prevention

## Abstract

For over 25 years, the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) has been invited into Indigenous communities across Canada to support them in mobilizing to prevent violence and create safe environments to promote wellness for children and youth. We collaborated with four Indigenous communities to understand community mobilization processes. Community-based researchers ensured that the research was culturally appropriate. Conversations with community members who participated in CRC's Ten Steps workshop were transcribed and qualitatively coded. We are reporting on the 15 themes that were common across the four communities. Ten common themes emerged related to how the workshop supported communities to mobilize and work cohesively to prevent violence. Five additional themes arose from community members' suggestions for future programming and are described following the seven questions. Communities recognized the value of the CRC programming to create safe environments for children and youth.

## Keywords

violence prevention, Indigenous communities, community mobilization, Indigenous wellness

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## Indigenous Community Mobilization for Violence Prevention

Since 1998, the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) has been invited into Indigenous communities in Canada to support them in preventing violence and creating safe environments to promote wellness for their children and youth. Based on a need expressed by Indigenous communities, the CRC developed a violence prevention workshop for Indigenous communities called Walking the Prevention Circle. This workshop focused on building awareness and strengthening capacity to promote the healthy development of children and youth. To consolidate their many violence prevention initiatives, the CRC (2007) created a community mobilization process, the Ten Steps for Creating Safe Environments for Children and Youth. This process was later integrated with the original Walking the Prevention Circle workshop to support Indigenous communities in cohesive planning for violence prevention. This paper focuses on research and evaluation of the Indigenous Ten Steps community mobilization process with four Indigenous community partners.

Consistent with practices among Indigenous Peoples across the land now known as Canada, we begin by locating ourselves. Muskwas Nitanees, the daughter of Little Bear, also known as Shelley Cardinal, is Cree and Mennonite. She was raised with stories of cultural strength and stories of the harms that Indigenous peoples endured. From a young age, she knew her life work would contribute to addressing the harms. Today, she leads the Office of Indigenous Relations within the CRC. Debra Pepler is a mother, grandmother, and psychology professor. Debra's European ancestors came as settlers to the lands of the Anishnabeg, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Debra has focused her teaching and research on the relationships in which children and youth grow up. Debra is grateful for her experiences walking alongside Indigenous leaders who have supported her learning journey on Indigenous ways of supporting Indigenous children and youth in family and community relationships. Dawn-Lee Ricard was initially a community-based researcher on the project, then transitioned to a leading role as a research associate. Dawn-Lee has mixed heritage: French/Métis and Scottish on her father's side and Dutch/Russian and English/Scottish on her mother's side. Dawn-Lee was born on Treaty 1 Territory and the Métis Nation Homeland in St. Boniface, Manitoba. With humility, Dawn-Lee respectfully acknowledges Nehirowisi Aski and the Atikamekw Nation who have stewarded it since time immemorial; in 1664, this was the landing place of her first settler ancestor on Turtle Island (Trois-Rivières, QC).

### Working in a Good Way

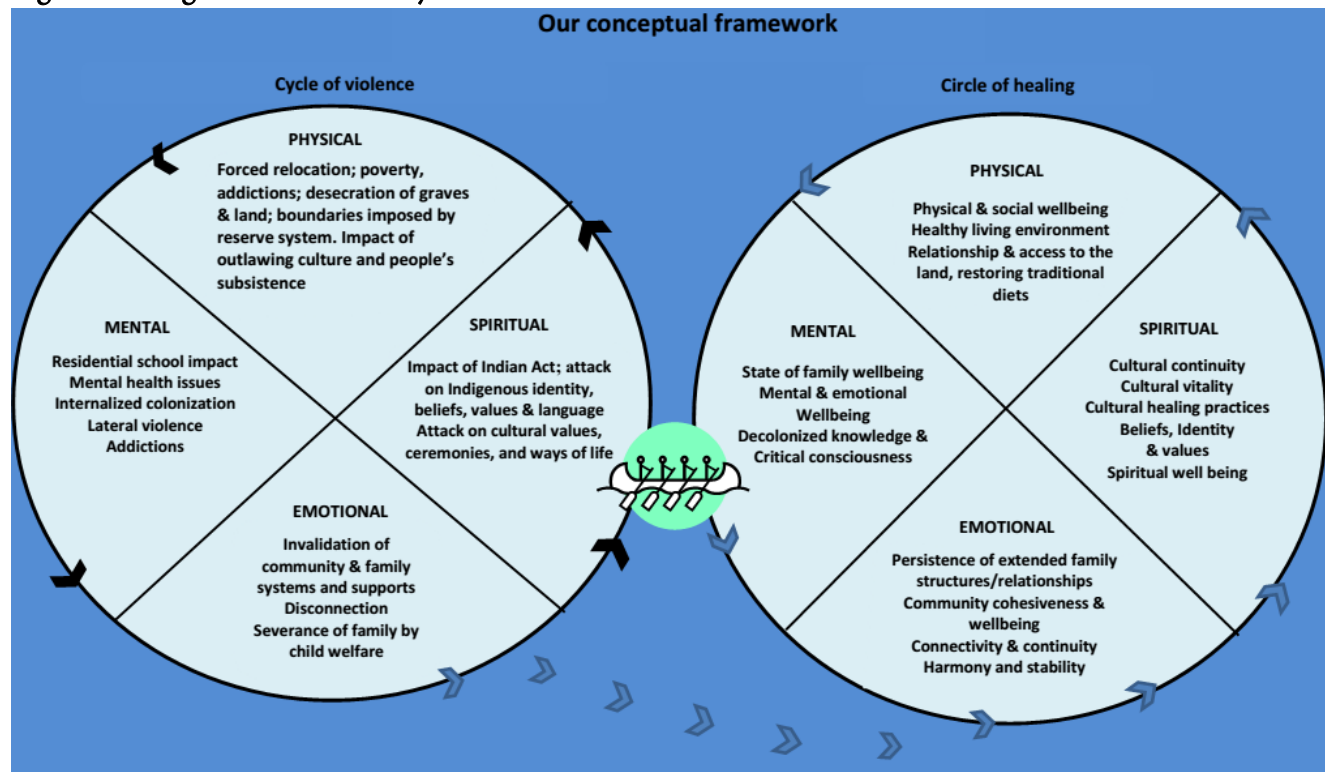
Shelley Cardinal and Debra Pepler met over 20 years ago and recognized their common interest in promoting relationships and preventing violence. Our collaboration began with a preliminary evaluation of CRC Indigenous programming (Pepler, 2011), followed by a study of processes that CRC facilitators use to mobilize knowledge for Indigenous communities. We learned that facilitators were deliberate in delivering programming with fidelity and balancing layers of harm with levels of safety (Yamada, 2014). These studies raised questions about the processes of program delivery, the importance of strengthening community capacity, and supports needed to achieve and sustain community wellness. In our program of research, we have been deeply committed to engaging with communities through relational processes. To ensure the research is being done in a good way, we have guided it with foundational values based on Indigenous worldviews and methods including safety, respect, working together in a decolonizing way,

open communication, ensuring there is learning in all places, and understanding responsibility and accountability. We have also relied on three Indigenous and one Western set of ethical principles for research with Indigenous Peoples (Riddell et al., 2017).

We recognized that all those participating in the partnership project were essential to its success. We engaged research advisors within each community and asked them to identify two members of the community who could be hired for the project and collaborate on implementing both the programming and associated research. We acknowledged that communities and community-based researchers were experts who played an essential role in gathering and interpreting community’s knowledge.

Through the decades of CRC violence prevention programming, communities identified that their process of mobilization needs to start with understanding the community-specific cycle of violence arising from colonialism, envisioning wellness, and identifying a pathway to wellness. We began our project with communities based on a model adapted from the cultural framework of the First Nations Longitudinal Health Survey (Dumont, 2005). Our model for the research depicted a Cycle of Violence, a Circle of Healing, and a Canoe with paddlers representing the communities’ mobilization to prevent violence and create safe environments to promote wellness (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Indigenous Community Mobilization Model**



**Community Mobilization**

In this project, we collaborated with four Indigenous communities that had invited the CRC to join them in implementing the Ten Steps community mobilization process for violence prevention.

Community mobilization engages individuals, organizations, and the whole community in developing the capacity to address challenges and provide support for moving forward through adversities (Public Safety Canada, 2009). Culture is foundational to mobilization within Indigenous communities.

Given its long history of supporting Indigenous communities in times of crisis, the CRC focuses on capacity building for community mobilization to prevent violence and create safe environments for children and youth. The CRC Ten Steps process for Indigenous communities is both culturally and historically attuned. This process is similar to trauma-informed community development in Australia, through which “healing must occur across all social systems (individuals, families, and communities) if it is to influence whole-of-social change and growth” (Atkinson, J. & Atkinson, C., 2016, p. 110). Homel and colleagues (2006) developed the Pathways to Prevention Project to support community development and the positive development of Australian Indigenous children, youth, and families. They emphasized the importance of recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ challenges and negative pathways as adaptations to system failures and biases, rather than problems that reside within an individual or family. They noted that deficits in system responses must be addressed within the local community, as well as the larger society.

Although, there is extensive research on violence prevention programming within Indigenous communities in many parts of the world, there is a dearth of programming and research related to Indigenous community-level mobilization to prevent violence. To date, most programming for the prevention of violence and promotion of wellness with Indigenous communities has focused on four levels: individual, family-relational, community-cultural, and societal (McKinley & Theall, 2021).

### **Violence Prevention Programming**

At the individual level, the focus of interventions has often been on trauma arising from colonialism. For example, Brave Heart and colleagues (2020) conducted a pilot study with Native Americans in which they compared interpersonal therapy to interpersonal therapy plus a historical trauma and unresolved grief intervention. The latter program led to greater engagement and reduced depression and trauma. Hatcher and colleagues (2016) reported on a culturally informed intervention with Māori individuals who presented with intentional self-harm at a hospital, which reduced hopelessness and recurring hospital visits for self-harm.

Although there is promise in these and other culturally attuned approaches for individuals, Greenwood and de Leeuw contend that:

Interventions should not target individual behavioural change or focus solely on proximal determinants of child health . . . Instead, interventions should account for broader contexts and distal determinants that continue to influence the context and, thus, the health of the child. (2012, p. 383)

The potential for intensive individual or group psychotherapy is limited by a paucity of Indigenous therapists to engage with the large proportion of Indigenous individuals who suffer from trauma and experiences of violence arising from colonialism (Faber et al., 2023).

At the family-relational level, culturally attuned violence prevention efforts have focused on youth, parents, and women experiencing intimate partner violence. Some relational programs for Indigenous youth have been delivered within the school context. Crooks and colleagues (2015) collaborated with Indigenous educators on the Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations program which supports youths' school success, sense of belonging, confidence, and leadership. In the Hui Malama o ke Kai program, Indigenous Hawaiian youth improved in appreciation of culture and attitudes about violence and substance use (Akeo et al., 2008). Although this Hawaiian project engaged Elders and businesses, it focused primarily on youth, falling short of community mobilization to develop capacity within the whole community.

With a cultural adaptation of the Triple P-Positive Parenting Program in New Zealand, Keown and colleagues (2018) found improvements in parents' reports of their children's behaviour problems, problematic parenting, and inter-parental conflict. The Weaving Healthy Families Program was culturally aligned to address violence and conflict in Native American families, as well as adolescent substance use (McKinley & Theall, 2021). It showed improvements at the parent, youth, family, and community levels. The community outcomes, however, comprised parents' perceptions of their connections to others, not change in community-wide wellness. The Intervention for Health Enhancement After Leaving (iHEAL), which supported women in a partnership between Indigenous Elders and nurses, led to improved individual women's quality of life and trauma symptoms (Varcoe et al., 2021).

At the community-cultural level, programs to reduce Indigenous family violence have been developed and studied in Australia and other countries. Cripps and Davis (2012) conducted a review of these programs which covered a range of legal services, community policing, behavioural reform, alternative justice models, mediation programs, broad educational violence prevention campaigns, and holistic programs that focus on the perpetrator, victim, and community. Although the emerging evidence was promising at an individual or family level, none of these programs represented full community-level mobilization initiatives.

At the societal level, change is needed within systems and structures to remove racism and the myriad processes that create vulnerable contexts for Indigenous individuals, families, and communities. In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) presented Calls to Action and Calls for Justice that articulate the changes needed at every level of systems and structures that Indigenous peoples encounter. Self-determination is at the root of these recommendations.

In an international review of government plans to prevent domestic violence within Indigenous populations, Fotheringham and colleagues noted the lack of programming at the community level and lack of consideration of "intersectionality, the impact of colonization, or Indigenous worldviews" (2021, p. 325). The Aboriginal Healing Foundation stated that: "Healing in the larger sense in which Aboriginal people conceive it must reach beyond individuals to transform family and community systems. Sustainable wellness requires social harmony, economic resources and political agency" (Castellano, 2006, p. 180).

## Canadian Red Cross Programming for Indigenous Communities

Indigenous leaders within the CRC developed violence prevention programming focused on the whole community, rather than individuals' violence, with the goal of creating safe environments for children and youth. The basic premise is that the initial focus for change needs to be at a community level, rather than on counselling individuals exhibiting violence or addressing intimate partner violence. The CRC provides education to enable communities to create nurturing and stable environments for children by integrating an understanding of violence prevention, protection instruments, and cultural healing. This CRC programming has been introduced in over 300 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to strengthen their capacity and support community-level mobilization to implement violence prevention action plans.

The CRC Ten Steps for Creating Safe Environments (2007) comprise: 1. Understanding the issue; 2. Recognizing the vulnerability and resilience of children and youth; 3. Defining protection instruments; 4. Creating a prevention team; 5. Completing a risk assessment; 6. Developing policies and procedures; 7. Educating adults, youth, and children; 8. Responding to disclosures of violence, abuse, bullying, and harassment; 9. Meeting the challenges; and, 10. Maintaining safe environments.

The Indigenous Ten Steps process begins with recognizing situations and behaviours that create unsafe environments and then guides communities to strengthen capacity, cohesion, and strategies to prevent violence. Community leaders from diverse systems (e.g., Elders, representatives from Chief and Council, educators, youth, knowledge holders, health professionals) participate in the workshop. Because children are the focus of the Ten Steps community mobilization process, we framed our research using Mussell and colleagues' (2004) analysis of effective community approaches to support the wellbeing of Indigenous children and youth.

For the Indigenous community mobilization process, CRC master trainers worked with each research advisor and community to determine dates for the Ten Steps workshop and a list of community members to invite as representatives of education, youth justice, social services, and health. The Ten Steps workshop was delivered over two to three days, with a researcher present as an observer. We expected that the Ten Steps workshop would serve as a catalyst for community mobilization, enabling community participants to share understanding of the myriad harms of colonialism and strengthen practices to prevent violence and create safe environments promoting wellness grounded in Indigenous traditions. For this paper, we have gathered communities' knowledge about their processes of mobilizing to prevent violence with the support of CRC programming.

## Method

### Research Approach

The communities that participated in the programming and research had well established relationships with the CRC. These communities had invited the CRC to deliver the Ten Steps community mobilization process. CRC established collaborative agreements for both the programming and research. The guiding decolonizing principles for this research were that: 1. the community benefits

from the research, 2. the community owns the process and controls the forms of data collection, 3. community capacity is enhanced, and 4. community members are empowered. Our research approach aligned with ethical principles and values for research with Indigenous peoples and was grounded in community-based relationships and connections (Kovach, 2021; Riddell et al., 2017).

### **Participating Communities**

For this project, we partnered with three First Nations communities (two reserve, one urban Friendship Centre) and one Inuit hamlet. A fifth community participated in programming but was unable to complete the research due to an unforeseen community disruption. We began by engaging research advisors within each community. Research advisors collaborated in the Research Advisory Council and programming, supported the research process, and attended annual research gatherings with the community-based researchers. They helped guide the research process to ensure that it minimized risk, was respectful, safe, and beneficial to their communities.

The research advisors were invited to identify two community members who could join the project as community-based researchers. The research advisors and community-based researchers served as experts for the CRC programming and knowledge gathering and ensured that the research was culturally attuned for the community members who participated. We recognized that the community-based researchers were critical to ensuring that the research processes were attuned to the spirit, heart, mind, and body of their communities. We trained the community-based researchers to engage in culturally sensitive and relational conversations with workshop participants and to uphold the ethical principles of community ownership and control of the research. The research was approved by the York University Human Participants Review Committee and its Aboriginal Ethics Advisory Committee.

### **Gathering Knowledge on the Ten Steps Community Mobilization Process**

#### ***Follow-up Conversations***

Follow-up conversations were conducted with community members who had participated in the Ten Steps workshop, as they were best placed to reflect on the relevance of the CRC programming and the strengths, capacities, and challenges within their communities. We recognized a tension in the research methods between an Indigenous process of open-ended knowledge sharing through stories and a more structured Western process with a standard set of questions to gather understanding of communities' experiences. To balance this tension, we began with a set of semi-structured questions related to the research objectives and supported the community-based researchers in their dual roles as both researchers and participants with insider knowledge of their own community. We emphasized that the conversations were relational and that they could modify and augment the questions and engage participants in meaningful discussions to fit their community's activities and efforts.

The semi-structured questions for the research included:

1. How has your understanding of violence in your community changed through the Ten Steps workshop?
2. What has the Ten Steps workshop added to your knowledge and skills to help make changes in your community?

3. How do you think that the new information, tools, and skills from the Ten Steps workshop will help you create change in your community through the Action Plan?
4. What about the Ten Steps workshop made you curious?
5. How motivated do you think your community is to make change through your Ten Steps Action Plan?
6. How hopeful are you that your community will be able to make change through your Ten Steps Action Plan?
7. Have you talked with anyone else in your community about the Action Plan? If yes, who? If not, why not?

## **Procedure**

With the follow-up conversations, we were interested in the mobilization that had occurred following the workshop, which is represented by the Canoe in Figure 1. Therefore, within six to nine months after the workshop, the community-based researchers invited community participants for a one-on-one conversation about the programming and violence prevention actions within the community. All participants provided informed consent for the follow-up conversations and were given a small gift aligning with the Indigenous protocol of reciprocity to demonstrate respect and gratitude for the knowledge shared. We recognized that the consent process needed to be multi-layered to uphold the ethical principles guiding our research (Riddell et al., 2017). All data gathered were returned to the community; however, individuals consented to what aspects of their shared knowledge were returned. Individuals chose whether to provide consent for the ongoing use of their audio recordings and/or transcripts by their community. They also chose whether they wanted their names associated with the knowledge they shared or wanted to remain anonymous in any reports.

## **Meaning Making**

The conversations were audio recorded, and transcripts were created which were reviewed for accuracy and professionally translated, when necessary. We recognized that each community was unique and would engage and benefit from the programming in different ways; therefore, we analysed the follow-up conversations for the four communities separately. Each community-based researcher worked on thematic analyses with Julia Riddell, a graduate student research assistant, and Dawn-Lee Ricard, a research associate with the project. We were diligent in upholding the voices of the Indigenous community members and keeping their own words accurately threaded through the meaning making phases.

The researchers first familiarized themselves with the transcripts from each community. In the next phase, the precise answers that community participants provided to each question were recorded and discussed. With each question, we worked with the community-based researchers through an inductive or bottom-up approach to identify themes that emerged in the responses of participants from each of the four communities (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kovach, 2021). In this theme generating phase, we recognized that knowledge shared by the community members was first in response to the semi-structured questions; however, given that each community-based researcher was a co-participant, many of the participants also shared through storytelling. Therefore, we created additional themes that

emerged from the community voices. Inter-rater agreement on the themes was established through consensus among the community-based researcher and the two university-based researchers, with reliance on the community-based researchers' interpretations given their community knowledge. Overarching themes were subsequently identified by the two university-based researchers because the community-based researchers were no longer employed on the project. In this paper, we have reported on the 15 themes that were common across the four communities.

## Results

### Framework for Follow-up Conversation Themes

The research team leaders, community-based researchers, and research advisors hosted a share-back session within each community. Themes specific to each community and the common themes were gathered in a presentation that was shared, discussed, and interpreted with the community members. The goals of the share-back sessions were to ensure that theme interpretations were aligned with the communities' understandings and to uphold learning in all places. At the end of the project, a report was prepared and delivered to each community.

For this paper, we are reporting on the 15 common themes, which provide an understanding of the ways in which the Ten Steps workshop supported communities to mobilize and work cohesively to prevent violence and create safe environments to promote wellness, as represented by the Canoe in Figure 1. The first 10 themes are organized according to the questions asked in the conversations. Some themes overlapped across questions and are not discussed repeatedly. Five additional themes arose from the community members' suggestions for future programming and are described following the seven questions.

Question 1. How has your understanding of violence in your community changed through the Ten Steps mobilization process?

One theme, *Increased understanding of violence*, emerged in participants' responses to this question. The first step in the Ten Steps workshop is Understand the Issue. This step identifies various type of violence, abuse and maltreatment. Within the workshop tailored for Indigenous communities, the harms of colonialism and the impact of intergenerational trauma were highlighted to support the community in recognizing the root cause of violence and disruption.

**Increased understanding of violence.** The knowledge shared in this step resonated with the workshop participants. Members from all four communities spoke about having more knowledge of the challenges and burdens that Indigenous community members experience because of the intergenerational trauma of historical harms. One participant noted: "I guess the workshop gave me a better understanding of what the [members] here have had to deal with and some of the hardships that had faced them over the past few years... I didn't realize the extent of it" (Jill Jewer, Victoria Native Friendship Centre<sup>1</sup>). The workshop, which brought together leaders from diverse sectors, increased awareness of the community's

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<sup>1</sup> Each participant consented to the way in which they wanted to be identified in transcripts and any reports. They consented to being linked to their words by name or by their role, or as a "community member".

capacity to respond to violence. One participant explained: “My understanding of violence in my community has changed a little bit because it has brought more attention to people who are able to make preventative steps, especially amongst the youth” (Educator, Arviat).

Question 2: What has the Ten Steps workshop added to your knowledge and skills to help make change in your community?

The Ten Steps workshop is designed to support community mobilization to prevent violence and create safe environments for children and youth. The participants’ responses to this question reflected two common themes: *Envisioning community change* and the *Importance of additional training in violence prevention*. Several of the workshop steps provide guidance on how to make change. Step 3 identifies the protection instruments (e.g., United Nations Declaration the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Step 4 highlights the best practices for creating a prevention team. Steps 5 and 6 guide communities in completing a risk assessment and developing policies and procedures, respectively.

**Envisioning community change.** The participants indicated that the process helped them focus on what skills they needed to develop, what work needed to be done, how to proceed, and who could be involved. One community member summarized the gradual change process:

It was a good workshop [with] some ideas of steps to take. Hopefully we can take the strategies used and try to slowly address certain things. You know it's just one piece at a time... as long as it is in that direction. (Community member, Moose Cree First Nation)

There was also recognition that the workshop brought community members together and had in some ways already initiated a change process:

... at that meeting in the 2 days... We organized a structure... You already had a team, you already had a plan, everybody conversed about what they thought it was, so we generated an understanding... And so that meant that we have a structure so now what we need to do is help the community structure for themselves. (Joe Karetak, Arviat)

**The importance of additional training in violence prevention.** The workshop not only increased awareness of violence prevention strategies, but it also highlighted the need for additional training. Most of the participants were leaders within their different sectors and reflected on the need for front-line staff to be trained in violence prevention. As one participant described: “What I’m going to do is ask somebody that has knowledge on violence prevention... to come and talk to my staff because my staff does the front-line work, really working with the participants one on one” (Lani King, Victoria Native Friendship Centre). There was also recognition that youth in the community would benefit from the training. As one participant expressed: “This Ten Step workshop is very good to gain more experience and understanding, and I can pass it on to younger persons” (Community member, Arviat).

Question 3: How do you think that the new information, tools, and skills from the Ten Steps workshop will help you create change in your community through the Action Plan?

The CRC's Ten Steps community mobilization process is designed to support communities in developing an Action Plan for violence prevention and child protection. By bringing together leaders from different sectors in the community, the workshop provides a starting place for change. Three themes emerged from the answers to this question: *Importance of working together*, *Better understanding of violence and safety*; and *Policies, procedures and guidelines that support change*.

**The importance of working together.** The fourth step in the workshop guides communities in creating a prevention team or safe environments working group. This step entails identifying who should be involved from the diverse sectors, ensuring that membership is representative, securing a budget and community support, and establishing communication and accountability lines. The workshop participants appreciated the shared engagement and responsibility in the development of an Action Plan. One community member noted:

I think the Action Plan in this workshop has brought light to the fact that there are people who can work together, so that the main tools that we can use are the tools of one another in different agencies, in different institutions and even just neighbours. (Educator, Arviat)

In another community, a participant reported that the Action Plan had led to the creation of an interagency group:

Our first meeting [of the inter-agency group] will be tomorrow, and that will be our first step. From there, I'll probably put in some of my inputs where we can make plans for the community as a whole, front-line workers together from each department. That will [be] great. (Community member, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation)

There was consistency across communities on the importance of community leadership being involved in the violence prevention planning and implementation.

**Better understanding of violence and safety.** The second theme that emerged from the question about knowledge and skills acquired through the workshop related to understanding both violence and safety. Members in several communities recognized that to some extent violence had been normalized, hence not addressed effectively. The definitions and comparisons among different types of violence in Step 1 of the workshop provided clarity for the participants. As one participant described:

Understanding various types of violence, and focusing on different ones... To give a better understanding of each one of them, and how we behave ... We don't see how we behave until we ... see that behaviour... And once they see that, then they can start making change. (Community member, Moose Cree First Nation)

The Ten Steps workshop created awareness of the both the challenges within communities and the importance of finding solutions to ensure safety:

Again, made us aware of where we need to improve our safety. Both our physical safety and our emotional safety... I've thought about it [safety] on a deeper level... the safeties that we have in place ... the things that are missing. (Jill Jewer, Victoria Native Friendship Centre)

**Policies, procedures and guidelines that support change.** The sixth step in the CRC violence prevention workshop focuses on developing, implementing, and monitoring risk management policies and procedures. The workshop participants, who were leaders from diverse sectors within the community valued this step because it provided guidelines that people can refer to. As one participant explained:

...if everybody has the same information and everybody is coming from the same sort of belief place or it's like a policy and procedure kind of like lateral violence, non-tolerance that kind of thing. These are guidelines that people can refer to. (Community member, Victoria Native Friendship Centre)

The participants resonated with the importance placed on policies and procedures. As one participant acknowledged:

That's something I really didn't realize how important that is that you should know... when we talked about Duty to Report. ... and Duty of Care... That's definitely something I need to learn more about ... [something] they should actually make mandatory ... I think it's important. (Community member, Moose Cree First Nation)

Question 4: What about the Ten Steps workshop made you curious?

Two novel themes emerged from responses to this question: *Planning*, and *People coming together to create change*. Increased awareness was also a theme under this question but reflected the themes in questions 1 and 3 related to increased understanding and a better understanding of violence and safety.

**Planning.** The participants recognized that the Ten Steps process could be used for strategic planning, asset mapping, and programming, as well as education and training. They noted that the Road Map to Safe Environments (CRC, 2007, p. 6) was helpful for community planning alongside violence prevention initiatives. As one participant explained:

Now, thinking about the Ten Steps and the roadmap and you know what the community can do ... seeing what the goals are that the people want... some of them are a safe place, a safe shelter. Some of them are talking about the justice system and how they can prevent going to the justice system, but what we can do here in the community, setting some goals... I'm really interested in it, because it's preventing things in the community. (Community member, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation)

**People coming together to create change.** Participants were grateful for the opportunity to come together and work together in critical numbers to bring about change. As one participant explained:

It was an opportunity to come together within a setting that I think could support change, healthy change. And the Ten Steps through the Action Plan and the gathering of good people with good intention actually can create a road map, a pathway. (Community member, Victoria Native Friendship Centre)

Question 5: How motivated do you think your community/organization is to make change through your Ten Steps Action Plan?

A two-sided theme emerged from the responses of community members to the question about *community motivation*. On one hand, many participants believed that their community was motivated; on the other hand they were realistic about the *barriers to effective change*.

**Community is motivated.** Many participants across the four communities expressed a belief that their community was highly motivated to make change and that those who had participated in the workshop were motivated to apply the knowledge and skills they learned. They believed that diverse sectors in the community were motivated to work together to create safer environments. As one participant explained: “I think that the people who were at the meeting are very motivated and that if they can take their energy and transfer it to the rest of the community, I think that change is definitely possible” (Educator, Arviat).

**Barriers to motivation.** Community members were also concerned about the barriers to making change. They recognized that knowledge from the workshop needed to be shared with others in the community to bring about change, but even then, there would be challenges. As one participant explained:

I think the desire is there. It's just a matter of getting them to ... follow-through... You hear a lot of people wanting this and wanting that, but when those things are offered, they're not there... It doesn't just take off the way you hoped it would... So, I think we've just got to keep pushing it. Keep offering it more, keep bringing it to their attention, making it more available, because there is progress ... things have slowly picked up. (Community member, Moose Cree First Nation)

Question 6: How hopeful are you that your community will be able to make change through your Ten Steps Action Plan?

Similar to Question 5, a two-sided theme emerged from the community members' responses about hope for change. Although many participants were hopeful because they recognized that change was already occurring, others had less hope given the barriers to long-lasting and effective change.

**Hopeful about community change.** The participants' hopefulness varied; however, there was a consistent belief in the ability of community members to work as a team to create safe environments for children and youth. As one community member described: “My hopes are always high ... when our front-line workers come together, especially if the leadership, chief and council are hundred percent supportive. I'm very hopeful that everybody puts in their effort and makes this happen” (Community Member, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation).

Some of the respondents were hopeful that supporting youth would bring about change, which is consistent with the centrality of children and youth in Indigenous communities:

I guess we would start with the youth. They're more easily influenced... A lot of them are good kids, so I guess we could start with them, and maybe their parents would start seeing the

difference in them... So, I'm hopeful for the youth and maybe longer-term would be hopeful for the community. (Pamela Innes, Moose Cree First Nation)

**Scaled back hope.** Although community members were hopeful, they were also realistic about the challenges in getting leaders to work together with front-line staff on a common goal. As one community member described:

We as front-line workers understand and know every day what the struggles are, but the decision makers, the above people that make decisions, should be *among us*... What would be the priority for the community? What's the most needed for the community? And just pick that goal, put it up there, brainstorm, so that everybody takes roles and responsibility. ... It's not going to happen without teamwork. (Community member, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation)

Question 7: Have you talked with anyone else in your community/organization about the Action Plan?

The conversations with community members who had participated in the Ten Steps workshop occurred six to nine months following the workshop. We recognize that this is a relatively short time for communities to mobilize and begin to self-determine a plan to prevent violence and promote community wellness. The responses to this question varied from some engaging in fulsome discussions and others not yet ready to discuss next steps.

Those who answered positively, indicated that they had talked to their families, management team, co-workers, and/or other leaders within the school and community. One participant recounted:

I think amongst us mental health and addictions [workers], and some of the staff that were at the training from the band office, we talked about it and we're supposed to meet again on how we can bring in more training and apply for more funding for different activities to bring into the community for the children and the youth ... (Elaine Richards, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation)

Those who had not yet shared anything about the Action Plan recognized the need for structural changes and other supports to ensure any planning could be taken up and implemented for community change.

### Guidance for Canadian Red Cross Programming

In the conversations with participants from the four communities, five additional themes emerged to guide the CRC in working with Indigenous communities. These were: *Solutions have to include culture*, *Strengths-based approach to prevention*, *Importance of many sectors working together to create change*, *Addressing the root cause of harms (colonialism)*, and *Importance of intergenerational involvement*.

**Solutions have to include culture.** Across communities, there was a recognition that culture promotes wellness and needs to be included in any programming that comes from outside. As one community participant explained:

... one of the things that they seem to forget is how it was in the past with the Elders... that's something that they don't include in these... programs. I may be wrong, but the prevention programs are always concentrating on the present day never from the past... Because in the past things worked with families and what they seem to be failing to do is put in that part into the programs. (Billy Ukutak, Arviat)

**Strengths-based approach to prevention.** Community members pointed to the importance of programming that recognizes strengths within the community and the potential for self-determined actions for wellness. As one participant explained:

...instead of it being deficit defined, its strength defined. ... my own belief about that is that really honours the strengths and the survival of people and the ability to individually and collectively create, co-create strategies to move forward and I think it's really, really important.” (Community member, Victoria Native Friendship Centre)

**Importance of many sectors working together to create change.** Across the communities, there was a recognition that plans to prevent violence and create safe environments needed efforts across many levels of leadership and many sectors. This recognition was emphasized by a community member, as follows:

So—I think in working in unison, where all our community services work together, and we create that interagency, and *we all* come together for a common goal — to decrease the violence in the community and make it safer — bringing in programs to teach our youth, our children, our men, our women. (Community member, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation)

**Addressing the root cause of harms (colonialism).** Community members were aligned with the Ten Steps process which emphasized that colonialism is the root cause of violence and disruption in Indigenous communities. As one participant noted, “Recognition that violence and abuse are rooted in colonization and residential school ... Violence, abuse, everything. It always went back to residential school, colonization” (Educator, Arviat).

**Importance of intergenerational involvement.** The final recommendation theme from the communities was that the programming needed to involve all the generations in the Ten Steps workshop and action planning. One participant explained:

So if we want to help our people, I think we need to look at the first people, the middle people, and the new generation. Combine their knowledge toward whatever violence, suicide or anything, even pregnancies or whatever was on the board... combine their knowledge together. (Billy Ukutak, Arviat)

## Discussion

For over 25 years, the CRC has been collaborating with Indigenous communities to develop and implement programming to prevent violence and create safe environments for children and youth. The central question for this research project focused on the Canoe in Figure 1 and how communities

mobilized away from violence and toward healing. Through partnerships with Indigenous communities, we worked to identify, document, and understand the community mobilization processes that address violence rooted in colonialism and promote wellness rooted in Indigenous cultural strengths. We are grateful to the communities for their collaboration in identifying and supporting the community-based researchers and in generously sharing their experiences, visions, and concerns related to preventing violence and moving to wellness. In reviewing the rich knowledge shared by community members, we were able to identify 15 themes that provided insights into community mobilization from the Cycle of Violence to the Circle of Healing (see Figure 1).

There is a dearth of research on Indigenous community-level interventions for violence prevention, even though Greenwood and de Leeuw (2012) recommend that interventions shift to a focus on broad determinants that influence the health of Indigenous peoples. To centre Indigenous culture and worldviews in this discussion, we have reflected on the knowledge shared by communities as it aligns with Mussell and colleagues' six effective approaches that Indigenous communities can take to promote children and youths' mental health and wellbeing. These include: "Recognize the role that culture plays in determining health; Focus on implementing ecological, community-level interventions; Promote local leadership and high-quality training; Provide mentoring and support; Foster links within and between communities; and Support ongoing capacity building" (2004, p. 5).

The *role of culture in shaping health* was identified by community members in the theme "Solutions have to include culture." Communities recognized the importance of re-centring their traditional and contemporary community knowledge and restoring their critical cultural strengths to prevent violence. They also recognized the importance of sharing cultural strengths through the generations to enhance community capacity and families' skills in raising children in safe and nurturing contexts. Community members spoke about the challenge in restoring their critical cultural strengths, which have been deeply disrupted by colonialism. Self-determination in the development of programming and policies will strengthen the centring of culture.

The *focus on implementing ecological, community-level interventions* was endorsed by communities. The CRC programming began by discussing the importance of addressing the root causes of violence in community, which arise from enduring colonial harms. There is a recognition of the need for community-driven solutions to prevent violence and create safe environments to mobilize to wellness. The importance of community-driven solutions aligns with Homel and colleagues' (2006) observation that benefits for Indigenous communities arise when the communities are empowered. Community members expressed strong motivation to bring about positive change for the wellbeing of children, youth, families, and all community members. Indigenous peoples recognize the journey to wellness as a collective process (Castellano, 2006). In contrast to the collective perspective, most intervention projects for Indigenous peoples have focused on individuals or couples, rather than violence prevention programming for the whole community (Fotheringham et al., 2021). There is a need for programming, policies, and associated research to align with communities' recognition of the collective process in mobilizing to wellness.

*Promoting local leadership and providing high-quality training* is a central feature of the CRC programming, as represented by the Canoe in Figure 1. When invited in to support violence prevention,

the CRC asks communities to identify leaders from diverse sectors to participate in the workshop. Participants reported that they were hopeful about change following the Ten Steps workshop, with increased understanding of violence and how to address it with a strengths-based and culturally grounded approach. As organizations, such as the CRC, move toward reconciliation and a decolonizing approach in their work with Indigenous communities, it will be important to balance the local leadership's self-determination with support through high quality training.

*Mentoring and support* for Indigenous communities are provided by the CRC before, during, and after the Ten Steps community mobilization workshop. Community members expressed appreciation for the deeper insights into various forms of violence and a better understanding of safety. A two- or three-day workshop, however, may not be adequate to support and sustain communities in mobilizing to recover from the historical, intergenerational, and ongoing harms of colonialism. Although community members appreciated the CRC community mobilization support, they indicated the need for additional training to enhance their knowledge and skills.

*Fostering links within and between communities* is a foundational process within the CRC programming. When planning for the Ten Steps workshop, communities are asked to invite leaders from many sectors as a mechanism to build cohesion for the community Action Plan. In some communities, an interagency group had already been formed; in others it emerged from the workshop. Community members shared the importance of working together intergenerationally, as each generation has something unique to contribute. Participants recognized the importance of sharing knowledge and strategies from the workshop within the community as a means of enhancing motivation for change. Policies and programming that foster collaboration across systems within the community may also support self-determination to rebalance community systems (Johnson et al., 2022).

*Support for ongoing capacity building* was the final opportunity identified by Mussell and colleagues (2004). The CRC recognizes that communities have the motivation, cultural strengths, and capacity to create nurturing and stable environments for their children. The workshop supports communities' work by strengthening their understanding of violence prevention and enhancing discussions of their traditional pathways to wellness. For Indigenous communities, the process of addressing and preventing violence that has arisen from centuries of colonialism is challenging and ongoing. Through the CRC programming, communities continued to strengthen their capacities and mobilize to wellness. The tenth and final step in the CRC programming provided strategies to maintain safe environments. Community members understood their responsibility in leading violence prevention efforts in a coordinated way and recognized a need for additional training and resources to ensure a sustained journey to wellness.

The four communities that participated in this project were motivated to learn about violence prevention and invited the CRC and research team to collaborate in supporting them to mobilize from the Cycle of Violence to the Circle of Healing (Figure 1). This collaborative research has provided rich opportunities for learning with and from the communities. At the same time, we recognize the limitations in the present research. We have a small sample of four communities, each with its unique culture, protocols, strengths, and challenges. Therefore, this report, which aggregates data across four communities, does not capture the distinctive characteristics and possibilities within each of the communities. Additionally, the themes that emerged from this research may not be generalizable to

other communities across Turtle Island and beyond. Nevertheless, there is a pressing need for policies, programming, supports, and resources that enable Indigenous communities to self-determine their pathways away from the violence rooted in colonial harms and toward collective wellness.

Communities have taught us about the importance of recognizing the harms of colonialism as the root cause of violence in their communities and have identified the need for well researched documentation of the diverse, long-standing, and ongoing harms. With knowledge shared by the communities, we were able to modify our model depicting communities' journeys from violence to wellness through a revitalization of cultural strengths & (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). We are currently preparing about 150 documents for a website with a timeline of 15 layers of harm experienced by Indigenous communities over the past five centuries. It will be complemented by a tool that communities can use to create their own timeline of harms, which will enable them to clarify the violence from colonialism that they have experienced over generations and the root cause of the cycle of violence that they are mobilizing away from.

This research opportunity coincided with the CRC efforts to integrate new understanding into their engagement with Indigenous communities. The extensive community feedback regarding needs within Indigenous communities has strengthened the process for community mobilization in times of crisis in Canadian and international contexts. In future research, it will be important to learn about the effectiveness, validity, and generalizability of the community mobilization process: What aspects of the community mobilization process are working to bring about change? Where is the change occurring, or not occurring and why? and What is it that enables community members to participate in the process to mobilize and bring about change for themselves and others? This knowledge will be beneficial to Indigenous communities, outside organizations, and research partners as they come together to address the cycle of violence and promote wellness in Indigenous communities.

The knowledge shared by the four communities has strong implications for policies to support Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Policies for reconciliation across Turtle Island and beyond must align with an understanding that the pathways to wellness for Indigenous Peoples are through their cultural strengths and ways of knowing, being, and doing which have enabled them to thrive since time immemorial.

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