

DECOLONIZING PLACE

THE NANĀTAWIHOWIKAMIK HEALING LODGE AND WELLNESS CLINIC

A new decolonized early career counsellor-training clinic and healing and wellness lodge

Drs. JoLee Sasakamoose and Angela Snowshoe have worked countless hours since they began their Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF)-funded research into understanding the role of place in determining the mental health and well-being of First Nations youth. The project took over two years to complete, and included the development of a Faculty-funded decolonized clinic on the second floor of the Education Building at the University of Regina.

Purpose: Effective Health Intervention

Sasakamoose says that consideration of historical context is crucial when working with Indigenous peoples of Canada. The legacies and trauma of colonization and of Indian residential schools are embodied in the lives of Indigenous peoples through direct experience and intergenerational transmission. She says, "Healthcare professionals are often not cognizant of the ways in which colonization and intergenerational trauma translate into poor health outcomes for Indigenous people. Despite positive intentions, current mainstream health programs are not effectively meeting the unique psychosocial and spiritual needs of Indigenous peoples. Consequently, it is felt by many that culturally based healing programs, rooted in the land and traditional knowledge, spiritual values, and ceremonial practices, would present a relevant approach for those whose needs are not being met by mainstream programs."

"The Lodge was designed as a radical departure and disruption of current academic strictures in order to facilitate culturally responsive training and emerging forms



of research, particularly those guided by decolonizing methodologies. The process required essential shifts in the university culture," says Sasakamoose.

The Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Theory (ICRT), developed by Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan, was used to design the Lodge. ICRT validates and supports Indigenous histories and inherent rights, and reframes, renames, reclaims, and restores Indigenous approaches to health and well-being.

Three main concepts in the ICRT model guided their understanding of the process: (a) restoration of Indigenous community-based health and wellness systems; (b) establishment of a "middle-ground"¹ for engagement between mainstream and Indigenous systems and worldviews to support a mutually beneficial co-existence and foundation for reconciliation and respectful engagement; and (c) transformation of mainstream service delivery to become culturally responsive by guiding research that continuously improves the health, education, governance, and policies of Indigenous peoples.²

Sasakamoose says, "Our space design seeks to implement effective health intervention strategies following the ICRT framework drawing on the strength and resilience of Indigenous people and are inclusive of Indigenous ways of promoting spiritual wellness and healing."

The space creates opportunities for training, healing, and capacity rebuilding within communities.

Planning a Decolonized Space

Decolonizing a space within a Western institution has many unique factors that would not be encountered, for

¹Ermine, W. (2007). The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal*, 6(1), 193–203.

²Sasakamoose, J., et al. (2017). Miyo-pimātisiwin developing Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Theory (ICRT): Improving Indigenous health and well-being. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 8(4).doi: 10.18584/iipj.2017.8.4.1

Effective health intervention strategies following the ICRT model draw on the strength and resilience of Indigenous people and are inclusive of Indigenous ways of promoting spiritual wellness and healing.

instance, within a First Nation's community. In every aspect of the planning, Sasakamoose and Snowshoe were careful to engage with elders, knowledge keepers, community members, students, and faculty. Sasakamoose says "Every decision made regarding this space has been guided by our ancestors and spiritual keepers who sit at the directional doorways of East, South, West, and North." Even the name for the Lodge has come out of ceremony. Sasakamoose says, "Early in 2016, we offered Noel Starblanket tobacco and cloth and he went into ceremony with other Treaty 4 and 6 Elders to vision a name for the space that would engage the work of all our efforts."

Sasakamoose and Snowshoe have utilized the concept of *two-eyed seeing* (*Etuaptmumk* is the Mi'kmaw word for two-eyed seeing), meaning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing. This concept originated through the work of Mi'kmaq Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall from Eskasoni First Nation.

Sasakamoose says, "We believe that this space allows us to grapple with each other's cognitive universes and learning, to see through the minds of each other's work for generations to come."³ She points out that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health has adopted the two-eyed seeing concept with the goal of transforming Indigenous health and figures it prominently in its vision for the future.⁴



Artwork on doors and inner window ledge is by Cliff Dubois, an artist from the Pasqua First Nation

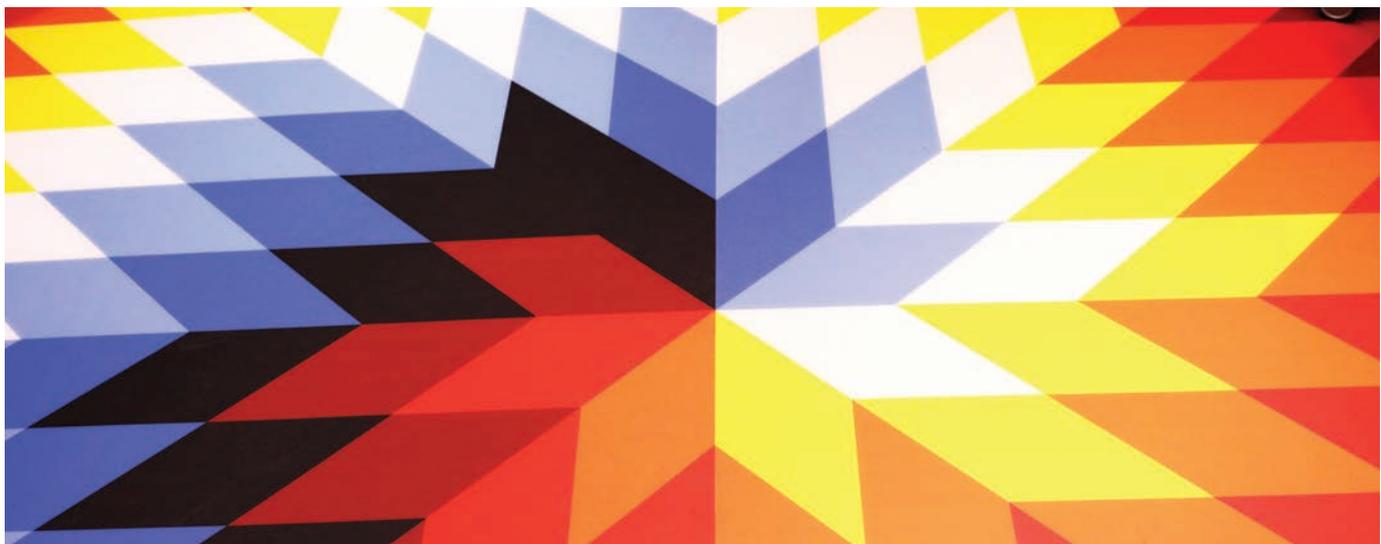


Counselling students meeting in The Nanatawihowikamik Healing Lodge and Wellness Clinic. Photo credit: JoLee Sasakamoose

³Newhouse, D. (2004). Indigenous knowledge in a multicultural world. *Native Studies Review*, 15(2), 139–154.

⁴Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health. (2011, March). *Aboriginal peoples' wellness in Canada: Scaling up the knowledge. Cultural context and community aspirations*. Retrieved from http://www.integrativescience.ca/uploads/files/2011_Aboriginal_Peoples_Wellness_in_Canada_scaling_up_the_knowledge.pdf; Hall, L., Dell, C. A., Fornssler, B., Hopkins, C., & Mushquash, C. (2015). Research as cultural renewal: Applying two-eyed seeing in a research project about cultural interventions in First Nations addictions treatment. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 6(2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2015.6.2.4>

"The Nanāwihowikamik Healing Lodge and Wellness Clinic is in effect a middle ground space for healing, wellness, and for truth and reconciliation to begin."



Photos Credit: Shuana Niessen